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## The Reign of Law

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**Abstract:** This article discusses Old Testament examples of the consequences of disobedience.

## THE REIGN OF LAW.

BY W. A. HOWARD, OF SALT LAKE CITY.

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“As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil, pursueth it to his own death.” Such is the decree of the moral law of God that governs the actions of men; and the law, shaped for the purpose of ennobling and exalting man, is absolute and inviolable. Operating as surely and unchangeably as the laws of nature, in its own due season, it exalts the righteous and humbles in the dust the wicked and rebellious. Its smile is heavenly; its reproof terrible. From the beginning, the Lord, through chosen servants, has revealed this law to his earthly children. He has pleaded with them to come within the reach of its beneficence, and not to fall beneath the heel of its judgment, for he is bound to its enforcement. The law is not cruel, it is not unjust. The arms of mercy are outstretched to all who break its statutes, if they will but repent and turn to God with true contrition of heart. But this law will not be mocked, for, sooner or later, it lays the hand of justice on the unrepentant sinner; the one who refuses to conform his life to the principles of righteousness, rejects the counsels of God, and fights against his truth. Mercy and Justice sit enthroned in the courts of heaven, and their portions are measured out to them by the infinite wisdom of the Most High. Mercy claims her own, while justice is satisfied.

Indeed, a close observation reveals the fact that a perfect equity adjusts its balance in all parts of life. Every secret is told, every crime is punished, every virtue rewarded, every wrong redressed, in silence and with certainty. “Crime and punishment grow out of one stem. Punishment is the fruit that unsuspected ripens within the flower of the pleasure which con-

cealed it." This principle of equity operates in all the creations of God. We find it in nature, in the lives of men, and in the rise and fall of nations.

It matters not how great and powerful individuals or nations may be, the seeds of their dissolution and decay are sown when they permit the worship of Mammon to take the place of the worship of God. Looking down the path taken by justice, in its stately march through the ages, it is plainly seen that when this law is trampled under the feet of men, it rises in righteous indignation, and, with a mighty sweep of its omnipotent arm, cleanses the earth of the wickedness encumbering it. From every age and every clime comes the voice of ruins and of history, testifying that judgment has overtaken the misdeeds of men. If we turn to the history of peoples and nations to learn the lessons which their experiences teach, we are amazed at the awful judgments men have brought upon themselves by rebelling against principles of righteousness and persisting in iniquity.

The close of the antediluvian age is marked by the most terrible retribution on record. For a hundred and twenty years, the Lord, through his servant Noah, labored with the people of that perverse generation; and not until they were beyond the hope of reformation; not until every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts was evil continually, did justice—that they might not perpetuate their corruption in their posterity—demand their annihilation in the waters of the deluge.

Not less signal and complete was the destruction that came upon the people of Jared, who were guided by the Lord from the "great tower" to this land of promise. They grew into a mighty nation, and overspread the face of the land. Prophets and inspired teachers were raised up from time to time to teach them the way of life. Though they were frequently in rebellion against God, and continually straying from his principles and ordinances, yet, as often as they repented, he forgave them, and supplemented that forgiveness by periods of spiritual blessing and temporal prosperity. Yet sin, individual and national, was added to sin; they killed the prophets and persecuted those that attempted to follow their counsel, until the cup of their iniquity was filled, the Spirit of the Lord entirely withdrew from them, and

then commenced the series of wars in the sixth century before Christ, that finally ended in the extermination of the entire people.

They were succeeded in the possession of this land by the Nephites and Lamanites, whose forefathers were led hither from Jerusalem. The fate that overtook these peoples also bears witness that it is a fearful thing to fight against the Most High. The Nephites were meted a more severe judgment than their neighbors, for they sinned against the greater light. The Prophet Mormon, standing on the hill Cumorah, with the few other survivors, and looking over the surrounding plain covered by the unnumbered thousands of his dead countrymen, whose bodies had been left to molder upon the land and to crumble and return to their mother earth, could well cry out in the anguish of his soul: "O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord? O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, how could ye have rejected that Jesus who stood with open arms to receive you? Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But ye are gone, and my sorrows cannot bring your return." They had chosen darkness rather than light, and oblivion was their reward.

Of the Lamanites, suffice it to say, that when the Europeans discovered this country, they found them half naked and savage, surrounded by ruins that testify to the grandeur of their departed glory. Their condition is a significant warning to the nations not to follow in their footsteps, thus rejecting the counsels of God against themselves.

