

DOES GOD KILL?

EXPLORING THE NON-VIOLENT NATURE OF GOD



TROY J. EDWARDS

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of God

By Troy J. Edwards

Vindicating God Ministries

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *King James Version* (KJV) of the Bible.

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Formerly titled, "*Is the God of the Bible Literally a KILLER?*"

Published by **Vindicating God Ministries**

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Dedicated to someone who quickly
and lovingly befriended so many of
us. The late:

Pastor Joe McIntyre

Author of the excellent book, “E. W.
Kenyon and His Message of Faith:
The True Story.”

Preface

The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. (Hebrews 1:3; New Living Translation; Emphasis added)

To understand what God is like, read the four gospels and take note of the life of Jesus. Everything Jesus did is exactly what God would do. Jesus' actions were God's actions. Jesus is a flawless representation of God in the way that He talks, walks, and interacts with others.

Jesus only carried out His Father's instructions (John 5:19). Jesus never made His own will His goal. He did only as his Father desired (John 5:30). Only the deeds of His Father were performed by Jesus (John 5:17; 10:25, 32, 37, 38). Jesus taught the truth, stood up for the vulnerable, fed the hungry, healed the sick, pardoned the guilty, loved the ugly, consoled the grieving, and made friends with the outcasts of society. According to John 14:7–11, you saw the Father when you saw Him.

If everything that Jesus accomplished is an accurate representation of God's nature, character, and qualities, then everything that Jesus did *not* do is likewise an accurate representation of God's personality. Jesus did *not* bring about illness, withhold forgiveness from those who came to Him for it, exact revenge on those who hurt Him or those He loved, call for the occurrence of natural calamities, or exact retribution for transgressions.

A woman who was caught committing adultery by some religious leaders was brought to Jesus one day (John

8:1-6). They provoked Jesus by asking him how they ought to apply the Law of Moses. According to this legislation, the woman had to be stoned for her adulterous behavior. Based on the divine law that was revealed to Moses, Jesus could have said, “Stone the woman.” Rather, Jesus instructed them, “*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*” (John 8:7b).

Jesus had the right to cast the first stone because He was the only one without sin among the group. However, Jesus refrained from carrying out the execution when the lady’s accusers realized that their lack of genuine holiness precluded them from killing the woman for her transgression. Rather, He said to her, “*Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more*” (John 8:11b).

Since Jesus is God’s perfect representative then this means that God does not take it upon Himself to execute the sinner. The Bible says about Jesus, “*For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens*” (Heb. 7:26). William Barclay notes that the word “harmless” means, “... that Jesus *never hurt anyone* (*akakos*).”¹ The God we serve does no ill to His neighbor (Rom. 13:10). The Father, like Jesus, would never do things that harm us (Matt. 7:7-11).

Then the issue comes up, “What about all those killings that are attributed to God in the Bible?” We hope that this book may clarify certain parts for you. The Bible is the inspired Word of God, but it is frequently misinterpreted, as you shall discover. You will learn from this study that God is harmless and that everything written in the Bible is true. It will also take away your fear of a loving God and make you feel comfortable approaching Him in closeness and affection. Above all, we pray that this book will assist you in modeling the qualities of the God you love for everyone around you.

Chapter One

God Takes Responsibility (Part 1)

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. (Deut. 32:39)

Some individuals find this text troubling, and with good reason. God tells us in this verse that He both kills and wounds people. In her expression of gratitude and praise to God for giving her a child, Hannah, the mother of the famous prophet Samuel, states, “*The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up*” (1 Sam. 2:6).

If you take this passage at face value, it most definitely aligns with Muslim ideology. Many of them don’t mind if their deity murders people. Indeed, for this reason the majority of them have no trouble killing people they label as infidels.

Sadly, this Scripture is also used as a proof-text by a number of “Christian” groups that identify as followers of Christ. Their god is so “sovereign” and “in control” that all deaths—murder, accidents, and war—occur exclusively as a result of his sovereign will. Deuteronomy 32:39 and 1 Samuel 2:6 are two of the scriptures that are referenced to support an argument made by a Christian or an atheist when they discuss the harsh image of God that such a notion portrays.

Progressive Revelation

For those of us who are troubled by this, how should we handle these passages? Regretfully, there are others who, in addition to rejecting God and becoming

atheists, have adopted a stance that I cannot support: they reject the truth that Scripture is fully inspired.

I firmly believe the Bible, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, is the inspired, infallible word of God. It is a totally inspired revelation that God has given to humanity. Men were moved by the Holy Spirit to write down what He said and also recorded the historical occurrences that align with the disclosure of God's purpose for humanity.

That being said, how does one reconcile the notion that writings like Deuteronomy 32:39 and 1 Samuel 2:6 are inspired by the Holy Spirit with the reality that God is a loving and compassionate God who longs for no harm or suffering to occur to His creatures? The solution is as simple as realizing that the Bible is a work of *progressive* revelation. The ancient Hebrews could not have handled all of the truth about God because of the effect of their surrounding culture. This is clarified by what Jesus said to His disciples:

*I have yet many things to say unto you, **but ye cannot bear them now.** Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. (John 16:12-13)*

The earliest texts of Scripture did not provide all the information that God's people needed to understand about His nature or the goings-on in the spirit world. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "*If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?*" (John 3:12). Therefore, God revealed truth *progressively*. This phenomenon is known

as *progressive revelation*. The writer of Hebrews stated it this way:

God, who gave our forefathers many different glimpses of the truth in the words of the prophets, has now, at the end of the present age, given us the truth in the Son. Through the Son God made the whole universe, and to the Son he has ordained that all creation shall ultimately belong. This Son, radiance of the glory of God, flawless expression of the nature of God, himself the upholding principle of all that is. (Heb. 1:1-3; Phillip's New Testament)

The Amplified Bible also provides us with an insightful interpretation:

In many separate revelations [[a]each of which set forth a portion of the Truth] and in different ways God spoke of old to [our] forefathers in and by the prophets, [But] in [b]the last of these days He has spoken to us in [the person of a] Son. (vv. 1-2)

In reference to the Old Testament prophets and God's grace (kindness) in Jesus Christ, Peter states of them, "Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things" (1 Pet. 1:12a). Even the things that they were foretelling to those of us in later generations were not fully understood by the prophets of the Old Testament. Only Christ could provide a full comprehension (Luke 24:25-27, 44-48; John 5:39-40).

Thus, until the Son of God came to reveal Him, men would not be able to comprehend the entirety of the truth about God (Matthew 7:9-11; 11:27; John 1:14-18; 8:19; 14:10-11; 16:1-3; 17:25; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; 1 John 1:3-5; 5:20). A deeper comprehension of Satan and demons could only come from Jesus disclosing the truth about God (Matt. 12:22–29; John 8:44). There are several reasons for this, but one of them is unquestionably the paganism that surrounded His people. Most of the countries in the same region as Israel practiced polytheism. To put it another way, they worshipped several deities.

Monotheism, or the belief that there is only one God, was the central truth that God required His people to be anchored in (Deuteronomy 6:4). It would have been easy for the ancient people to adopt the myth that Satan and the devils were gods on par with the genuine God if God had revealed too much to them about angels, demons, Satan, the Trinity, the constant struggle between good and evil in the spirit world, and other spiritual realities. The following is further explained by *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*:

There is a sound pedagogical reason, from the viewpoint of revelation, for this earlier withholding of the whole truth concerning Satan. In the early stages of religious thinking it would seem to be difficult, if not impossible, to hold the sovereignty of God without attributing to His agency those evils in the world which are more or less directly connected with judgment and punishment (compare Isa 45:7; Am 3:6). The Old Testament sufficiently emphasizes man's responsibility for his own evil deeds, but super-human evil is brought upon him from above. "When willful souls have to be misled, the spirit who does so, as in Ahab's case, comes from above" (G. A. Smith, op. cit., 317). The progressive revelation of God's character and purpose, which more and more imperatively

demands that the origin of moral evil, and consequently natural evil, must be traced to the created will in opposition to the divine will, leads to the ultimate declaration that Satan is a morally fallen being to whose conquest the Divine Power in history is pledged.¹

In its early centuries, ancient Israel was not prepared for a complete revelation concerning an entity known as Satan. Over the ages, God had to gradually reveal truths to His people so they wouldn't revert to heathen practices. This implied that God had to accept accountability for actions that He did not personally take. Whether good or wicked, God assumed accountability for everything that occurred because He was in charge. In a sense, God assumed the danger of being misunderstood.

God is the all-powerful sovereign of the universe, so He has the last say over what He allows or forbids. Even while God's creatures are fully free to choose, He nonetheless has the authority to restrict and prohibit certain actions. Thus, in the past, God frequently assumed accountability for the deeds He allowed Satan and evil men to commit, treating them as though He had carried them out Himself (Job 1:12; 2:3; 42:11).

God and David's Temptation

To demonstrate to you how this principle aids in our understanding of Deuteronomy 32:39, we must first lay the groundwork by looking at a few Bible verses. Here are two key verses that will help you comprehend the reality of progressive revelation:

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah (2 Samuel 24:1)

And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. (2 Chronicles 21:1)

According to Samuel, David was moved by God to carry out the conceited and haughty sin of taking an official census of Israel. But in his commentary on the same occurrence, the divinely inspired author of 1 Chronicles, Ezra, tells us that the tempter was Satan. According to James 1:13–14 in the New Testament, God does not tempt anyone to sin. Moreover, the Bible refers to Satan as the Tempter in multiple instances (Matt. 4:1–3; 1 Thess. 3:5). It appears that the overwhelming weight of biblical evidence favors Ezra’s account of what happened.

Is the Chronicles correct and Samuel’s narrative incorrect? Is the Bible riddled with contradictions, as so many of its detractors assert? Were both passages inspired by God? The responses are “no,” “no,” and “yes,” in the sequence in which the questions were posed. Both stories are true. The *permissive sense* is used in one writing, whereas the *causative sense* is used in the other. God felt it necessary to reveal truth *gradually*, therefore He inspired the writers of His Word to write in this way:

As to the agent in this temptation, **it was God only in the permissive sense**; Satan in the personal and positive sense, permitted of God, and by his very nature, wanting nothing more than the barest permission to give scope to the Satanic malice of his heart, and involve both David and the Lord’s people in terrible calamities. It may, perhaps, be put to the account of “**progress of doctrine**” that in the later book (Chronicles) this agency is ascribed to Satan, while in the book of Samuel, neither his name nor his agency appears.² (Emphasis added)

Another student of Scripture attests to this fact: “The older account does not enter into the distinction between what God permits and what God causes. This distinction is the result of later reflection and more subtle theology.”³ The writings of 2 Samuel were composed sometime between 913 and 722 B.C. Several centuries later, between 450 and 425 B.C., 1 Chronicles was composed. We can observe that there was advancement in the understanding of God’s and Satan’s roles in the scheme of things over these centuries. Consequently, it is best to interpret verses like 2 Samuel 24:1 in the permissive sense:

Satan the accuser was then permitted to influence David. The statement, “He (God) moved David,” also means in Hebrew, “He suffered him to be moved.” He permitted Satan to do his work.⁴

Both E. W. Bullinger and J. B. Rotherham concur with this as noted by the two translations below:

*And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and He **suffered** David to be moved against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. (2 Sam. 24:1; E. W. Bullinger's Companion Bible, 1909; Emphasis added)*

*“And again was the anger of Yahweh kindled against Israel, - so that **he suffered David to be moved** against them, saying, Go, count Israel and Judah” (Rotherham Emphasized Bible; Emphasis added)*

God did nothing but permit David to be tempted to take the census. While God did not initiate the temptation, He also did not stop it from happening.

