

ANGRY WITH GOD

[Understanding the
Rules of Earth Life]



SCOTT R. FRAZER

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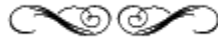
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CHAPTER 1

IS GOD TO BLAME FOR TRAGEDY?



ON AUGUST 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina slammed into New Orleans, Louisiana. The storm caused numerous breaches in the floodwalls and levees around the greater New Orleans area, submerging about 80 percent of the city in over fifteen feet of water. Over a thousand people died, and total property damage was estimated at eighty-one billion dollars. Katrina damaged or destroyed oil-drilling platforms, refineries, businesses, highways, and almost three hundred thousand homes.¹

Religious leaders, televangelists, politicians, and even Iraq's Al Qaeda announced that Hurricane Katrina had been sent by God to devastate New Orleans because of the decadence and sinfulness there. After all, New Orleans was the home of Mardi Gras, the French Quarter, and had a well-publicized history of decadence. To some, it seemed an ideal target for God's punishment. These pronouncements became a hot topic of debate and received much media attention. However, in the October general conference of that year, President Gordon B. Hinckley of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints strongly rebutted the accusation. Speaking of Hurricane Katrina, he stated, "Now, I do not say, and I repeat emphatically that I do not say or infer, that what has happened is the punishment of the Lord. Many good people, including some of our faithful Latter-day Saints, are among those who have suffered."²

The question of whether God is to blame for tragedy and disaster has been asked for thousands of years. The book of Job in the Old Testament, which debates this one question for forty chapters, is actually one of the oldest books in the Bible, having been written around 587 BC. In this ancient document, Job and his friends each expressed their own opinions as to whether disaster is God's punishment for sin and whether blessings are

His reward for obedience. Apparently, a large number of people are still pondering that religious puzzle.

In 1981, Rabbi Harold S. Kushner wrote the book *When Bad things Happen to Good People*,³ and it became a national best seller. You will still find a number of books with similar titles available for purchase.⁴ So, after twenty-five hundred years of debate, faithful believers in God are still seeking for reasons for the tragedies in their lives. A few months ago, a young man sitting next to me on an airplane asked me what God was trying to teach him through the heartbreak of his recent divorce. A good friend in church confessed that he felt that his job loss could well have been divine retribution for the mistakes and follies of his life. The question remains for many people: Does God punish His wayward children by sending misfortune into their lives and not answering their prayers?

Despite the evidence, many people still believe that God sends punishments to individuals who do not meet His expectations. Many faithful Christians seem especially willing to believe that God is punishing *them* personally whenever tragedy strikes someone they love. There are a number of reasons for this belief. Some are scriptural, most of which we find in the Old Testament, but we often blame God for the bad things that happen to us simply because He appears to be the most logical choice.

Tragedies are both overwhelming and life changing. When tragedy occurs, you immediately realize that, from that moment on, your life will never be the same. A disabling health condition, a traumatic divorce, or the death of a loved one can have such a devastating effect on our lives that it is nearly impossible to believe it could be a random event. Thus, we think that if we can just discover God's reasoning behind the tragedy then we might be able to do something to fix it. At the very least, if we could just come to understand *why* the disaster occurred, it would make us feel better. Was this a punishment? Did I do something wrong to cause this, or could I have prevented it? Was it all part of some greater plan? The uncertainties can consume us, so we turn to God, asking in prayer why each misfortune occurs, even while suspecting that this heartbreak was initiated or at least sanctioned by Him. Who else is better to blame? Obviously, God has the power to initiate a crisis that will cause us grief for the rest of our lives. For many tragedies, such as a fast-acting cancer, a heart attack, a devastating hurricane, or the birth of a handicapped baby, it seems that God is actually the *only* one we can logically blame. Some Christians debate that there is a big difference in whether Heavenly Father actually initiated the crises or simply stood back and allowed it to occur. In the midst of heartbreak, the difference between the two possibilities appears minimal. In the end, many hold God responsible for their grief.