The judgments referred to thus far have all taken place upon this continent. Let us look for a moment to the nations that grew up in the east, and, from their history and their ruins, gain a testimony of the hand-dealings of God.

Of these nations, the first that rises to claim our attention is Israel, the "daughter of Zion." She appears before us clad in priestly robes, a crown of divinity is on her brow, the sceptre of Jehovah is in her hand. Divinely chosen and set apart from among the nations; nurtured from infancy by the care of heaven; her head for centuries the focal point of heavenly light; her dwelling-place an everlasting inheritance; surely this blessed virgin did not



fall beneath the judgment of the law. Her path had been marked out by the great lawgiver, Moses, wherein, if she had walked, there would have been no place or people or nation worthy of her envy. Warning was also given of the awful consequences of straying therefrom: yet Israel walked in crooked paths. She frequently wandered out on the highways of corruption, or became entangled in the thickets, tearing her robes on the briars of sin. And though called back toward the path of rectitude by the prophetic pleadings of Jeremiah, the sharp reproofs of Ezekiel, the seraphic fire, and more splendid prophecies of Isaiah, or brought down in humility and repentance by lingering in captivity for a season; yet prophets and captivity, each in turn, were soon forgotten, and Israel strayed still further, blinded by the fogs and mists, until finally she sealed her doom by lifting upon the cross the One perfect example of the law that was sent to lead her to a place of refuge. Then outraged Justice stripped off her priestly vestments, took away her crown and sceptre, slew her children without number, laid her land drear and waste, and turned out this daughter of Zion, refusing even the refuge of oblivion, and compelling her to wander an outcast among the nations—to be a hiss and a by-word for centuries. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not? Behold your house is left unto you desolate.”

We would pause and weep over the fate of these great peoples, to whom the knowledge of the true God and his righteousness was revealed; but we must pass on, and take a hurried view of the judgments that overtook great heathen cities and empires of antiquity.

The plains of Assyria and Chaldea were once the centers of the world's activity. On their wide and fertile fields were reared great and populous cities, beautified with gorgeous temples and magnificent palaces, and fortified by impregnable walls of such immense proportions that they were expected to endure forever. Today those plains are barren and parched wastes, and the palaces and walls are shapeless heaps of ruins. This remarkable transformation was not brought about by the natural erosion of time, or

because the "march of empire" has been westward, but is a direct result of the judgments of heaven against the vice, luxury, and gross ungodliness that long held polluted court and highest carnival in their pleasant gardens.

Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, situated on the banks of the Tigris, was for a long time an extensive and populous city. From her gates went conquering armies, to return loaded with the spoils of conquest. Prodigious wealth led to abounding immorality. Luxury and corruption reigned paramount. Cruelty of the most atrocious kind characterized its rulers; she was indeed pre-eminently the "bloody city." At length, however, her course was run. The Assyrians invaded Judea, and soon thereafter "Nineveh was made a desolation, and dry like the wilderness." Jehovah "dug her grave, for she was vile." Even the elements conspired to her overthrow. The river, swollen by tempestuous torrents, inundated part of the city, and washed away a portion of the great wall, affording an opportunity for a besieging army to rush in and take possession. The tramp of Median soldiers was heard in the streets. The inhabitants, who never before beheld a foreign foe, except as trembling captives, fled in dismay. The king, despairing of safety, erected an immense funeral pyre, on which he heaped his wealth, and mounting to the summit, with his wives and servants, applied the torch and perished in the flames. His ashes lay white on the marble floor, mingled with the ashes of the Assyrian empire. A new power had arisen, and the glory and greatness of Assyria were shrouded in everlasting night.

The Tigris still washes the ancient ruins of Nineveh. The setting sun still falls, with his long train of splendid twilight, across the Mesopotamian hills, sinking to rest as gloriously as when their proudest monarch beheld him from the western windows of his palace; but the great people, who for seven hundred years pressed beneath the conqueror's foot the necks of a thousand enemies, has passed into oblivion forever. Where their victorious warriors drove triumphant chariots through the roar of tumultuous thoroughfares, some half savage Kurds, sitting on the broken stones of ancient grandeur, watch a distant flock; and, at the fall of night, the jackal sets up a howl as he issues from his den in the basement of a ruined palace. Sin wrought desola-

tion in Assyria as, finally, if unrepented of, it must in any and every land.