God and Deception

The deceit of false prophets is another instance of this progressive revelation in which God accepts accountability for the deeds of Satan. Compare the following two passages:

*And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, **I the LORD have deceived that prophet**, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.* (Ezekiel 14:9)

*“And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and **Satan, which deceiveth the whole world**: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”* (Revelation 12:9)

In the past, God accepted responsibility for the deception of the false prophets. The reality about who is truly doing the lying came to light later, as additional information became available. Scripture reveals to us that God is unable to lie (Titus 1:1-3; Heb. 6:17-18) because His holiness prevents Him from doing so (Psalm 89:33-35). Even more, God very much hates lying (Prov. 6:16-19; 12:22; Zech. 8:17).

However, Satan is the creator and the patriarch of deception. According to John 8:44, he gave birth to lying. Since lying is the foundation of deception, it is incompatible with God’s nature. Therefore, in what way does God accept accountability for Satan’s deceptive acts? Paul assists us with this:

*“And now ye know **what withholdeth** that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: **only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.** And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, **whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,** And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. **And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion,** that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Thessalonians 2:6-12)*

God will release Satan’s control in the closing days, permitting him to deceive everyone who wishes to believe falsehoods. Paul claims that this is how God will bring them powerful deceit. Edward Bird sagely observed, “For, pray take notice, God is said in Scripture to *send* what he *can* (but *doth not*) hinder from being *sent*.”⁵ Accordingly, the following translation of verse 11 would be more accurate: “*For this reason, God will **allow** them to follow false teaching so they will believe a li.*” (New Life Version).

We think that a *permissive* interpretation of Ezekiel 14:9 is more appropriate in light of this evidence of the progressive character of God’s revelation. According to E. W. Bullinger,

Active verbs were used by the Hebrews to express, not the doing of the thing, but the *permission* of the thing which the agent is said to do..... Eze_14:9.- “If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet”: i.e., I have permitted him to deceive himself.⁶

Furthermore, as evidenced by their own translations, Bullinger and Boothroyd confirmed this information:

*And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have **permitted** him to be deceived, and I will stretch out My hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of My People Israel. (Eze. 14:9; E. W. Bullinger’s Companion Bible, 1909; Emphasis added)*

*And when a prophet is deceived as to the thing of which he hath spoken, I, Jehovah, have **permitted** that prophet to be deceived; and I will stretch out my hand against him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people. (Eze. 14:9; The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments; Now Translated from Corrected Texts of the Original Tongues by B. Boothroyd, D.D., 1836; Emphasis added)*

This is how scriptures claiming God did actions we know are not fitting the description of a loving, merciful, and holy God should be understood.

Chapter Two

God Takes Responsibility (Part 2)

As we discovered in the first chapter, some of the language in the Bible may lead us to believe that God is a seducer. However, we also discovered throughout the gradual revelation process that God's involvement in temptation was *permission* rather than *causality*. In chapter one, we also learnt that God is portrayed as being deceitful. But once more, the unfolding of revelation showed that the real liar is Satan. All God did was accept responsibility for what *Satan* had done.

Deuteronomy 32:39 and Progressive Revelation

Now that we have established this framework for comprehending the Bible's progressive revelation, let us observe Deuteronomy 32:39 again and contrast it with another well-known verse:

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. (Deut. 32:39)

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

In Deuteronomy 32:39 God accepts responsibility for killing and wounding. In John 10:10, however, Jesus, who is identical to the Father in every aspect (John 14:8-11; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; Heb. 1:3), compares His methods with those of *the thief* (one of Satan's many aliases).¹ According to Jesus, the thief comes to steal, murder, and

destroy. In contrast, Jesus came to demolish Satan's works (see also Acts 10:38; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8). Subsequent revelation shows that the perpetrator and killer is Satan, not God:

*But now ye seek to **kill** me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. **Ye do the deeds of your father.... Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.** (John 8:40, 41a, 44; emphasis added)*

We must recognize that God accepted responsibility for Satan's murdering deeds, just as we have shown via progressive revelation that He did so for the devil's acts of temptation and deceit. Therefore, rather than being interpreted in a causal meaning, Deuteronomy 32:39 should be interpreted in a *permissive* sense.

God Taking Responsibility

Although God's people received revelations of the truth piecemeal over the ages, references to Satan and his activities were not entirely absent from the Old Testament. According to experts, the oldest book in the Bible is the book of Job. Job has several terrible catastrophes in this book, such as the demise of his cattle and servants (Job 1:14–17). The loss of Job's children, for whom he frequently prayed, was far worse (Job 1:4, 5, 18, 19). These deaths were all attributed to God:

*While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The **fire of God** is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. (Job 1:16; Emphasis added)*

*Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all **the evil that the Lord had brought upon him**: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold. (Job 42:11)*

God Himself accepts full responsibility for all that befell Job:

*And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although **thou movedst me against him, to destroy him** without cause. (Job 2:3)*

Just as God says in Deut. 32:39, “*I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal,*” in the same manner He claims responsibility for Job’s servants, animals, and children. It is not up for debate whether God did the killing because we know that he never lies. Is it true that *He* actually carried it out?

The response to that query would be “no.” In the early days of documenting divine revelation, God accepted full responsibility for everything He allowed or did not prevent. The killing in this instance was not literally done by God, yet He nonetheless holds Himself accountable for what He *allowed* Satan to do:

*And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, **all that he hath is in thy power**; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.*
(Job 1:12)

This is the manner in which God “kills”. He does it by removing His protection and allowing Satan to have his way (see vv. 10, 11). God’s comments to Satan are appropriately translated in the permissive sense in the New Life Version, “*He still holds to his good ways, even when I **allowed you** to go against him, and to destroy him for no reason*” (Job 2:3b).

Subsequently, in John 10:10, Jesus made a comparison between the devil’s conduct and His own. The thief, Satan, comes to kill, steal, and destroy. On the other hand, Jesus comes to offer life. As a result, Deut. 32:39 should also be interpreted permissively, as demonstrated by the preceding cases.

Deuteronomy 32:39 and the Surrounding Context

It does look to us like God is a real killer when we take Deuteronomy 32:39 out of its context. The context, however, indicates that the passage should be interpreted permissively. God referred to Himself as Israel’s “Rock” on multiple occasions in Deuteronomy 32 (Deuteronomy 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31; also see 1 Corinthians 10:4). A commentary on verse 32 of Deuteronomy states:

We have in Scripture several instances of persons retiring to rocks for safety; and it appears that rocks are still resorted to in the East, as places of security. Before the invention of gunpowder, and before its explosive power was known, fastnesses of this kind were in a manner impregnable. Hence we see the propriety of considering the protection of God as a “rock;” which often occurs in Scripture.²

Accordingly, the Bible uses the metaphor of a “rock” to refer to someone who *defends* against hostile forces (2 Samuel 22:2-3, 32, 47; Psalm 18:2, 31, 46; 31:2-3; 62:2, 6, 7; 71:3; 94:22; Isaiah 17:9-10). God informs Israel in Deut. 32:30:

*How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except **their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up?*** (Deut. 32:30; Emphasis added)

Scripture uses similar wording in other places to explain God’s punishment of His people for disobedience. For instance, we read in Judges 2:14:

*And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and **he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.*** (Emphasis added)

The fact that Israel’s Rock *sold them* signifies that God withdraws His protection and allows their foes the upper hand. Judges 2:14 is interpreted more liberally by another translation:

The Lord was angry with the Israelites, so he let enemies attack them and take their possessions. He let their enemies who lived around them defeat them. The Israelites could not protect themselves from their enemies. (Easy to Read Version)

Deuteronomy 32:30 demonstrates that the “rock metaphor” refers to God’s removal of His protection from Israel in the event of their rebellion. The Bible in Basic English renders verse 30, “.... if their rock had not let them go, if the Lord had not given them up?” The Good News Translation says, “*The Lord, their God, had abandoned them; their mighty God had given them up.*”

In light of this, take note of how God instructs the disobedient Israelites to turn to their false gods rather than Him for protection in times of hardship, saying that they could refer to these “deities” as their “rock”:

*And he shall say, Where are their gods, **their rock in whom they trusted**, Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? **let them rise up and help you, and be your protection**. See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. (Deut. 32:37-39)*

God is aware that the idols the Israelites would worship will not bring them any assistance. Israel won’t be protected at all if the real God ceases to be their rock. God is stating in the context of Deuteronomy 32:39 that He inflicts wounds and kills idolaters, not by personally

inflicting harm, but by taking away His protection and allowing their adversaries to triumph.

Deuteronomy 32:29 and the Wider Context

Verse 39's permissive meaning is further demonstrated by referring to another passage in Deuteronomy 32:

And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. (Deut. 32:20; Emphasis added)

God threatens to keep His face hidden from the disobedient Israelites as He observes their progress and eventual outcomes. This is undoubtedly a sign that God has withdrawn His protection. Regarding Deut. 32:20, Joseph Caryl explains, "Certainly no good end if God hide his face. He speaks in reference to temporal or outward things, I will bide my face from them, that is, I will withdraw my protecting presence, my wonted influence and assistance."³ Hence, the hiding of God's face means that He will not *interfere* with any attacks from Israel's enemies:

"I will hide my face from them" is expressive of utter abandonment, as if the indignant Jehovah had said, 'I will now let this depraved people reap the harvest of their own perverse and froward conduct; I will not again interfere to protect them as I have hitherto done: I will no longer allow myself to become an eyewitness of their abominations, which are as unfit for me to behold as for them to commit. I will pour out my indignation upon them; I will not only withhold from them my tender paternity, but leave them to the consequences of their own rash behaviour.'⁴

This refutes the notion that God used His omnipotent power to kill people directly and literally. God “hideth” in order to “smite” (Isa. 57:17). This is in line with what God informed the Israelites about His response to their idolatry in the preceding chapter:

*Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and **I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.** (Deut. 31:17-18; Emphasis added)*

God will forsake Israel and conceal His face from them, causing them to undergo great evil and trouble. God’s favor, blessings, presence, protection, and assurance of receiving answers to prayers are represented by the *shining* of face (Numbers 6:23–27). All of these things are lost when God’s face is hidden.

