

The Tower in Siloam: Bible and Ellen G. White Comments on Unexplained Tragedies

Compiled by Jerry A. Stevens
February 2, 2005

Luke Chapter 13

13:1 There were present at that season some that told Him of the Galilæans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

13:2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilæans were sinners above all the Galilæans, because they suffered such things?

13:3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

13:4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

13:5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

13:6 He spake also this parable; A certain [man] had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

13:7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

13:8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung [it]:

13:9 And if it bear fruit, [well]: and if not, [then] after that thou shalt cut it down.

August 13, 1889 Camp-Meeting at Williamsport, Pa.

By Mrs. E. G. White.

As we rode through the outskirts of the city of Williamsport, we found evidences that the flood had preceded us in its work of devastation. One field of thirty acres was covered with rich tapestry, with carpets of all colors and qualities, which has been spread out to dry in the sunshine. Lines hanging full of all kinds of dry goods, were stretched in the yards. In front of churches were sofas, chairs, and other articles of furniture that had been damaged by the water. All along the streets, sidewalks had been washed away, save where the precaution had been taken to tie them to the houses. Front steps were gone, and boxes, logs, and rubbish of all kinds, were heaped up in the gardens and yards. The stores throughout the city seemed to have suffered great loss because of the deluge, and boxes of coffee, beans, pea-nuts, candies, crackers, apothecary goods, and the contents of jewelers' shops were piled up on the streets, waiting for removal. The perishable goods were already in a state of fermentation, and seemed likely to breathe pestilence by their decay. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 1}

We were told that the camp-ground had been flooded, and that the tents had been taken down. When we arrived at the place, we found that a number of tents were pitched on a rise of ground beyond the original camp-ground, and that the campers were all safe. We were glad indeed to meet our friends, and they received us with joy. A few hours after reaching the camp, the telegram we had sent from Buffalo by way of New York, arrived. The same day telegrams came

from Des Moines, Iowa, urging me to attend the camp-meeting there; but this was impossible. The Lord had a work for me to do at Williamsport. I had much freedom in speaking to the brethren and sisters there assembled. They did not seem to possess a spirit of unbelief and of resistance to the message the Lord has sent them. I felt that it was a great privilege to speak to those whose hearts were not barricaded with prejudice and evil surmising. My soul went out in grateful praise that, weary and exhausted as I was, I did not have to carry upon my heart the extra burden of seeing brethren and sisters whom I loved, unimpressed and in resistance of the light of God had graciously permitted to shine upon them. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 2}

I did not have to set my face as a flint, and press and urge upon them that which I knew to be truth. The message was eagerly welcomed; and although I had to speak words of reproof and warning, as well as words of encouragement, all were heartily received by my hearers. Says the True Witness, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." Those who will give heed to the light that God sends them, will never be left to grope their way in darkness. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 3}

Our meetings were well attended, and in the early morning meeting, so many were desirous of bearing testimony, that it was difficult to close the meeting at the appointed time. Since coming from California to labor on this side of the Rocky Mountains, I have realized as never before the love of my Saviour. The good hand of God has sustained me in bearing a decided testimony to the churches. The Lord has worked for His people, and they have received the light with joy as meat in due season. Their souls have craved spiritual food, and they have been supplied. There has been in the churches a great lack of the meekness of Christ, a great lack of that wisdom which is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, without partiality and without hypocrisy, full of mercy and good fruits. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 4}

The churches in Pennsylvania have been passing through discouragements, and some of their members have apostatized. But as the precious message of present truth was spoken to the people by Brn. Jones and Waggoner, the people saw new beauty in the third angel's message, and they were greatly encouraged. They testified to the fact they had never before attended meetings where they had received so much instruction and such precious light. They were now determined to return to their homes and to their churches to impart to their friends and neighbors the light they had received. They felt that they now understood better how to win souls to Christ. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 5}

The churches are lukewarm. They have listened to doctrinal discourses, but they have not been instructed concerning the simple art of believing. In every meeting which we attend, we find many who do not understand the simplicity of faith. They do not know what constitutes genuine faith, and they miss a rich experience simply because they do not take God at His word. They need to have Christ set forth before them. They need to have courage and hope and faith presented to them. They ask for bread, and shall they receive a stone? Shall the youth in our ranks say, "No man careth for my soul"? Shall we not give light to the souls that are groping in darkness? Shall we not seek to save them from perdition, and build them up in the most holy faith, ever keeping before them the righteousness of Christ? {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 6}