STAGES OF GRIEF

Everyone has probably been mad at God at some point in his or her life. It appears to be a natural reaction to tragedy. The grieving process has been broken down into five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.⁴ God has a central role in *two* of these stages. After getting past the first stage of denying that the tribulation even

occurred, we move on to anger. We may be angry with ourselves for not somehow preventing the problem, but in many cases, we realize that we simply did not have the power to prevent the adversity. Then we realize that God *did* have the power to avert the tragedy, and our anger swings toward Him for not *using* His power. As stated in the book *On Grief and Grieving*:

The truth is that anger has no limits. It can extend not only to your friends, the doctors, your family, yourself, and your loved one who died, but also to God. You may ask, "Where is God in this? Where is his love? His powerfulness? His compassion? Is this really God's will?" There you sit, alone with your anger, wondering how to reconcile your spirituality and your religion with this loss and anger.⁵

After the anger, we then usually enter the bargaining stage of grief. God plays a major role in this stage as well, because He is usually the one we are trying to sell on the possibility of a new outcome. From the same book quoted above:

Before a loss, it seems you will do anything if only your loved one may be spared. "Please, God," you bargain, "I will never be angry at my wife again if you'll just let her live." After a loss, bargaining may take the form of a temporary truce. What if I devote the rest of my life to helping others? Then can I wake up and realize this has all been a bad dream?⁶

When the bargaining does not work, we get angry with God yet again. We then enter into the depression stage of our grieving. While there are grief counselors and bereavement groups available for support, personal adversity often plunges once-faithful Christians into a dark place from which they never emerge. This is when many disaffected believers decide that God does not exist or, if He does, He does not deserve their faith and obedience. Even after they move on with their secular lives, these new agnostics may never regain their spiritual lives. When a man blames God for a hardship, he often carries that anger with him for the rest of his life, until he can finally, as the saying goes, "curse God and die."

BLAMING GOD

Blaming God for disaster is endemic in our society. Somehow, the popular conclusion in religious circles has been that, since God is all-powerful, absolutely everything that happens in the world is His will. This is a terrible accusation to lay on our loving Heavenly Father, but we see it every day. When a young man dies in the prime of his life, the sympathies often expressed to the grieving parents are, "God called him home" or "God has another mission for him in Heaven" or "It is all in God's plan." This implies that God arranged the death of this young man to get him from the mortal world to the afterlife a little more quickly. It infers that this young man apparently had talents that God could not find elsewhere in heaven, so He arranged for the death of their son. What a terrible concept to suggest to grieving parents! In such sympathies, mourners essentially express their opinion that, "Yes, God did take the life of your son, but I am sure it was for

a very good reason.” If they actually believed that God had taken their son, could his loving parents ever forgive Him? To all parents who have lost a child, let me assure you that it was never God’s will that such a thing should happen. God joins you in your grief. He did not cause it.

But the idea that we should blame God for our difficulties extends even further. I have heard numerous Church members describe a painful physical ailment, a distressing family problem, or a serious financial setback and then exclaim that they have fasted and prayed to understand *what God was trying to teach them* through this awful event! The implication here is that God initiated a devastating loss of their happiness to get them to guess what they were doing wrong and correct it. By this faulty logic, it would appear that God will arrange for cancer to afflict an elderly grandmother in order to further humble her, teach her pain, or cause her to repent of some unknown sin. Where did this belief come from? Religions have taught for many years that God influences even the smallest details of our lives. On one hand, it may be a comforting thought that God interacts with us so closely in each moment of our lives. Such a belief assures us of God’s love and our importance.

On the other hand, if we believe that God influences our lives daily, then God is on the hook for many disappointments. Did you get the flu because your body is susceptible to a virus or because God gave it to you? Did your car break down because you drove it so much or because God thought you needed another financial setback? Were you late for work because you left home too late or because God delayed traffic to teach you responsibility? Then, if we accept the premise that God causes the small, day-to-day difficulties in our lives, isn’t it a forgone conclusion that He is the author of the major tragedies as well? This belief has caused many afflicted people to feel so much undeserved guilt that they consciously choose to become atheists. If God causes the calamities in our lives, they conclude, He must have a very sadistic side and does not merit their worship.