Thus, we are to interpret God’s statement, “*I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal,*” as the disavowal of God’s shield. This is not to be interpreted as God actually or immediately taking a life by the might of His own hand. The phrase, “*I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal*” simply expresses God’s acceptance of responsibility for the actions He lets men and the devils commit when a person or a country has abnegated His protection.

Chapter Three

God Kills and the Idiom of Permission

One of the most necessary things for youth to regard, if they would understand the Old Testament, is the nature of the Hebrew idiom. For example, how God is said to do what he only permits.¹ (William Dalrymple)

We have provided enough proof from our exegesis of the Bible to conclude that God's declarations, like "I kill and I make alive," are to be interpreted permissively rather than causatively. As we've seen, during the Old Covenant, God assumed responsibility for a number of actions that we later discovered were actually carried out by Satan.

God is Said to Do What He Permits

Yet, despite the overwhelming amount of evidence to support it, some have questioned the validity of a "permissive sense" in Scripture. In particular, some have focused their denial on the Lord's words, "*I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal*" in Deuteronomy 32:39.² The passage's words are intended to be interpreted literally by those who reject the concept of permission. In a nutshell, they insist that God actually causes death and wounds in addition to giving life and healing.

However, it is crucial for readers of the Bible to understand that, in Hebrew, "... according to the peculiar idiom of the language, a thing is often said to be done by a person, who only permits or grants that it should be done."³ Scripture used this idiom in reference to both God and men (Zech. 8:10; Matt. 10:34–35; Isa. 6:9–10; Jer.

1:10; Eze. 43:3). The Israelites' accusations against Moses and Aaron following the demise of Korah and his followers serve as an illustration of this truth:

*But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, **Ye have killed** the people of the Lord. (Numbers 16:41)*

Anyone who has read the story understands that Moses did nothing more than predict what would happen to Korah and his fellow rebels (Num. 16:25-33). Neither Moses nor Aaron did anything to contribute to their deaths. The accusers of Moses and Aaron are well aware of this.

So, why did they accuse the two men of murdering those they referred to as “the people of the Lord”? This type of phrase was widespread among Hebrews since they believed Moses and Aaron could have prayed and prevented the deaths of Korah and his followers (Ps. 106:23). Robert Young, a prominent Hebrew scholar, goes on to explain how the Hebrew language has a *permissive* rather than a *causal* connotation in this case:

YE YE HAVE.] The reduplication of the pronoun shows the bitterness of the people; they thought that Moses and Aaron might have interceded with the Lord, and He would have spared even the guilty; they, not doing so, were held as having ‘put them to death.’ So, also, because Jeremiah (1. 10,) was commissioned to foretell the desolation of nations, he is said to do it himself; and God, because he foretold (Ex. 3. 19,) the obstinacy of Pharaoh, is said (in 4. 21,) to have produced it. The Hiphil (or causative) form of the Hebrew verb found here is often only permissive.⁴

Dr. Young explains that just as God is supposed to do things that He did not prevent, so too were Moses and Aaron are said to kill because they did nothing to prevent the men from dying. Furthermore, according to Dr. Young, the text is permissive because of a hiphil conjugation. Deuteronomy 32:39 has a hiphil conjugation, which should likewise suggest *permission* rather than *cause*, according to *The Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament, Volume I*.⁵

Additionally, Hannah referenced Deuteronomy 32:39 in 1 Samuel 2:6 to say, “*The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.*” “The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge” cites various passages that demonstrate this concept of permission, one of which being 1 Samuel 2:6:

.... it is well known, that in Scripture, God is frequently represented as doing what, in the course of his providence, **he only permits to be done.** Ex.15:26. De.7.15. **1 Sa.2:6.** Pr.3.33. Is.45.7. Am.3.6.-6.11. Mi.6.9.⁶ (Emphasis added)

It is possible to list numerous academics who confirm that the Hebrew language contains an “idiom of permission” according to which God is said to do that which He merely permits.⁷ The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge contends that 1 Sam. 2:6, and by implication, Deut. 32:39, from which Hannah is citing, can be understood as permissive.

God the Supreme Governor

Many clergymen and theologians of bygone eras did not read Deut. 32:39 and 1 Sam. 2:6 in the way some do today—that is, that God actually kills. Instead, the passage was understood to declare God’s right as the all-powerful sovereign to decide whether a person ought to live or die. Put another way, He alone had the authority to

decide these matters. Thus, taking a life without God's consent is an infringement on a right that only He has.

In a Thanksgiving Day speech from the 1800s, Dr. Henry A. Boardman bemoaned the time's scant regard for human life. Dr. Boardman cites a number of arguments in support of his conviction that killing and death are grave sins committed by some people against society. One of his arguments is that it is an invasion of the "divine prerogative." Citing Deut. 32:39, Dr. Boardman says, "As He alone can give life, so no creature may take it away without His permission."⁸

The idea here is not that God kills people directly, but rather that He is the only one who has the authority to take a life. But the Bible is replete with examples of created beings acting in ways that God neither approved nor permitted (Deut. 18:10–14). Consequently, it is never appropriate to use Deut. 32:39 and 1 Sam. 2:6 to justify every murder and killing that occurs, as though doing so were in accordance with God's purpose.

However, in their idiomatic manner, the ancient Jews frequently held God accountable for what He did not act to prevent. As we have observed throughout this book, early on in the history of the nation, Satan's role in human events was not very prominent. It is our responsibility as modern people to comprehend the terminology and draw the appropriate distinctions in order to comprehend God's role. In his book, *Short Discourses on Scripture Subjects*, H. C. Dutt elaborates on the reality of the disparities between the things that come from God and the devil:

.... according to the Holy Scriptures the sources of good and evil, of happiness and suffering, are distinct, like two parallel lines, or the two poles of a magnetic bar. All happiness comes from God, and all suffering from our ourselves or the Devil. But it must not therefore be concluded that the Devil is a

self-existent personality, a rival evil power co-ordinate with the good like Ahriman or Ormuzd, or that God is not the Supreme Moral Governor of the universe. This is very far from our meaning.⁹

Dutt asserts validly that while God is all-powerful, He only bestows goodness, and that although Satan is the source of all evil, he is still a created entity and is subordinate to God. Dutt provides numerous Scripture references to support this assertion. Deut. 32:39, 1 Sam. 2:6, and Isa. 45:7 are a few of the verses mentioned. Following his citation of these verses, Dutt writes:

Without, therefore, entering into a metaphysical disquisition about the origin of evil, we shall at once proceed to explain the meaning of the passages just quoted. In no other sense can God be said to be the creator of evil, excepting as creator of free wills; in no other sense can He be regarded as the author of death, except as allowing His creatures to choose life or death just as seemeth them good. Notwithstanding the moral uses of dark things our original proposition holds true that God cannot be regarded as sending suffering to any, not even to those to whom as the moral governor of the universe He will say “Depart ye cursed”—cursed not by Him, but of their own selves or the Devil. Unless the subject is viewed in this way, the beautiful symmetry of the Scripture system, the almost mathematical order in which similars and dissimilars range themselves on opposite sides will not be obvious, and the Bible equation of good and evil becomes hopelessly difficult of solution.¹⁰

The fact that God kills or makes alive is only realized when He allows choice (Deut. 30:15, 19; Prov. 8:36; 11:19; 12:28; 13:14; 14:27; 18:21; Ezek. 18:21, 32; 33:11). God does not personally administer death, but He does enable sin to produce its consequences when we

reject His salvation (Rom. 5:12; 6:23; James 1:13-15). This is the character of His government.

Predestination Theology

On the other end of the spectrum, predestinarian theologians frequently string together Deut. 32:39 and 1 Sam. 2:6 with several other biblical texts as proof that God is the controller of all events, including the death of every man, woman, and child, regardless of how said death occurs (murder, accident, sickness, etc.).

When making these citations, many of these predestinarians will neglect the Hebrew permissive idiom, but they are not ignorant of it. Augustus Hopkins Strong, a famous Calvinist theologian, remarked over a century ago, "... the Hebrew writers sometimes represented God as doing what he merely permitted finite spirits to do."¹¹ T. O. Summers adds:

.... the Hebrew writers frequently speak of a person's doing a thing, or appointing a thing, which he only permits or does not prevent. Calvinists themselves, however inconsistently, are obliged to make this admission.¹²

Indeed, in order to teach their beliefs of predestination while absolving God of being a party to sin, many Calvinists in the past have pointed to God's employment of "secondary causes." As a result, they were forced to use the concept of permission to settle any seeming dispute in their teaching. Hence, even Calvinists saw Deut. 32:39 and 1 Sam. 2:6 as having a "permissive sense" in them:

.... he that made us and gave us life and health, he only hath power to continue or take away these his own gifts from us; and **though he employ creatures and second causes as the instruments to accomplish his will, we must know they act**

but by his permission. The scripture fully asserts this royal prerogative to be solely vested in God: I kill, saith he, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal, Deut. xxxii. 39. And again, The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up, 1 Sam. ii. 6.¹³ (Emphasis are mine)

Calvinists and others who claim these verses as authority to attribute every event to God's will acknowledge that there is a "permission" and that God "uses secondary causes" to bring about the killing. Another writer from the same period, in order to maintain his Calvinist perspective of God's sovereignty while attempting to avoid making Him the cause of evil, credits Satan with evil, but only with God's permission:

First, because every cross and calamity of life, as sword, famine, pestilence, and other punishments, proceed from God. Nothing happens in this world at random, or by chance, though **by the permission of Providence, many evils are inflicted by the devil and his instruments.** Hence it is said by the Prophet, "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things." And "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." What canst thou reply to all this, wilt thou be impatient, and like the giants of old, fight against God?¹⁴ (Emphasis are mine)

While Calvinists must use permissive wording to alleviate the harshness of their erroneous predestination doctrine, they are nevertheless closer to the truth in reading these passages than those who deny that they have a permissive sense at all.