God requires more of those who believe the truth than they have yet given Him. Our high and holy calling demands that we accomplish all that it is possible to accomplish by pure living, by fervent prayer, and by faithful dealing with souls. In this way alone can we be accounted loyal to Christ who was crucified for every son and daughter of Adam. Learning and eloquence cannot be depended upon to do the great work that must be done; but if the ability of the speakers is wholly

consecrated to God, it will be made a power for good. There are great things in store for those who put their trust in God. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 7}

As we looked upon the desolation of Williamsport, we thought of the time when the world was deluged by the flood. In our imagination we could behold dimly the scenes of the terrible destruction in the days of Noah. We thought of the burning of wicked Sodom, when the earth was defiled under its inhabitants, and we remembered that we were living in a time similar to the time preceding the judgments which fell upon the old world. The Spirit of God is now withdrawing from the people of the earth. Men, wrapped up in prosperity, seeking and getting gain, have placed their affections upon earthly things. Few have recognized the long-suffering mercy of God. Few have realized or acknowledged His protecting care. Few have appreciated His goodness and love, although He has kept them from dire disaster and death. As in the days that were before the Flood, there has been a strange forgetfulness of God. The blessings that God has given to draw men to Himself, have been perverted, and made the means of forgetting Him. The special directions given from the pillar of cloud to the people in regard to presenting gifts and offerings, and a faithful tithing of all they possess, have been almost wholly ignored. Says the Scripture, "Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of Heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 8}

Men have not had God in their thoughts; they have followed the imagination of their own hearts, and that continually, as did the inhabitants of the old world. The Lord sent a message of warning by His servant Noah, but the people who saw no evidences of the impending evil, laughed his message to scorn. In the world today there is a similar indifference to the warnings of the messengers of God. Reproof and entreaty alike fall upon deaf ears. One turns to another, and asks concerning the solemn messenger, "Does he not speak in parables?" Is not spiritual darkness covering the earth, and gross darkness the people? Do not men stand in defiance of the Most High? {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 9}

The terrible destruction of life and property at Johnstown and Williamsport, the terrible calamities by land and sea, by flood and fire, cyclone and accident, call for most serious reflection. In the calamity at Johnstown, thousands perished without warning. But we are not to think that because of these judgments, Johnstown and other places visited with calamity, were more deserving of punishment than are other cities and villages. There are those who profess to have advanced light on the Scriptures, who profess to believe that the end of all things is at hand. Have these who make such high profession been faithful in presenting the light to the people? Have they been laborers together with Christ? There are those who are living under the very shadow of our institutions, who are sinning against greater light than were the people of Johnstown, and who are, therefore, becoming more guilty than the veriest sinner who has not had such privileges, and they will more certainly fall under the wrath of God's retributive judgments. With most serious reflection we should search our own hearts, and humble our souls before God. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 10}

At a time of calamity there were many in Jerusalem who thought that those who perished were the special subjects of the wrath of God. Says the Scripture, "There were present at that season some that told Him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye

that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 11}

"Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the Day of Judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto Heaven, shalt be brought down to Hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment, than for thee." {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 12}

Our responsibility and accountability are in proportion to the light that we have had—in proportion to the privileges and opportunities that have been given us. The Lord requires that far greater personal effort shall be put forth by the members of our churches. Souls have been neglected, towns and villages and cities have not heard the truth for this time, because wise missionary efforts have not been made. Irreligion and vice prevail on every hand, most earnest work must be done to come close to souls. This time demands that advance moves be made, that resolute, persevering faith be exercised, that a patient, self-denying, long-suffering spirit be manifested by every member of our churches, and that each one who professes to follow Christ shall become a worker in His moral vineyard. The God-fearing members of the church can do more good by devoted, personal effort than our ministers can accomplish when they feel no burden to labor from house to house. Our ordained ministers must do what they can, but it must not be expected that one man can do the work of all. The Master has appointed unto every man his work. There are visits to be made, there is praying to be done, there is sympathy to be imparted; and the piety—the heart and hand—of the whole church is to be employed, if the work is to be accomplished. You can sit down with your friends, and in a pleasant, social way, talk of the precious Bible faith. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 13}

At this important moment of earth's history, there are mighty influences at work; for the enemy of God and man is seeking through many classes to thwart the purposes of God. All who profess to believe that the Lord is soon coming, should reveal their faith by corresponding works. It is well to raise money for home and foreign missionary work; but the time demands more than this. Work must be done that money cannot buy. Light must shine forth in vigorous effort, diligent zeal must be manifested to set the truth before the people by personal work. But the most enthusiastic zeal will accomplish nothing without the co-operation of God. Divine power must combine with human effort, and heart must meet heart as you intercede for the souls of men who are out of Christ. Deep, fervent piety at home, in the church, and in the neighborhood, will bring souls to behold wondrous things out of the law, and to see the glorious truth of Christ our Righteousness. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 14}