You may logically argue that God sends us difficulties and disaster to make us *better people*. By this line of thinking, God decides which tribulations are necessary in our lives to help us mature, develop empathy, and handle grief. Once He has made the decision, God then uses His power to bring the needed hardship into our lives. This concept is based on the fact that difficulties really *do* help us mature, develop empathy, and handle grief. The truth of that principle has been proven in millions of life stories. We have a lot of learning to acquire from childhood to adulthood, but maturity is caused by life experiences, not age. Afflictions teach us perseverance, strength, empathy, patience, and appreciation of our normal day-to-day lives. Any negative mishap in our lives gives us the opportunity to respond and further develop our courage and resilience—or to retreat and ignore the difficulty. Life experiences motivate us to grow, and I am thankful to live in a world that provides them. But there are problems with the conclusion that God custom

designs our tragedies and springs them upon us. First, it has very little scriptural basis, which we will examine in a moment. Second, one has to wonder if the thousands of people affected by a hurricane, earthquake, or other natural disaster were all due for both a near-fatal experience and a lesson in humility by losing their homes.

For example, in November 2018, the camp fire in Paradise, California, destroyed 13,053 homes.⁷ Did the families in those homes all need this particular hardship in their lives? Certainly not. It would have been an incredible coincidence indeed if almost all of the population in Paradise needed such a severe lesson in humility and appreciation. Will each of those 13,053 families learn to be more resilient and thankful as they build new homes and lives? Almost certainly. So, while we know that disaster strengthens character, it is illogical to extrapolate that God sends those disasters.

When a ship at sea sinks, drowning everyone on board, it is impossible to ascribe the disaster to God trying to teach those passengers a lesson. Last, if God strikes me with tragedy to improve *my* obedience, is His plan also to cause my wife, children, grandchildren, friends, and neighbors new emotional pain to develop their empathy as well? Do they also deserve punishment, or are they simply collateral damage to the disaster sent to me? No, the long-held belief that God sends misfortune into our lives to teach us principles is rife with impossibilities, gaps in logic, and lack of proof. Joseph Smith stated,

So that it is an unhallowed principle to say that such and such have transgressed because they have been preyed upon by disease or death, for all flesh is subject to death.”⁸

However, that “unhallowed principle” seems to be the exact premise of the Book of Job, which is why we will now examine this scripture and our conclusions about it.

THE BOOK OF JOB

The book of Job is the classic go-to scripture when it comes to defending the idea that bad things are sent by God to afflict us. Job and his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Elihu, and the Lord debate the topic for thirty-nine chapters. The saying “curse God and die” actually comes straight out of the book of Job. After Job has lost all of his children and wealth and is covered with boils from head to foot, Job’s wife exclaims, “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God and die” (Job 2:9). Job then answers her with a statement that deserves admiration yet seems to support the idea that disaster and tragic loss come from God. “What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10). Several other verses from Job support the idea that God chastens us with tragedy. These verses are all statements made by Job or his friends in defense of God or to indicate an acceptance of fate.

Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD

hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. (Job 1:21)

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. (Job 5:17–18)

It should be noted again that the book of Job is an ancient book, written at the time of Israel's exile to Babylon in the fifth century. Job is chronologically misplaced in the latter half of the Old Testament, as it now appears to be one of the oldest books in the Bible. Thus, the question, "Does God bless the righteous and curse the sinners?" has been asked for millennia. Until recently, it was believed Job's answer to this question was an unqualified "yes," but our understanding has now changed.

THE IMPATIENCE OF JOB

Ironically, while Job has been quoted liberally to argue that God rewards the righteous and punishes wrongdoers, it actually teaches the exact opposite. In his excellent book "Rereading Job," Michael Austin details the needed adjustments to our thinking regarding Job. First, Austin announces that the book of Job was *not* a historical rendition of a real man named Job.

Job is a highly stylized work of imaginative literature that may or may not have been based on the experience of a real person but cannot be considered objective history. Everything about the Book of Job announces that it is a work of literature. It begins with the Hebrew equivalent of "once upon a time" and deliberately steers us away from any historical place or period. It features immortal characters (God and Satan) acting in ways that are inconsistent with their actions anywhere else in the Bible.⁹

Since my youth, I never liked the book of Job, since I could never reconcile the premise that God put Job through hell on earth just to win a petty argument with Satan. If Job is a historically accurate book, then no matter how one tries to justify the narrative, it is rather difficult to see God in a favorable light. So, it was a huge relief for me to learn that the book of Job is actually a work of literature and not historical fact. If Job is not historical, then God did not really make a bet with Satan to see how far Job could be pushed. He did not allow Job's ten children to be killed or Job to be stricken with disease as part of that wager. If the book of Job is a work of literature, then God did not really bully and intimidate the man Job in chapters 38–41.