The "Permission" Given to God's Creatures

While we reference Calvinist-predestinarian theologians simply to show that this group recognizes a

"permissive sense" in Deut. 32:39 and 1 Sam. 2:6, we must nevertheless challenge their warped understanding of this permission. For Calvinists, permission is essentially synonymous with consent. For them, an occurrence (such as murder) is only *permitted* because God *decreed* and *predestined* it.¹⁵

The Biblical teaching on God's permission, on the other hand, has nothing to do with consent and everything to do with His policy of respecting our freedom of choice and His non-prevention or non-interference in relation to the repercussions of our choosing decisions in disobedience against Him. In Deuteronomy, for example, God *set* before His people the following options:

See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.
(Deut. 30:15, 19)

The word "set" is the Hebrew word "nathan," which, according to Stephen D. Renn's *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, "... expresses the meaning 'to let, allow,' in negative contexts of refusing to give permission."¹⁶ The Unlocked Dynamic Bible renders the passages as follows:

*So listen! Today **I am allowing you to choose** between doing what is evil and doing what is good, between what will enable you to live for a long time and what will cause you to die while you are still young I am requesting everyone in heaven and on the earth to testify to you,*

that today I am allowing you to choose whether you want to live for a long time or to soon die, whether you want Yahweh to bless you or to curse you. So choose to live. (Deut. 30:15, 19; Unlocked Dynamic Bible)

When He demands that people “choose life,” the Lord also guides them on their decision. God expands on this permission or choice once more in Ezekiel, telling rebellious Israel, “*For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye*” (Eze. 18:32). God reinforces this choice once more:

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)

God respected the decisions made by His people and allowed them to either die or live. Reading verses like Deut. 32:39 and 1 Sam. 2:6 in this context is necessary because God does not enjoy His people making the incorrect decision. He pleaded with them to make the right decision, which is life, but ultimately did not constrain or force them to fulfill His will.

The concept that all killing is permitted by the Lord in the sense that He decreed it is refuted by Scripture in multiple places. In 2 Samuel 12:9a, for example, the Lord says to King David through the prophet Nathan, “*Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword.*”

The word “commandment” is the same word used for decree in 2 Chron. 30:5: “*So they established a decree*” David genuinely loathed and violated the Lord’s decree by killing Uriah. While God did not intervene in David’s decision to commit this horrible deed, He did not consent to it, nor was it part of His predetermined plan. If this isn’t obvious enough, consider what God informed Jeremiah about Judah’s horrific death of children in ritualistic sacrifice:

And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. (Jer. 32:35; see also 7:31; 19:5)

According to *Brown-Driver-Briggs’ Hebrew Definitions*, the Hebrew word for “commanded” here means to “ordain (of divine act).” God contends that not only did He not intend for Israel to accomplish such a thing, but it never even occurred to Him that they would. As a result, reading Deuteronomy 32:39 and 1 Samuel 2:6 as if God is responsible for every act of violence is absurd.

Therefore, in Deut. 32:39, God was telling Moses, and Hannah subsequently confirmed, that the Lord has power and authority over life and death. Consequently, the Jews understood that God may both prevent and provide life. Because God has the ability to avert killing, Jews interpret His non-interference in death as His killing. That is the correct interpretation of God’s *permission*.

Chapter Four

How is God Said to Smite and Kill?

For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. (Isa. 57:17)

In the preceding chapter, we examined claims by Bible expositors from various theological backgrounds who argue that Deuteronomy 32:39 should be interpreted *permissively* rather than causally. In this chapter, we look at various places in Scripture that allude to the idea that God smites and kills, and we show that the context teaches that God is only stated to kill from the standpoint of permission rather than causation.

Hiding: God Withdrawing Protection

We informed you in chapter two about Deuteronomy 32:39 that God “smites” by “hiding.” This is a vital insight for realizing that God is not a literal killer. We also saw in this chapter that the shining of God’s face represents His favor, blessing, presence, protection, and promised responses to prayer (Numbers 6:23-27). The concealment of His face is a retreat of His presence, which amounts to the loss of any other favor He would bestow. As a result, the Common English Bible’s translation of Isaiah 57:17 is correct: *“I was enraged about their illegal profits; I struck them; in rage I withdrew from them.”*

God exercises His wrath and *smites* by hiding His face. When God does this, people suffer (Deut. 31:17-18; Psalm 30:7; 104:29; Isa. 59:1-2). When God hides or withdraws, He gives their foes the opportunity to destroy them:

*And the Gentiles shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity because they rebelled against me, and **I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their enemies; so they all fell by the sword.** (Ezekiel 39:23; Emphasis added)*

The Contemporary English Version says, “*I turned my back on my people and **let** enemies attack and kill them.*” The VOICE translation says, “*This is why I turned My back on them and **allowed** their enemies to do with them as they pleased.*” Applying this Scripture to the Holocaust, some Jewish analysts write:

You see, it was the adversaries that did the damage, and so it’s the Germans or ourselves that did the damage, but God withdrew his protecting power.¹

In Leviticus 26:17 God says, “*And **I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies.***” Again the Contemporary English Version renders this, “*I will turn from you and let you be destroyed by your attackers.*” This “hiding (setting)” or “withdrawing” is God’s *method* of “killing”:

*He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel: **he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy,** and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about. He hath bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary, **and slew all that were pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he***

poured out his fury like fire. (Lamentations 2:3-4)

How does God “slay” all that were “pleasant to the eye”? He does this by *drawing back his right hand*. Another translation renders verse 3:

The Lord was so furiously angry that he wiped out the whole army of Israel by not supporting them when the enemy attacked. He was like a raging fire that swallowed up the descendants of Jacob. (Contemporary English Version)

According to this translation of the Bible, God destroyed Israel’s army entirely by refusing to back Israel when the enemy attacked, rather than by using any force at all. This is the result of His withdrawal of protection. The following are a few more intriguing alternate interpretations of verse 3:

*In his fierce anger he cut off all the power of Isra’el, **withdrew his protecting right hand at the approach of the enemy**, and blazed up in Ya’akov like a flaming fire devouring everything around it.* (Complete Jewish Bible)

*In his fierce wrath he cut off all the strength of Israel. **He withdrew his protection as the enemy approached**. He burned Jacob like a blazing fire consumes everything around it.* (International Standard Version)

*Cut down by God's anger, the pride and strength of Israel falls; **He withdrew His right hand and stood back and allowed Israel's enemies to wreak havoc in the land. God has burned and consumed Jacob in an insatiable fire.** (The VOICE)*

At least six times in Deuteronomy 28's litany of curses, we are warned that God would afflict the rebels with various things (28:7, 22, 25, 27, 28, 35). When the Lord declares, "*I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them*" (Deut. 31:17), He discloses His exact manner of smiting. The following is a noteworthy quote from Thomas Scott regarding this passage:

.... when he withdraws his protection and blessing, (which is implied by the figurative expression of "hiding his face,") man necessarily sinks into misery.²

On the basis of this data, we might conclude that God "smites" and "kills" by withdrawing His protection and allowing the enemy to have his way.

How God is Said to Kill?

Other passages in the Bible also indicate that God killed. We have missed the interpretation of these texts that would vindicate Him due to carelessness and religious bias. As an example, consider King Saul:

*So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; And enquired not of the Lord: **therefore he***

slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse (1 Chron. 10:13-14)

According to the Bible, God killed Saul. But we also need to understand the background of the Bible and how God killed Saul. In His covenant with David God promised, “*But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee*” (2 Samuel 7:15). The Tree of Life Version says, “*Yet My lovingkindness will not be withdrawn from him as I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed from before you.*”

For his constant disobedience, God had withheld His love, favor, and protection from Saul. As a result, Saul was severely injured by the Philistines, which ultimately caused him to commit suicide:

Then said Saul to his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. So Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise on the sword, and died (1 Chron. 10:4-5)

It is not God’s purpose to force individuals to end their lives. But as these lessons have repeatedly taught, God is accountable for the things that He does not prevent. He assumes this duty in a way that makes it seem to the Western mentality that He carried it out directly. This is due to the fact that most Westerners are not acquainted with the idioms of the Ancient Hebrew culture.

Nevertheless, when we allow Scripture to interpret itself, we find these idiomatic expressions explained

elsewhere. For example, the spirit that Saul questioned about the day before he was killed said the following:

Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines. (1 Sam. 28:19)

The word “delivered” is “nathan,” which means to allow or permit. The Contemporary English Version reads, “Tomorrow the Lord will **let** the Philistines defeat Israel's army, then you and your sons will join me down here in the world of the dead.” Similarly, The Easy-to-Read Version renders it, “The Lord will **let** the Philistines defeat you and the army of Israel today. Tomorrow, you and your sons will be here with me.”

God did not compellingly move King Saul to take his own life. To the contrary, Saul no longer had the Holy Spirit's influence who could have given him peace of mind and victory in war. God is said to have slain him because he was without God's presence and protection.

How God Killed Israel's Enemies

Scripture claims that God personally slaughtered Israel's adversaries in several different places. An illustration of how He is supposed to have accomplished this can be seen in Joshua 10:

*And the Lord said unto Joshua, Fear them not: for **I have delivered them into thine hand**; there shall not a man of them stand before thee. Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, and went up from Gilgal all night. And **the Lord discomfited them***

before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Bethhoron, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah. (Joshua 10:8-10)

Here we are told that the Lord “*slew them with a great slaughter*” but then we are told that Israel chased and smote them. God is only said to have done the slaying because He “*delivered them into thine hand.*” Again, the Hebrew word “delivered” means to allow or permit. Therefore, the Easy-to-Read Version properly renders the passage, “*I will **allow** you to defeat them.*”

Many do not realize that even Israel’s enemies enjoyed God’s protection up to a certain point (Gen. 15:13-16). When that point has been reached, as Joshua and Caleb told Israel concerning their enemies, “*.... their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not*” (Num. 14:9b), or, as another author explained, “the divine protection is withdrawn from them, and the tenor of God’s covenant is insured to us.”³ With God’s protection removed from the enemy, Israel was able to slaughter them.⁴

Nonetheless, the very following verse depicts God Himself sending down hailstones on Israel’s enemies:

And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Bethhoron, that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword. (Joshua 10:11)

Of course, some may reasonably argue that this demonstrates that God executes death directly. Once more, we respond by letting Scripture interpret itself. In Psalm 78:47-48 we are similarly told, "*He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts.*"

The God's Word translation renders verse 48, "*He let the hail strike their cattle and bolts of lightning strike their livestock.*" Even when it comes to weather and natural disasters, God provides protection in a chaotic world ravaged by sin. When men choose to rebel against God, even the weather is released from God's restraint and can harm men and their animals (Rev. 7:1). When interpreted in light of Psalm 78:48, Joshua 10:11 demonstrates that God's method of killing is *permissive* rather than *causal*.

How is God Said to Smite?