Let us turn now and glance at the empire of the Chaldeans, whose capital city was equally as great as that of the Assyrians, and even more magnificent. If there ever was a city that seemed to bid defiance to defeat and overthrow, it was this city Babylon. For a long time it was the most famous city in the world. Its walls, which were reckoned among the wonders of the world, appeared rather like bulwarks of nature than the workmanship of man. The temple Belus, half a mile in circumference and a furlong in height—the hanging gardens, which, piled in successive terraces, towered as high as the walls—the hundred b azen gates—and the adjoining artificial lake—all displayed many of the mightiest works of mortals concentrated at a single point. In the days of its power, Babylon was the hammer of the whole earth. It demolished cities; it changed dynasties; it made and unmade; it arrogated the prerogatives of a supreme. But all this glory was to perish in a night. Its days were numbered, for, secure behind its impregnable walls, the city lived in wantonness, revelry and wild luxury. Jehovah pronounced its doom, through the prophets of Israel, while yet in the plenitude of its power. The burden of their message was that “Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation; neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make fold there; but wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures.” These predictions have been literally fulfilled. Under the direction of Cyrus, the Persian, whose name had been mentioned in prophecy over a hundred years before, the Euphrates was diverted from its course through the city, and a conquering host rushed under the walls in the river-bed, and in a single night became master of Babylon. This was the last act in the drama of this great Empire, and from that time it began to hide itself under the dust and ruin of the ages. Pools of water and heaps of ruins for centuries have marked the site of this proud queen of cities. A pall enshrouds its precincts, and they are avoided by the Arabian and the shepherd as a place of death and evil spirits. Wild beasts prowl,



and moan, and cry, where the proudest princes once abode, and the loudest of revelers abounded. The natural ambitions of the Babylonians had been quenched in the cups of luxury and lust; they had defied the moral law, and, as a consequence, the "beauty of the Chaldees excellency" faded from the canvas of history like a vision of night.

Other cities and other empires have risen and passed away, but the foregoing is sufficient to demonstrate that the penalty inevitably follows the rejected law. We will pass by, therefore, the lessons taught by the fate of the great cities of Tyre and Sidon, of Athens and Corinth, and the wasting away of the great empires of Egypt and Persia, of Macedonia and Greece, and, lastly, of Rome, the "lone mother of dead empires," for centuries the throne of the world. They, too, were wicked. They, too, are dead. They worshiped the golden calf of luxury and corruption; they tyrannized over the meek and lowly; they were guilty of oppression and pride, and the Lord of Hosts came out against them in the power of his wrath, and levelled them even with the dust. Nothing is left of them but their names and their history, which rise as a monument over their graves, bearing an epigraph of warning to the nations: "As in the sight of God the mountains are as unstable and transient as the clouds, so nations rise and pass away."

See

The cypress, hear the owl, and wend your way  
O'er steps of broken thrones and temples, Ye!  
Whose agonies are evils of a day!  
Worlds are at our feet as fragile as our clay.

There is the moral of all human tales,  
'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past;  
First freedom, and then glory—when that fails,  
Wealth, vice, corruption—barbarism at last;  
And history with all her volumes vast hath but one page!

An overpowering sensation of reverential awe possesses the mind when contemplating the power and majesty of this great law. All is subject to it, whether great or small. As mighty empires rise and fall at its bidding; yea, as even the orbs of the universe are under its guidance and control, so also even the sparrow fails to fall without its notice. Omnipotent! Omnipresent! "Whither



shall I go from thy power, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; and if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there; if I take the wings of morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand hold me." O man, canst thou presume to deceive and cheat God, when to him thy heart is like an open book? Thou art abashed at his power, yet remember his love is far more inexhaustible. It springs up as a well of living water unto everlasting life, to everyone that thirsts after it, and drinks thereof. And while his judgments on the nations reveal the power of his wrath, let us not forget that he so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might receive salvation.

We turn from the dark history of the past with feelings of sad regret that so many of the sons and daughters of God have had to learn his power by these sterner aspects of his face; but the long night of sin and judgment is drawing to its close, and our hearts give way to rejoicing as we look toward the horizon of the future, where shafts of light even now appear, heralding the dawn of the bright millennial morn, when all men shall dwell in love and peace: protected by the law, because they humbly bow before its shrine.

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#### A MILLIONAIRE'S ADVICE.

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The following was printed on one thousand rulers and given away to school children in Central New York recently, the advice being that of George W. Perkins, a millionaire. The words come with force from one who began life in a humble position—that of an office boy in a New York office:

"Too many young men in this country don't want to work hard. They prefer to take things easy, stay up late at night, and lie abed too long in the morning. They never can get ahead that way. Time and conditions may change, but the old rule remains the same, that there is no success without keeping everlastingly at it."