Austin presents good arguments that Job is not historical. Many Church members believe that Job must be a real person, because the argument is made that he is referred to by Ezekiel in Ezekiel 14:14, by James in James 5:11, and by the Savior in Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) 121:10. However, the Savior also refers to the beggar Lazarus in Luke 16:19–31, the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:33, and the prodigal son in Luke 15:11, never mentioning that these men *were not real*. Fictional characters are often used to teach, as demonstrated in Aesop's fables, Grimm's fairy tales, stories by Hans Christian Anderson,

the Tales of Arabian nights, and Jesus's parables. The story of Job does not have to be historical to instruct us about earth life and how we should behave.

If Job is not historical, then what is the point of Job? Good literature is supposed to not only entertain the reader but also teach a concept as well. Job is good literature, but since the book uses irony to teach its lesson, many readers have missed its point. Actually not having to justify the book of Job as historical frees the reader to seriously evaluate the message behind the story. Rereading Job in that light reveals a rather shocking reversal of perspective.

Austin goes on with his explanation of the complexity of the book of Job.

The Book of Job contains two basic parts: a simplistic prose frame and a complicated long poem, with the latter designed to comment ironically on the former. The Job frame, which consists of chapters 1–2 and 42:7–16, tells the tale of a righteous man who suffers extreme misfortune, endures them all with patience and faith, and gets rewarded handsomely in the end for being such a good sport.¹⁰

This “frame” is the story of Job that most of us remember. This is the story of how God allowed Satan to afflict a righteous man with all manner of financial ruin, family death, and disease. Yet Job suffers valiantly, defends God, and is blessed tenfold in the end. In further evidence of the irony of the frame, Job fathers exactly seven sons and three daughters to replace the seven sons and three daughters who died at the beginning of the story. But valiant suffering for no cause is NOT the lesson taught in chapters 3–41 of the same book. In the poem portion of the book, Job attacks the conventional wisdom that God blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked. At times Job's argument with his friends gets quite heated, but Job flatly refuses to confess the sins his friends suggest he committed. Thus, chapters 3–41 of Job are a complete reversal of the principle that most Christians take away from reading the book of Job. Job is not patient. Job does not accept his fate without complaint. When his friends state that Job has sinned to bring tragedy upon his own head, Job boldly defends himself.

I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth. (Job 29:14–17)

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar continue to defend the age-old belief that God punishes the wicked and blesses the righteous, so they reason that Job must have sinned. Job, however, does not relent. He challenges the Almighty or any adversary to provide a list of his crimes (Job 31:35). Setting up a storybook frame and then a poem that mocks the tale is a complicated piece of literature. The author of the book of Job subtly makes his statement that tragedy cannot be used as a discerner of righteousness, as was commonly believed at the time. Those who obey God are often struck down with awful calamity, frequently for simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It is enlightening to reread Job with the new understanding that it actually attacks the premise that God afflicts each of us individually, whether we are righteous or wicked. This learning also means that we can also no longer in good conscience use the book of Job to argue that God sends adversity into your life for no apparent reason. Unfortunately, while the book of Job repeatedly *asks* why bad things happen to good people, it never really *answers* the question.

PUNISHMENTS OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE SCRIPTURES ARE RARE

Many good Christians, who don't want to blame God for fatal catastrophes, take a compromise belief that God may not cause natural disasters, but He will put mishaps and stumbling blocks along our individual life's path. But this belief has little to no scriptural basis. The Lord does, of course, foretell the punishments that will befall a wayward people.