The terms "smiting" and "killing" are frequently (though not always) used interchangeably in the Bible. This is true of the Benjamites, whom God is supposed to have smote or killed:

And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword (Judges 20:35)

The text certainly says that "*the Lord smote Benjamin*" but this is immediately followed by the statement, "*...and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites.*" God smote Benjamin by allowing the rest of Israel to defeat and kill them in battle. As verse 48 says it,

*“And **the men of Israel** turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and **smote them** with the edge of the sword.”*

God accepted responsibility for the smiting of Benjamin because He removed His protection and allowed the other Israelite tribes to vanquish them. As a result, Judges 20:35 should be translated as, *“The Lord gave Israel victory over the army of Benjamin”* (Good News Translation). Even without this rendering, verse 28 states unequivocally that this is the case:

*And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow **I will deliver them into thine hand** (Judges 20:28)*

God smote the Benjamites by “delivering them” into the hands of the Israelites, or, as the Contemporary English Version says it, *“Tomorrow I will let you defeat them.”* This is a valid Biblical understanding of God’s method of smiting. In 1 Kings 14:15-16 we read, *“For **the Lord shall smite Israel.... And he shall give Israel up** because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin.* Also, 2 Chronicles 13:15-16 says, *“....it came to pass, that **God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. And the children of Israel fled before Judah: and God delivered them into their hand.**”* In essence, one will be smitten when they try to battle an opponent without God’s shielding presence.

*Go not up, **for the Lord is not among you; that ye be not smitten** before your enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the*

*sword: because ye are turned away from the Lord, therefore **the Lord will not be with you.*** (Num. 14:42-43; see also Deut. 1:42)

God's technique of smiting does not involve His omnipotent power immediately killing individuals. This is not how God usually works. He smites by no longer shielding the one who is being smitten. As John Hobart Caunter puts it, "I will not again interfere to protect them as I have hitherto done."⁵ God permits their adversaries to smite them, yet He accepts responsibility for what He allows as if it were His own doing.

Permissive Rather Than Causative

An excellent example of God's alleged smiting by *allowing* (not interfering with) an enemy when rebels forfeit God's protection is found in the book of Exodus concerning the Egyptian firstborn. In Numbers 33:4a we are told, "*For the Egyptians buried all their firstborn, which the Lord had smitten among them.*" Exodus explains God's technique of smiting in further detail:

*For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and **will smite all the firstborn** in the land of Egypt For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and **will not suffer the destroyer** to come in unto your houses to smite you. (Exodus 12:12, 23)*

The Hebrew word for "suffer" is "nathan" which we stated earlier simply means to "allow" or "permit." The Amplified Bible renders it, "*.... the Lord will pass*

over the door and **will not allow** the destroyer to come into your houses to slay you.” This is affirmed by Psalm 78 which says, “.... but gave their life over to the pestilence; And smote all the firstborn in Egypt” (vv. 50b-51a), or as, the Easy-to-Read Version renders it, “He let them die with a deadly disease. God killed all the firstborn sons in Egypt.” God smote Egypt’s firstborn by permitting another destructive agency to kill.

In chapter six, we will delve deeper into Exodus 12:23, where we will discover precisely what it means for God to “pass over” a house. We will also investigate the identity of the destroyer. But this verse is among the best in the Bible for showing us how, when Scripture interprets itself, we are further convinced that God is only stated to smite in a permissive sense, not a causal one.

This text also draws attention to another issue with regularly translating the Bible. When God enumerated the curses that would befall Israel as a result of disobedience in Deuteronomy 28, we read:

The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. (Deut. 28:25)

We are told that God will *cause* this smiting to occur. When the average English reader encounters the phrase “cause” in relation to God, we automatically assume that God is the One who will personally produce the effect and bring about the forewarned occurrence.

Nevertheless, the Hebrew word for “cause” in this chapter, *nathan*, is the same one that is used in Exodus 12:23 and which we know signifies “allow” or “permit.” The verb is more accurately translated in its permissive connotation in a few additional English translations: “*The*

*Lord will **allow** you to be struck down before your enemies*” (New English Version); “*The Lord will **let** your enemies defeat you*” (God’s Word); “*The Lord will **let** you be overcome by your haters*” (Bible in Basic English); “*The Lord will **let** you be defeated by your enemies*” (Contemporary English Version).

It is likely that there would be less misunderstanding regarding God’s involvement in the curses that follow His people’s rebellion if the verb had been translated consistently in our earlier translations. God does not directly bring about the curse of illness, disease, destitution, failure, etc. He only “causes” these things when rebels sever themselves from God’s protective wings via their disobedience against Him: “*I’ll be furious with them and abandon them. I won’t look on them when they pray. **I won’t protect them, and they’ll be eaten alive***” (Deut. 31:17; The VOICE).

This Biblical hermeneutic enables us to realize that God is not the direct cause of His people’s deaths at the hands of their adversaries. Israel’s enemies had previously shown a desire to destroy them. Jeremiah 19:7, for example, says, “.... *and I will **cause** them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and **by the hands of them that seek their lives.***”

It is worth noting that Judah’s adversaries had already sought their deaths. God’s only role was to stand aside and allow this to happen (Deut. 32:20). As a result, the Unlocked Dynamic Bible renders Jer. 19:7 as “*I will **allow your enemies who want to kill you to kill many of you with their swords.***” God does not need to incite His people’s enemies. Because His people want to revolt, God’s only role is to quit intervening to prevent their enemies from accomplishing what they already want to do. In other words, God’s purported smiting and/or killing is *permitted* rather than *causative*.

Chapter Five

Did Jesus Ever Kill?

The Revelation of the Father was His work. We have been taught to think, many of us, of His Atoning Work, of His Death, as the one feature upon which it is good to dwell. Such teaching gives us a wrong perspective. Before we can wish to be reconciled, we must know the Being to Whom we are to be reconciled. To know God is our first demand, and so the Revelation of the Father is the first work of Christ.¹ (Robert Eytton)

1 John 5:20a tells us, “*We know that Jesus Christ the Son of God has come and has shown us the true God*” (Contemporary English Version), or, as the Amplified Bible reads, Jesus “.... *has given us understanding and insight [progressively] to perceive (recognize) and come to know better and more clearly Him Who is true.*”

Jesus Revealed God’s True Character

The dullness of men’s minds that was brought about by sin hindered God from fully revealing Himself to them during the Old Testament time, despite God’s best efforts to reach out to them (Eph. 4:17-18; Matt. 13:10-17; John 10:6; 16:29-30). Jesus was the only one who could provide a deeper comprehension of God. John clarified, saying, “*For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*” (John 1:17). According to the New Living Translation, verses 17 and 18 state:

For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

Another translation of verse 18 reads, “*No one has ever seen God. The only Son is the one who has shown us what God is like*” (Easy to Read Version). What is this revelation of the “true God” or understanding and insight about God that Jesus brought to men as a part of His ministry? Once more, John responds to that in his epistle:

*This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that **God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*** (1 John 1:5)

The New Testament: An Expanded Translation by Kenneth S. Wuest reads, “.... *that **God as to His nature is light, and darkness in Him does not exist, not even one particle.***” Part of the objective of Jesus in coming to earth was to help us understand how God interacts with evil. Darkness is used throughout Scripture as a metaphor for evil (Job 30:26; Isaiah 5:20; 45:7; John 3:18–20; Eph. 6:12). God has nothing to do with anything that involves darkness.

This is in contrast to Satan whose kingdom is complete darkness (Col. 1:12-14; Eph. 6:10-12). Concerning the Gentiles, Jesus commissioned Paul, “.... *to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*” (Acts 26:18b). It is well to note that Satan's kingdom is also a kingdom of death. The apostle wrote that Jesus, “.... *might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil*” (Heb. 2:14b). It is

important to note this fact because, in Scripture, *darkness* is synonymous with *death* (Psalm 23:4; Job 3:5; 10:21-22; 12:22; 28:3; 34:22; Psalm 107:10; 14; Isaiah 9:2). Our Lord, by His example, came to show us that darkness and death are the very opposite of God's nature:

*The people which **sat in darkness** saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and **shadow of death** light is sprung up. (Matt. 4:16)*

*Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to **them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death**, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:78-79)*

While *darkness* and *death* are synonymous, *light* and *life* are as well (Job 3:20; Psalm 36:9; Proverbs 6:23; 16:15; John 1:4; 8:12; Phil. 2:15-16; 2 Timothy 1:10). Jesus revealed Satan to be a fallen entity whose only goal is *death*. In contrast, our Lord portrayed Father-God as having the character of *life* (John 10:10).

Our Lord perfectly reflected the Father during His earthly ministry, exhibiting the attributes of the Father in both His words and deeds. Says Jesus, "*The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise*" (John 5:19b).

As the incarnate of God, we discover that Jesus only bestowed life (Mark 5:35-42; Luke 7:11-16; John 11:43-44). Jesus *never* took a life throughout His earthly career. Conversely, not only did He never take a life, but He also chastised His disciples for having recommended that it be done:

*When the disciples James and John saw that, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to ask for fire to come down from the sky and burn them up?' But he turned and said to them, 'Stop that! You do not think about what kind of spirit you are showing. **The Son of Man did not come to kill people, but to save them.**' And they went on to another town. (Luke 9:54-56; Worldwide English New Testament)*

Jesus demonstrated to us the true nature of God's intentions toward humans when He declared that He had come to save, not to kill. As we can see from 2 Corinthians 4:3–4 and Hebrews 1:1–3, Jesus and the Father are exactly the same in nature and character.

Knowing Jesus is Knowing God

Too many people seemed to perceive Father God with the same homicidal and vengeful qualities that Satan possessed prior to Jesus coming to earth as a representation of the Father among humanity.

When our Lord met the religious leaders' homicidal purpose against Him, He said, "*But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth*" (John 8:40a). He went on to say that following Satan was the cause of this: "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning*" (John 8:44a). Their failure to truly know Jesus and, by extension, Father-God, was the source of all their homicidal intents:

I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me. Then said they unto him, Where is thy

*Father? Jesus answered, **Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.*** (John 8:18-19)

M. M. C. Otway wrote, “To know God is to understand his character, and to know Christ is to understand his character. If then to know Christ is to know God, the character of Christ must be the character of God.”² Because there is no record of our Lord taking a life and because He rebuked His followers when they suggested it, we must conclude that Jesus revealed to us a nonviolent God.

Those who do not see Jesus as the most true representation of God will frequently portray God as spiteful and violent. As a result, they will feel justified in resorting to violence in order to attain their objectives. Jesus warned His disciples “*whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service*” (John 16:2b). He sums up their heinous crimes by proclaiming that these murderers “*have not known the Father, nor me*” (John 16:3b). To fully know God, then, is to know the One who can reveal Him to us:

If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? (John 14:7-9)

The same Jesus who, despite the pressure of cruel, hypocritical religious leaders, refused to take up a stone to stone a woman for adultery is the same Jesus who tells us that this is what God is like (John 8:1-11). Our Lord proclaimed immediately after this encounter, “*I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*” (John 8:12).