There are grand truths, long hidden under the rubbish of error, that are to be revealed to the people. The doctrine of justification by faith has been lost sight of by many who have professed to believe the third angel's message. The Holiness people have gone to great extremes on this point. With great zeal they have taught, "Only believe in Christ, and be saved; but away with the law of God." This is not the teaching of the Word of God. There is no foundation for such a faith. This is not precious gem of truth that God has given to his people for this time. This doctrine misleads honest souls. The light from the word of God reveals the fact that the law must be proclaimed. Christ must be lifted up, because he is a Saviour Who forgiveth transgression, iniquity, and sin, but will by no means clear the guilty and unrepentant soul. {RH, August 13,

1889 par. 15}

God has raised up men to meet the necessity of this time who will cry aloud and spare not, who will lift up their voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins. Their work is not only to proclaim the law, but to preach the truth for this time,—the Lord our righteousness. The curse of Meroz will be upon those who do not now come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. Well may the question be asked in the spirit of Elijah. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 16}

All Heaven is interested in the work that is going on upon the earth. But there are those who see no necessity for a special work at this time. While God is working to arouse the people, they seek to turn aside the message of warning, reproof, and entreaty. Their influence tends to quiet the fears of the people, and to prevent them from awaking to the solemnity of this time. Those who are doing this, are giving the trumpet no certain sound. They ought to be awake to the situation, but they have become ensnared by the enemy. If they do not change their course, they will be recorded on the books of heaven as stewards who are unfaithful in the sacred trusts committed to them, and the same reward will be apportioned to them as to those who are at enmity and in open rebellion against God. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 17}

Those who have the truth open before them for this time, bear a solemn responsibility. They must proclaim repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. They must dwell upon the cross of Christ, and call the attention of every soul to the Lamb of God Which taketh away the sin of the world. Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in His purity, His holiness, Christ in His matchless love,—this is the theme that needs to be brought out in every discourse. I have been shown that there must be a great awakening among the people of God. Many are unconverted whose names are on the church books. Let these words be repeated by men who are consecrated to the work: "God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Let the sinner grasp this message as the word of God. Let him repeat it as he comes in penitence and faith to Christ. Let him say, "I am sinful and polluted, but the wrath of God rested upon His divine Son. He suffered humiliation and death, and exhausted the curse that belonged to me. I come, I believe. I claim thy sure promise, 'Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Will such a plea, made in contrition of soul, be turned away?—No, never. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 18}

If God has given His Only Begotten Son to die, the just for the unjust, He wants every voice to proclaim it; for this is the truth that is to work counter to the lies of Satan. Christ's death for man shows that His compassion and love are without a parallel. Christ's resurrection proves that He has power over death and the grave. He is willing and able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. {RH, August 13, 1889 par. 19}

January 27, 1897

MS-7-1897

"Sunnyside," Cooranbong, N.S.W.

Again and again the Lord has sent testimonies of warning, or reproof, and instruction to His people; but so long as the men who stand in responsible positions continue to resist the Spirit of

God, and determinedly follow their own unsanctified way and will, as revealed in Minneapolis and since; so long as they persist in holding power over those with whom they are connected, thus placing a mould upon the work that is detrimental to its healthful growth, and weaving into all the working of the cause of God methods and principles which the Lord has testified should not exist, He will overthrow, overthrow, overthrow, until the holy places are cleansed from their moral defilement. The Lord has declared that He will not serve with their sins. Although professing to have a knowledge of divine things, they reveal that they have no vital connection with the sap vessels of the parent stock. The result is that human wisdom takes the place of the divine. {1888 1636.1}

The destiny of such men will be an ultimate separation from Christ, as complete as that of the dead branch that has been severed from the vine. In heart they separated from Jesus years ago, and have become like the unfruitful tree of which the Owner of the vineyard said, "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit of this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto Him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall

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dig about it, and dung it and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." {1888 1636.2}

"Then after that." What meaning is there in these words? In them there is a lesson for all who are connected with the work of God. A period of probation was granted to the tree that bore no fruit. And in like manner God bears long with His people. But to those who have had great advantages, and who are standing in positions of high and sacred trust, and yet bear no fruit, Christ says, "Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?" There must be work corresponding with the sacredness of the truth they have had placed before them. Old things must pass away; all things must become new. {1888 1637.1}