I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate. (Leviticus 26:22)

For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain. (Isaiah 26:21)

Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will punish them: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine. (Jeremiah 11:22)

These Old Testament verses threaten to punish a particular *nation*—be it Israel, Judah, or one of their enemies. These peoples were sinning, and there would be consequences to their bad decisions. However, there are a few times in the scriptures that the Lord punishes an *individual* to get him to change his ways. Sometimes the Lord promises to punish a king, but generally the king actually represents his entire people.

In my review of the Old Testament, I find individual punishments of Cain (Genesis 4:11–12), the false prophet Shemaiah (Jeremiah 29:32), a servant of Elisha (2 Kings 5:27), and King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:19). In a quick review of the New Testament, only Herod (Acts 12: 23), Elymas (Acts 13:11), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5, 10) are punished as individuals. Even then, three of these four people *died* as a result of their punishment, so it is unlikely that God was trying to teach them something or even bring them to repentance. Paul had a vision and then three days of blindness and fasting, but that was more to gain his attention and aid in the conversion process than to get him to repent.

Similarly, the Book of Mormon has only a few individuals who receive direct-from-the-Lord punishments. *As a people*, the Nephites were cursed numerous times with famine or war to get them to repent. But there was never a time when an individual was punished to get him to repent of a wrongdoing. Korihor demanded to see a sign from God and was

struck dumb (Alma 30:49–50), which led to his death soon after. Sherem *also* demanded a sign from Jacob and he was given one, which led to his death as well (Jacob 7:14–15). (From these two examples, it appears that asking for a sign is *never* a good idea, so I don't recommend it.) Other bad guys in the Book of Mormon were not punished by God. Nehor preached false doctrine to the Nephites in the first chapter of Alma. When Gideon, a righteous man and hero of the people, publicly disagreed with his teachings, Nehor attacked and killed him. For this murder, Alma had Nehor executed (Alma 1: 15). The Lord did not punish Nehor. This was simply an instance of capital punishment by the Nephite government.

King Noah was also an unrighteous leader of the Nephite people. When the Lamanites attacked his people, Noah commanded that his personal guard abandon their wives and children and flee with him (Mosiah 19:11). Later, when those men repented of their abandonment and wanted to return to their families, Noah forbade it. For that command, the king's men put Noah to death by fire. Again, this was not the Lord's decision or execution. King Noah's cowardice and poor leadership caused his own men to rebel and kill him. Evil men may enjoy brief success, but eventually their unrighteous decisions bring mortal consequences. Alma the Younger had an experience very similar to Paul's (Mosiah 27:23). Granted, Alma had a tough couple of days of repentance, but his temporary coma could hardly be called a tragedy sent to afflict him.

So throughout the scriptures, we find very few *individuals* who were punished directly by God to motivate them to repent. Many people die in consequence of their choices, such as choosing to fight in a war against their nation's enemies. Whole cities were struck down for their wickedness, such as Sodom & Gomorrah in the Old Testament (Genesis 19:24) and Jacobugath, Laman, Josh, Gad, and Kishkumen in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 9:9–10). But there is no scriptural basis to believe that God regularly spotlights individuals for their sins and sends down punishments. It is a rare occurrence. If you think that God is punishing you individually for your misdeeds, you are either in a select group of people or you are blaming God for punishments He did not inflict.

You will hear numerous anecdotal stories from faithful members who believe that God punishes individuals to get them to change their ways. "God sent me pneumonia so I would appreciate good health and attend the temple more often." "God let my son be in a near-fatal auto accident to get him to come back to church." "God allowed me to get cancer so my children would visit and appreciate me more." These conclusions are based on poor reasoning. It is well known that the human mind tends to seek (and thus find) cause and effect in our life experiences. Thus, when a tragedy occurs in our life, we look for a cause. "What did I do to deserve this?" is so common it has become a cliché. A serious tribulation, we believe, is too meaningful and life changing to be random. When we can't identify an immediate cause, we wait. When something good occurs to us a short

time later (as it must), we attempt to devise how our misfortune somehow precipitated events that led to a fortunate outcome. In order to explain the two events, we extrapolate a cause-and-effect relationship between them, despite the fact that we have no evidence for such a conclusion. As explained by Marvin J. Ashton,

We must remember that all suffering is not punishment. It is imperative that we do not allow ourselves to be destroyed by the conduct of others. Sometimes we spend so much time trying to determine what we did wrong in the past to deserve the unpleasant happenings of the moment that we fail to resolve the challenges of the present . . . It is important that we not look upon our afflictions as a punishment from God. True, our actions may cause some of our problems, but often there is no evident misconduct that has caused our trials. Just the normal journey through life teaches us that nothing worthwhile comes easy.¹¹

The belief that God spends His time planning disasters and tribulations for us goes against all belief that He is a loving Heavenly Father.