Jesus said that He was the light of the world because of His nonviolent actions. Any other path is the dark side. Jesus revealed to us the nature of God, which is devoid of all darkness; so, God is not a murderer by nature. When we get to know Jesus, we get to know this non-violent God. As we follow and worship someone, we adopt their characteristics (Matt. 5:44-48; Luke 6:35-36).

Jesus Threatened to Kill

The aforementioned details must be kept in mind when we read the book of Revelation, which *seems* to paint a different picture of our Lord in terms of violence. Our Lord spoke the following while addressing some wayward members of the Thyatira church:

*Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And **I will kill her children with death**; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. (Rev. 2:22-23)*

This statement is apparently inconsistent with what other parts of scripture—especially the Gospels—have revealed about Jesus. It is crucial to keep in mind that the gospels provide us with the most comprehensive

understanding of Christ's nature. They show that our Lord has never followed a path of retaliation and violence.

He is the same God who has always existed and will always exist, and his nature is always peaceful and loving; it is not violent or vengeful; it is not out to get you for what you have done wrong. Scripture says, "*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*" (Heb. 13:8). There was no change in Jesus' character before and after His arrival on Earth. Furthermore, Jesus' nonviolent nature did not change after His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven. The divinely inspired writer of Hebrews verifies this truth as well:

*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, **harmless**, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.* (Hebrews 7:25-26)

The same ascended Jesus we find in the book of Revelation is said to be *harmless*. Even to this day, He remains our "harmless" High priest. The Greek word for "harmless" is *akakos*. One scholar defined the word as "the absence of willingness to hurt."³ Another writes:

"He is *akakos*, harmless. This character has a respect to his disposition and conduct towards men. He is no way injurious to any, nor disposed to do them evil; there is no malice, guile, or deceit in him, 1 Pet. ii. 22. And this negative character implies the positive, as well as the negative precepts of the law do; and imports that he is full of benevolence, goodness, mercy, sympathy, and compassion towards men."⁴

Moreover, Greek scholars have noted that the word *akakos* is the negative, or opposite form of the Greek word *kakos* which means to hurt or injure someone.⁵ Scripture tells us, “*He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love*” (1 John 4:8). Elsewhere we are told, “*Love does not harm [kakos] one’s neighbor*” (Romans 13:10a; Unlocked Literal Bible). The love nature of God simply does not permit Him to harm others.

All of this appears to contradict the Lord’s admonition to the false prophetess and her adherents. However, we are aware that the Bible never contradicts itself. As a result, the interpretation must be found in Scripture itself. Once more, the gospels give us the solution to comprehending the words used by the Lord in Revelation 2:22–23:

And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.
(Mark 3:3-5)

Keep in mind the distinctions Jesus makes between “good and evil” and “save life and kill” when discussing whether or not He should perform healing on

the Sabbath day. If Jesus does not do one, he is essentially doing the other. Jesus is committing evil by omission if He did not do good. The Lord would have killed someone if He had not chosen to spare a life when He had the chance. Instead of inflicting illness on the sick, Jesus would kill them by withholding the healing ability that was in His possession.

The Loss of His Protection

Therefore, as we have studied in earlier chapters, there is never a statement that God kills by using his divine might or by taking a human life personally. When He refuses to grant someone the help and safety He would normally supply, it is claimed that He is killing. Put differently, Jesus is only reported as killing when He *permits* the rebels in the church of Thyatira to bear the repercussions of removing themselves from His protection.

In his Bible paraphrase, *The Clear Word*, Dr. Jack C. Blanco renders Rev. 2:23, “And those who consider themselves to be her children I will not protect them from the plague of death.” One of the promises Jesus made to those in the churches who remained faithful to Him is that “*I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world*” (Rev. 3:10; New Living Translation). Without a doubt, Jesus is alluding to the moment when Death and Hades, the demonic riders, would be allowed to wreak havoc on the planet:

*And there went out another horse that was red: and **power was given to him** that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and **that they should kill one another**: and there was given unto him a great sword And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and*

*Hell followed with him. And **power was given unto them** over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. (Rev. 6:4, 8)*

Many English versions prefer to translate the Greek word for “given” in lines 4 and 8 as “allowed” or “permitted,” and this is how it should be rendered. Verse 4, for instance, is rendered in the Revised Standard Version, “*its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another.*”

These entities should not be viewed as God’s servants carrying out his instructions. The same demonic forces that cause death and damnation will eventually be eliminated for their evil (Revelation 20:14). As such, they are nothing more than God’s and men’s enemies, whose restriction will be temporarily relaxed. G. B. Caird goes on to clarify:

They cannot therefore be regarded as obedient angels, faithfully carrying out the task of retribution allotted them by God. It follows that all four riders represent evils which are not directly caused by the will of God, but only tolerated by His permission, and this excludes the possibility that one of them should signify the preaching of the gospel.⁶

Consequently, we should not interpret Jesus’ threats of death as an indication that He would personally bring about death or that He will appoint a supernatural or non-supernatural agent to do it. He is only thought to act in this way when people forfeit His protection from those demonic forces and are free to do whatever evil they choose because the people have refused to turn from their sin. There is no other way that the Lord “kills.”

The Sword from Christ's Mouth

In the book of Revelation, we are shown another scene in which Jesus uses a sword that comes out of His mouth to slaughter people:

*And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God And **the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth:** and all the fowls were filled with their flesh. (Rev. 19:15, 21)*

I have seen several paintings and sketches that show Jesus slicing through His foes in a fit of rage with an actual sword sticking out of His mouth. But bear in mind that a lot of the language used in the book of Revelation is symbolic and metaphorical, and it requires interpretation. Though some of it is from the New Testament, the majority of that terminology comes from the Old Testament (Isa. 11:4, 2 Thess. 2:8).

The “sword” that proceeds from Jesus’ mouth is not a literal sword. Rather, it is a metaphor for God’s Word (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12). In Revelation 19:13 we are told, “*And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and **his name is called The Word of God.***” As a result, the “sword” reflects God’s spoken or pronounced judgment on those who would oppose Him. This declaration of judgment is made either through His prophets or directly by Him. He is supposed to have slain His adversaries through this method:

*Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; **I have slain them by the words of my mouth**: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. (Hosea 6:5)*

In Hebrew idiom, God or His prophet is said to do exactly what they said would happen as a result of sinful behavior.⁷ For example, Isaiah is said to have hardened people's hearts merely because God anticipated how they would harden in response to his prophecy (Isa. 6:9-10). Jeremiah and Ezekiel are both supposed to have brought catastrophe upon people and cities just because they predicted it would happen (Jer. 1:10; Eze. 43:3). Our Lord Jesus was believed to carry a sword of division because He foresaw the hostility His followers would suffer from family and friends (Matthew 10:34-35; Luke 12:51).

Furthermore, Isaiah foretold the deeds of Jesus many years before John received his prophecy, as recorded in Revelation 19. When Isaiah describes the sword that comes out of Christ's mouth and slays the remnant, he uses terminology that is similar to Hosea's:

*And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and **he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.** (Isaiah 11:3-4)*

Contrast the statement, “*with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked*” with Psalm 34:21 which says, “*Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the*

righteous shall be desolate.” It is the evil itself that automatically kills the sinner through the process of sowing and reaping (Prov. 1:31-33). To sin is to place oneself on a suicide mission (Prov. 11:3; Hos. 13:9; Rom. 6:23; James 1:13-15).

According to the Brown-Driver-Briggs’ Hebrew Definitions the word “desolate” means, “to declare guilty.” In other words, God’s Word simply *pronounces* the judgment and allows the results of sin to take its course. Again, the psalmist wrote, “*The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands*” (Psalm 9:16).

How God Engages in Battle

After God has carried out judgment, He withdraws to allow the rebel’s self-inflicted ruin (Exodus 12:12–23; Psalm 9:15–16; Ezekiel 16:38). God typically permits the advancing armies to massacre one another in these kinds of judgments. A perfect example of this is found in the story of King Jehoshaphat.

When Judah was surrounded by several enemies, King Jehoshaphat asked God to judge them (2 Chron. 20:11-12). The Lord responded to the king’s request with this word, “... *for the battle is not yours, but God’s*” (2 Chronicles 20:15b). We are then told exactly *how* God engaged in this battle:

*And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set **ambushments** against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of*

*the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to
destroy another.* (2 Chronicles 20:22-23)

The word “set” is the Hebrew word “nathan” which means “permit.” As one scholar noted: “Accordingly our translators in other places often render the verb נתן nathan, by suffer, or let, in the sense of permitting.”⁸ This is undoubtedly what Armageddon will bring about. Jesus will not have to act in violence. By His Word, He will release the restraint holding back the slaughter and use the same methods in the battle of Armageddon in allowing these enemies to destroy themselves as He did in 2 Chronicles. S. D. Gordon goes into more detail about this last point:

God’s method of warfare is noteworthy. The leaders are killed by the sword that comes forth out of the mouth of Him who appears. The same One who created things by a word now acts in judgment in the same way. The immense numbers who are gathered against Jerusalem become terror-stricken; a confused tumult breaks out among both men and horses. There is an utter loss of self-confidence or morale. Discord breaks out in the ranks. They take to fighting each other. Pestilence breaks out, and a strange loss of vitality affects them.⁹

Gordon concludes this by reminding his readers, “... that the principle of judgment is simply the partial withdrawal of the divine creator power that holds things together and keeps life and vigour in man and beast, and in all nature.”¹⁰ Because of this, when God brings about judgment, He does so in a way that releases all restraint previously exercised over the wicked and permits them to commit suicide. In conclusion, Jesus never actually kills someone. It is plausible to argue that God never actually kills people since Jesus is the ideal representation of what God is like.

Chapter Six

Satan: The Author of Death

Seek not death in the error of your life: and pull not upon yourselves destruction with the works of your hands. **For God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living.** For he created all things, that they might have their being: and the generations of the world were healthful; and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor the kingdom of death upon the earth: (Wisdom 1:12-14)

The noncanonical book, Wisdom of Solomon, sheds light on the beliefs of the ancient Jewish society and contrasts with much of the modern theology that teaches about God's and Satan's roles in death.

Death Is Not From God

Some contemporary religious intellectuals believe that God created death for specific sovereign purposes in relation to man. Earlier Jewish thought denied that God had anything to do with death. Furthermore, we consider that Scripture supports the early Jewish authors. God's displeasure with death is revealed by Ezekiel:

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)

The book of Ezekiel has multiple references to the Lord's displeasure with the death of the wicked (Eze. 18:23, 32; see also 2 Pet. 3:9). The wicked are not doomed to die by God. It is *sin*, not *God*, that produces death (Deut. 30:15-19; Prov. 8:36; Rom. 6:16, 21, 23; 7:5, 13; 8:2, 6; 1 Cor. 15:56; James 5:20; 1 John 3:8-15; 5:16).