Some of the Jews had brought to Jesus the story of the Galileans whom Pilate had slain at the foot of the altar, thinking that it was because of their wickedness that this had happened unto them, and that they were deservedly suffering for their sins. But the great Teacher had a lesson for His hearers. He said unto them, "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, on whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all the men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell ye, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." {1888 1637.2}

The Lord is gracious, long-suffering, and of tender

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compassion. But His promised blessings are upon condition of obedience. God had done everything that He could for Sodom; but her inhabitants would not keep the commandments of God. Three angels disguised as men appeared to Abraham as he sat in the door of his tent. They were strangers to Abraham, but he treated them courteously, and supplied all their necessities as human beings, knowing not that one of those whom he entertained was no less than the Son of God. {1888 1637.3}

"And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that thing which He hath spoken of him. And the Lord said,

Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know." {1888 1638.1}

Through God's Word the light has been shining upon His people. Will those thus privileged appreciate their blessings? Will that which is wrong, in action, in spirit, and in thought, be renounced? Those who bear some good fruit must be pruned and purified from all common sensual things, from selfishness, ungodliness

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and deception in any line of business, and from greed expressed in any transaction in trade with their fellow-men. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory, not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." {1888 1638.2}

But this has not been the fruit borne by those in sacred positions of trust. There are those who have professed godliness have been severe and harsh and unmerciful to those who have had less responsibilities to bear. How harsh their judgment has been. How hard the hearts, how insensible to sympathy of those who have expatiated on the mistakes of their fellow-men. {1888 1639.1}

Christ has declared, "All ye are brethren." But how little of brotherly love has been manifested. The masterful, selfish, overbearing spirit will prove a curse in any line of business, but the injury it does to the work and cause of God is beyond the estimate that finite man can place upon it. At the very heart of the work they have

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lied against the truth. Deception, fraud, selfishness and covetousness which is idolatry has been brought in and mingled with the sacred offerings. Are there any so far deceived, so blinded, that they cannot distinguish the sacred from the common? {1888 1639.2}

Every church, although imperfect, is dear to the heart of Christ. He knows every member by name. Those who are meek and lowly in heart are precious in his sight. He will be sanctified in those that draw near unto Him. The man who loves and fears God will cease to think highly of his outward advantages. He will no aspire to be the greatest. {1888 1640.1}

The overbearing spirit manifested in the Review and Herald Office in lording it over God's heritage has been looked upon by the God of Heaven with indignation. They have brought into the sacred work of God principles that He hates,—principles which if carried out, would bring the sharp axe to the root of the tree. Had they loved God supremely, they would have loved the children of God, they would have loved all mankind with the love that is expressed in the life of Christ. It is the absence of the love of Christ that causes the Lord to pronounce the sentence, "Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?" {1888 1640.2}

God calls for decided changes in His work proportionate to the elevated character of the truth of these last days. Unless those repent who have been handling sacred things in the spirit manifested by the great apostate, their candlestick will be removed out of his place. The message of God is, "Remember then from whence thou art fallen, and

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repent, and do the first works: or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." {1888 1640.3}

These things have been opened before me in clear lines. I have seen that a cloud hangs over Battle Creek. The councillors in the offices have done strange things, and have offered strange fire. I tell you in the name of the Lord, Advance no farther in your work of loading down by bearing such institutions as the Health Retreat. Take your hands off from the Pacific Press. You who are so deeply at fault in your principles and practices, and under the reproof of God, cannot manage the interests with which you are connected. In the books of Heaven it is written against you, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." {1888 1641.1}

Stop where you are. You cannot retrieve your past record by seeking to reconstruct, reorganize, and consolidate other institutions with the institutions so defective in Battle Creek. I cry to you in the name of the Lord, No, No. Leave the Pacific Press under God's theocracy, and humble your hearts before God before it is everlastingly too late. The great day of God is coming when every man shall be known as God knows him. {1888 1641.2}

The managers of the Pacific Press need to humble their hearts before God. They need to walk in all humility. The Lord will overturn until there is a reformation in our institutions. The men who ought to be filled with faith in this most sacred truth ever presented to mortals, the men who handle sacred trusts, are not all true watchmen. The

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Holy Spirit has often been in your midst, but these men, whose hearts should have been open to receive the heavenly messengers, were closed to its entreaties. They have ridiculed, mocked, and derided God's servants who have borne to them the message of mercy from Heaven. Some have trifled with the precious things of God which are light and truth and grace. Had these men no fear that the sin of blasphemy might be committed by them. They would certainly fear were they not blinded by the enemy. Poor foolish, deluded souls. They know not the things that make for their peace. God has said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

/M.V.H. (7) Jan. 27, '97./ {1888 1641.3}