One last scripture needs to be highlighted to demonstrate that God does not individually curse the wicked and bless the righteous. As He was explaining the differences between the Mosaic law and His updated law, the Savior said,

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44–45)

With this teaching, the Savior puts to rest any remnant of the Old Testament idea that God sends curses upon the wicked. Like Nehor and King Noah, the wicked will suffer consequences for their evil actions, but our Heavenly Father is not the source of those consequences. Instead, He still loves His wicked children and sends sunshine and rainfall upon them and their crops. As Matthew states just a couple of verses later, loving your enemies is a step toward becoming perfect, even as our Father in Heaven is perfect. The sooner we can accept the fact that God is not the source of our misfortunes, the sooner we can stop blaming Him for them.

THEN WHY DOESN'T GOD ANSWER MY PRAYERS?

Throughout the New Testament and Book of Mormon, the Savior and other Church leaders encourage us to pray. For most Christians, this instruction remains current today, and we pray as a people. However, during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, many people and even Church leaders began to question the power of prayer—and its answers. As explained by one historian:

The concept of *revelation* was of central importance to traditional Christian theology. The Enlightenment witnessed the development of an increasingly critical attitude to the very idea of supernatural revelation . . . The new emphasis upon the mechanical regularity and orderliness of the universe . . . raised doubts about the New Testament accounts of *miraculous happenings*.¹²

Over the years, many Christians and their churches have come to doubt or deny the possibility of revelation and miracles. As a result, today we have a broad range of expectations of God during prayer. Many people still have extreme faith in the power of prayer and in the miraculous blessings of a loving Heavenly Father. Other Christians have few expectations of God, wishing only to express thanks to Him for blessings received. Wherever you are on this spectrum, you must realize that answers to prayers, like God's miracles, must meet certain criteria.

As a child, I was taught that our Heavenly Father is a white-bearded old man whose sole purpose was to answer my prayers and give me blessings. As I grew older and my prayers grew more complex, I realized that God was not a "benevolent grandfather" who gives us things and removes hardships. I changed my thinking due to a number of difficult circumstances that occurred during a disastrous professional career. Though my wife and I prayed mightily about every job offer, we never got sure answers. Each job turned out to be a difficult work environment, a harsh boss, or the continued threat of layoffs. I could have blamed God for not providing better guidance, but I realized the decisions were mine and I paid the consequences for those decisions.

In discussing the harsh rules of earth and consequences of poor (though well-intentioned) decisions, transitions in our thinking must often occur. Our understanding of God should include the fact that He is the Ruler over our mortal probation. He is still our Heavenly Father, but He also assures that our lives on earth meet the requirements of all such earths. In my discussions, I have found that many who are angry with God are actually mad at their benevolent grandfather image of Him. A grandfather will always be kind, protect us, and fix our problems, so giving up that image may be difficult. But neither our Heavenly Father nor Jesus Christ is our frail, sweet grandfather. Their roles are much more complex than that. An understanding of that difference is especially important when we pray, as illustrated in the following example.

When we pray for God to intercede in our lives and fix something, we are offering an "intercessory prayer." The most well known intercessory prayer in history was offered by our Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane. There, in anguish about the painful Atonement that He was about to experience, the Savior prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matthew 26:39). So, on the eve of the first Good Friday, God the Father had two choices. On one hand, His only begotten son Jesus Christ had just requested that He *not* have to pass through the Atonement. On the other hand, for the plan of salvation to continue, Jesus *had* to pass through the Atonement. Heavenly Father knew that a Savior absolutely had to be provided for all mankind—and this was obviously the greater need. As we all know, the request of the most famous intercessory prayer ever offered was *not* granted. The Savior had to drink from the bitter cup and suffer the pains of the Atonement.

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