Ascribing death to God is equivalent to blaming God for sin. Sadly, some theologians attribute both to Him. Yet, Scripture plainly avoids this fallacious notion:

*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, **neither tempteth he any man**: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and **sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death**. (James 1:13-15; Emphasis added)*

According to James, sin is the outcome of succumbing to temptation. God does *not* tempt men to sin. As a result, sin is not a product of God. On the other side, we are taught that sin leads to death. God does not create death because He does not create sin.

Sin naturally leads to death, just as turning off the lights naturally results in darkness. After the light has been turned off, no sane person would blame God for the dark room. God is not to be held responsible for the effects of sin either.

The Bible makes it clear that evil behavior in the world “...*is not of the Father, but is of the world*” (1 John 2:16). If the world's misdeeds are not of God, neither are their consequences, which is death. Sin and death were not included in the creation. Due to Adam's disobedience, sin and its result, death, entered the world:

*“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and **death by sin**; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”* (Rom. 5:12; see also Gen. 2:15-17; 1 Cor. 15:21; Emphasis added)

St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) said it well when he wrote, “God created neither death, nor illnesses, nor infirmities.”¹ Several centuries before St. Gregory, Church Father Tatian (120-180) wrote the following:

We were not created to die, but we die by our own fault. Our free-will has destroyed us; we who were free have become slaves; we have been sold through sin. **Nothing evil has been created by God**; we ourselves have manifested wickedness; but we, who have manifested it, are able again to reject it.² (Emphasis added)

Evil, or its equivalent, death, was not created by God (Deut. 30:15). Scripture portrays death as God’s adversary, saying, “*For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. **The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death***” (1 Cor. 15:25-26). Death would not be characterized as God’s enemy if it were a creation of God. As a result, death does not begin with Him.

Satan is the Author of Death

According to the Bible, death entered the earth as a result of human sin (Rom. 5:12). However, it makes no mention of death having its origins in humankind. It didn’t enter the world until after man committed sin. It had to originate from somewhere outside of the earth as a result. Who was it, since we can tell that it was not God? Once more, the Wisdom of Solomon provides us with an answer to that query:

“For God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity. **Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world:** and they that do hold of his side do find it” (Wisdom of Solomon 2:23-24; Emphasis added)

In his classic book on divine healing, T. J. McCrossan writes, “But who caused Adam and Eve to disobey God’s command and so bring sin, sickness, and death into the world? Satan. Then Satan, and not God, is the real author of sin, sickness, and death.”³ Without Satan’s temptations to Adam’s wife, it seems improbable that he would have sinned (Gen. 3:1-7; Rev. 12:9).

The earth was given to Adam to rule over (Gen. 1:26-28; Psalm 8:6). In reference to Adam’s sin, Scripture states that “*He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning*” (1 John 3:8a). Due to Adam’s transgression, Satan gained power over both humans and God’s creation:

In the past you were dead because you sinned and fought against God. You followed the ways of this world and obeyed the devil. He rules the world, and his spirit has power over everyone who doesn't obey God. (Ephesians 2:1-2; Contemporary English Version)

Satan became the “god” and ruler of this world (Job 1:7; Luke 4:5-6; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 6:10-12; 1 John 5:18-19). We are told in Romans 5:17a, “*For if by one man's offence death reigned by one.*” The Contemporary English Version renders it, “*Death ruled like a king because Adam had*

sinned.” Satan wielded this authority until Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, when He vanquished Him:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb. 2:14-15)

Death is more than just the body shutting down. ***Death is a governmental structure.*** Instead of producing love that is centered on others, Satan’s government fosters jealousy and hatred. His kingdom results in murder:

Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:12-15)

Since our definition of death is often limited to the point at which the body stops functioning, we might contend that a murder caused someone to die. According to the Bible, however, killing and murder originate from death. One is more likely to let adverse emotions spiral

out of control when they are subject to Satan's reign of death. Killing results from this.

Satan: The Death Angel

Early Judaism held that Satan functioned as the "Angel of Death," a belief that is now contested by contemporary theologians. Frederic Huidekoper, a historian and theologian, wrote:

"THE names by which the Jews designated the Prince of evil spirits may not always have been synonyms for each other, but Samael and Satan seem to have been identical. In the Jewish theology as contained in the Talmud, Samael or Satan appears in a twofold capacity, as the Angel of Death and as the ruler of the Gentile world"⁴

According to some theologians, "the Satan" or "Angel of Death" was mainly recognized in early Judaism as a person that God created specifically with the intention of testing and punishing men. But just like any other religion or sect, Judaism had different views on how God and the enemy operated.

While certain Jewish sects taught that Satan was God's agent, other traditions accurately considered that he was a fallen angel who worked as an opponent against God's will (Job 1:11-12; 2:5-6). According to one theologian, Joseph F. Frey, many early Jewish Rabbis believed that Satan, as the angel of death, was completely responsible for death entering the world:

"That our ancient Rabbins believed that Satan had the power of death, is evident from the names by which they call him. The most general is, that of Malach Hammaveth, i. e. the angel of death.... The reason assigned by our Rabbins for calling Satan the angel of death, is because that, by his means death entered and came upon all the world."⁵

It was proper for Early Judaism to refer to Satan as the angel of death because Adam's sin brought death and Satan dominated the world through its power.

God Taking Responsibility

We may better comprehend how God has frequently assumed responsibility for killings that were actually carried out by Satan when we link Satan to this angel of death. Exodus 12:12 tells us:

*For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and **will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.*** (Emphasis added)

The Good News Translation says, “*On that night I will go through the land of Egypt, killing every first-born male.*” God accepts accountability for the slaughter that occurs among the Egyptians. God assumed accountability for several actions that Satan truly committed until revelation could further advance. Nevertheless, Scripture records indications of Satan's malevolent presence, proving that he was undoubtedly present. Jumping down to Exodus 12:23, we find the following:

*For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and **will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.*** (Emphasis added)

God said that He would pass through to *smite*, that is, *kill*, the Egyptians. This is where God assumes accountability for what is going to transpire for them. However, in the same passage, He promises to “pass over” the doors of those who anoint with the blood of the lamb. In Ex. 12:23, the term “pass over” is crucial. Contrary to popular belief, the verse does not describe God going into houses where there is no blood and killing the firstborn while ignoring those with blood on them. Instead, God’s decision to “pass over” the blood-stained door signifies that He will stand in front of it, guarding it from any hostile forces that might try to enter.

Using the same term, Isaiah 31:5 declares, “*As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and **passing over** he will preserve it.*” The Charles Thomson Translation reads, “.... *he will hover over it and spring forward, and will protect and save it.*” Therefore, Exodus 12:23 is better rendered, “*Then the Lord will **protect that house. The Lord will not let the Destroyer** come into your houses and hurt you*” (Easy-to-Read Version).

Some bizarrely associate the “destroyer” with a creature that is purportedly employed by God and functions as His “hit-man”. If that were so, then, why would God feel the need to *defend* and *guard* particular homes from this individual? As one author wisely noted, “Here it is possible to see as the destroyer of the firstborn of Israel, not God, but some other power whom the Lord opposes and from whom He protects the Israelites.”⁶

Destroyer or Angel of Death

Perhaps the misconception stems from the King James Version and most other English translations referring to this entity as *the destroyer*. However, early Judaism referred to him as the “Angel of Death,” as John Owen pointed out: “.... that by Samael, the angel of death,

they understand Satan ...He is the head of those ‘evil angels,’ who slew the Egyptians.”⁷ Contemporary translations such as the Good News Translation interpret the word “destroyer” as “angel of death”:

*When **the Lord goes through Egypt to kill the Egyptians**, he will see the blood on the beams and the doorposts and will not **let the Angel of Death enter your houses and kill you.*** (Exodus 12:23; Emphasis added)

*It was faith that made him establish the Passover and order the blood to be sprinkled on the doors, so that **the Angel of Death would not kill the first-born sons of the Israelites.*** (Hebrews 11:28; Emphasis added)

The biblical fact that God is said to do that which He only permits is amply demonstrated by the Passover episode. Moreover, Psalm 78 tells us:

*He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, **by sending evil angels among them.** He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but **gave their life over to the pestilence;** And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham (Psalm 78:49-51)*

These malevolent angels are identical to those described in Revelation 12:3–4, Ephesians 6:10–12, and Matthew 25:41. All of these are Satan’s operatives. Regarding the Passover, the book of Jubilees, which is

thought to be an ancient Jewish text, states, “.... when all the powers of Mastêmâ [Satan] had been let loose to slay all the first-born in the land of Egypt” (Jubilees 49:2b). The Revised Standard Version similarly translates Psalm 78:49: “*He [God] let loose on them his fierce anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels.*” The following observation is insightful:

.... we find him in the majority of instances, giving offenders into the hand of Satan, or of wicked men who act under his influence, for punishment. It is mentioned by the Psalmist, though not by Moses, that among the inflictions dealt forth to the tyrannic Egyptians, this was the greatest; and the force of the expression is very remarkable: after detailing the plagues of blood, of flies, of frogs, of caterpillars, of locusts, of hail, frost, and thunderbolts, the inspired writer goes on:—“He cast upon them the fierceness, of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them.” Psalm lxxviii. 49. When Satan sends an evil angel, he will sorely afflict the object of his mission; but when God looses the restraints of these malignant creatures, and bids them smite, it is terrible indeed!⁸

The “evil” or “destroying” angels are Satan’s agents. He is the “Angel of Death” and it is he, not God, who is the *literal* killer. Because Pharaoh refused to comply, God relinquished control over Satan and “let him loose” (Rev. 9:14-15). If men choose to serve Satan, God will no longer protect them from him.

Satan’s *permission* (removal of restraint) to kill was limited to the firstborn rather than *all* Egyptians. This knowledge should help us better grasp our God, who, like Jesus, is not a literal killer. Literal killing is largely the domain of Satan, the author of death.

Chapter Seven

Satan: The Author of Violence

*And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because **he had done no violence**, neither was any deceit in his mouth. (Isa. 53:9; Emphasis added)*

Isaiah tells us that “*he had done no violence*” as he foretells the sacrifice of Christ. The Message Bible offers us this paraphrase: “*Even though he’d never hurt a soul.*” It is expressed as follows in the New International Reader’s Version: “*He was killed even though he hadn’t harmed anyone.*” Truly, Jesus was and is our harmless high priest (Heb. 7:26).

Satan Became Violent

In contrast, Satan, who was formed as a good angel by Jesus (John 1:1–3; Col. 1:15–17), eventually rebelled against God and turned evil. In Ezekiel 28:15 we are told concerning Satan, “*Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, **till iniquity** was found in thee.*”

“Iniquity” is derived from the Hebrew word *’âvel*. The Brown-Driver-Briggs’ Hebrew Definitions defines the word as “violent deeds of injustice.” This violent inclination was not bestowed upon him by God; rather, it was discovered in him at some point after creation. He didn’t hesitate to act in a way that was consistent with his violent temperament:

*By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee **with violence**, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast*

thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.
(Ezekiel 28:16; Emphasis added)

Slander, like murder, is a type of violence, according to Jesus (Matthew 5:21-22). Before this angel fell, there was no violence. Heaven went to war after he fell (Revelation 12:7-9).

We can observe signs of Satan's violent character on our planet. Sickness, disease, poverty, hatred, crime, broken relationships, natural catastrophes, death, abuse, and other traumatic occurrences occur in our world on a daily basis. These things, however, were never part of God's purpose when He created the world:

God, then, did not make this world a scene of sorrow. It was not His purpose that it should be such, but the contrary. It became what it is by the deed of Satan, in opposition to the will of God.¹

Jesus is the *Creator* but the things described above are essentially *anti-creation*. It is Satan's violent attempt to destroy God's creation. The Bible goes to great lengths to contrast God's nonviolent character with Satan's violent nature because of this: "*The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10). Hence, Satan is the source of all violence. Jesus, on the other hand, never used violence. The Father is represented by Jesus. Because Jesus was never violent, it follows that violence is not in God's nature. The God we worship is not a violent one.

Jesus Takes Responsibility

The Biblical evidence demonstrates that Jesus is One who would never kill. This truth applies to each and

every member of the Triune Godhead. Still, some are eager to draw attention to some of the graphic language that our Lord uses in the book of Revelation. In chapter five, we studied our Lord's admonition to the church in Thyatira, which was permitting a false prophetess to lure men into adultery:

And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. (Rev. 2:23)

Even though we discussed our Lord's seeming threat in chapter five, it could still be beneficial for the reader to quickly understand it in light of the fact that Satan is the real perpetrator of violence. This will make it easier for us to comprehend how frequently the Lord has assumed responsibility for actions that Satan truly took throughout Scripture (2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:1).

This direct threat to kill from Jesus' own lips may be concerning to individuals who haven't read much of the book of Revelation. It is inconsistent with the image of Himself that the Gospels paint for us. This, however, ought to be interpreted in the same way as the Old Testament prophecy made by the Lord to allow Satan to slaughter the Egyptian firstborn:

*He made a straight path for His anger. He did not save their soul from death. But **He gave their lives over to all these troubles. He killed all the first-born in Egypt, the first children of their strength in the tents of Ham.** (Psalm 78:50-51; New Life Version; Emphasis added)*

For the Lord will pass through to kill the Egyptians. But when He sees the blood around your door, the Lord will pass over the door. He will not let the one who destroys come into your houses to kill you. (Exodus 12:23; New Life Version; Emphasis added)

Regarding the man in the Corinthian church who was having an affair with his stepmother, 1 Corinthians 5:5 says, “*To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh.*” Revolting members of the church were disciplined by handing them over to Satan. According to a subsequent passage in Revelation, Jesus killed with “death” by giving Jezebel and her lustful followers over to the spirit of death.

I looked and saw a light colored horse. The one who sat on it had the name of Death. Hell followed close behind him. They were given the right and the power to kill one-fourth part of everything on the earth. They were to kill with the sword and by people having no food and by sickness and by the wild animals of the earth. (Rev. 6:8; New Life Version)

Jesus personally refrains from using physical violence to reprimand disobedient church members. But if rebels refuse to accept His mercy, Jesus will withdraw His protection from them, giving the spirit of death the authority and right to kill—something that Satan enjoys doing (1 Sam. 16:14, 15, 23; 18:10; 19:9; 2 Sam. 7:15; Ps. 89:20-32).

Please remember that although the Lord demands discipline inside His church, it is not His will for anybody

to perish (Eze. 18:23, 32; 33:11). Jesus therefore provided ample opportunity for Jezebel and her adherents to turn from their ways (Rev. 2:21–22).

Children of Satan Versus Children of God

In contrast, Satan feeds on violence, murder, and destruction. The Pharisees of Jesus' day, as well as numerous supporters of religious doctrine throughout history, have frequently executed those who oppose their sects rather than seeking to win them over through love. While they assumed that God approved of their activities, Jesus offers us an alternative viewpoint:

*These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that **whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.** And these things will they do unto you, **because they have not known the Father, nor me** (John 16:1-3; Emphasis added)*

God desires that we understand and know Him (Jer. 9:24). It is evident that individuals who commit murder do not know Him and do not possess eternal life (John 17:3; 1 John 3:13–15).

An essential reason for studying the truth about God is that we become exactly like the deity we worship (Psalm 115:4-8; 135:15-18; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6). One of the primary ways that we reflect God's character is by how we interact with and treat others. For example, our love for our enemies and our reaction to their mistreatment of us determines whether or not we are legitimately children of God (Matthew 5:44-48; Luke 6:35-36; Eph. 5:1-2).

Jesus told the murderous religious leaders who sought to kill him that they had a different father than God and His servant Abraham:

*They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, **If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father.** Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. (John 8:39-41)*

Being a child of Abraham is synonymous with being a child of God (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:16, 29). Jesus never denied that these Jewish leaders were the natural seed of Abraham (John 8:37). But the Lord would later reveal to Paul that it was only those who followed Abraham's faith that would be seen as his true descendants. Killing Jesus is not following in the faith or works of Abraham.

Therefore, regardless of natural heritage, Jesus told them that they had a different "father" and did his works (John 8:37-38). Jesus finally made it clear who their father was:

*Ye are **of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.** (John 8:44)*

Since Satan was violent and these religious leaders were violent then they were naturally the children of the author of violence. We become like the very object of our worship.

Satan: A Killer of Men from the Beginning

The J. W. Etheridge English translation of the Peshito New Testament says, “*He from the beginning was the killer of men.*” Every single murder from the beginning of creation is to be attributed to the author of violence. While the Old Testament does not mention Satan by name very often, we find plenty of statements concerning his work throughout. For example, look at the story of Cain killing Abel:

*And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, **sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.** And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. (Gen. 4:6-8)*

While Satan’s name is not mentioned here, he is certainly present in the personification of sin. The Contemporary English Version says, “.... *sin is waiting to attack you like a lion. Sin wants to destroy you, but don’t let it!*” (v. 7b). Peter’s similar warning of Satan’s methods is a clear reflection of his violent tendencies: “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Pet. 5:8).

The New Testament reveals that the “sin” that was waiting to attack Cain was in fact, Satan’s murderous spirit:

*He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.... For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. **Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous** (1 John 3:8, 11-12)*

He that commits sin is of the devil. Sin was crouching at Cain’s door waiting to attack. Rather than resist it, Cain opened the door wide and Satan walked in. The result was violence against his own brother. Satan, the wicked one, has been violent since his fall and a killer of men from the beginning. Those who kill manifest satanic rather than godly traits. That being the case, God is not a killer and neither are His children.

The Evil Spirit from the Lord

Satan’s violent tendencies are revealed with more clarity in other portions of the Old Testament. After King Saul rebelled against God and refused to repent, the Lord eventually departed from him and a satanic spirit began to possess him. One of the manifestations of this spirit was violent murderous tendencies towards David:

And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul,

and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice. And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul. (1 Samuel 18:10-12)

The statement, “... *the evil spirit from God*,” understandably troubles some. Keep in mind that whenever God departs from someone, it means the withdrawing of His mercy, love and His protection (Hosea 9:12). In His promise concerning David’s heir, the Lord clarified in regards to His protective mercy of Saul, “*I withdrew it from Saul and shielded you from his vindictive plots*” (2 Sam. 7:15b; New Catholic Bible).

Therefore, we should understand the statement, “... *the evil spirit from God*,” in terms of permission than direct causation. As one author advises,

Don’t stumble on this passage. The evil spirit was an evil spirit from God. He was a messenger of Satan, but permitted by God for Saul’s discipline.²

The Contemporary English Version renders verse 10a, “*The next day the Lord **let** an evil spirit take control of Saul.*” Keep in mind our earlier lessons about the progression of revelation. Hence, passages such as these are always to be understood in the *permissive sense*.³

Note that when Saul is taken possession of by this evil spirit that it seeks to kill David. The Bible records another attempt by Saul to kill David when under control of this evil spirit:

And the evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand: and David played with his hand. And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin: but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night. (1 Samuel 19:9-10)

This fury of Satan did not only affect David. Saul was driven by a violent spirit to massacre 85 priests as well as the women and children residing in their city (1 Samuel 22:16-21). God does not send an evil spirit onto someone indiscriminately with the goal of executing his own ministers and their families. Saul broke a covenant Joshua made with the Gibeonites and killed many of their people because of the same murderous mindset (Joshua 9:2-19; 2 Sam. 21:1-2). Satan is a violent person by nature. Like S. D. Gordon aptly stated:

Then he is fond of using force. Violence is peculiarly his weapon, from the stage of simply threatening to use it, on through its active use both in personal and in large mass movements But violence, force, mere brute force is one of Satan's favourite modes of action, and reveals his character.⁴

In another book, Gordon summarizes the work of Satan as follows: "Satan has done, and is doing, his best and his worst to kill the race off, by disease, violence, ignorance, lust, and so on."⁵ Satan has undoubtedly always been a brutal killer. Any allusion in the Bible that portrays God as participating in this kind of violence has to be interpreted permissively.

Chapter Eight

Sin: The Real Killer

*Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For **the turning away of the simple shall slay them**, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. (Proverbs 1:31-33)*

The Contemporary English Version reads, “*Sin and self-satisfaction bring destruction and death to stupid fools.*”

Sin is the Seed-Death is the Harvest

Similarly, Psalm 34:21 tells us, “***Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.***” Other translations read, ““*Sin will kill the sinful*” (New Life Version); “*Sinners will be killed by their own evil*” (New Int’l Reader’s Version). Joseph Benson wrote in regards to this passage, “The evil of sin: his own wickedness, though designed against others, shall destroy himself.”¹

It is made evident in Proverbs 1:31–33 and Psalm 34:21 that God does not need to directly intervene in order to punish wrongdoing. Another Proverb tells us:

His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray. (Prov. 5:22-23)

Similar to how a hunter traps and kills his prey, sin traps and kills the sinner. Thus, sin is the killer in and of itself. Likewise, when God warned Adam in the Garden of Eden about the repercussions of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He did not mean to hurt him directly: “... *for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*” (Gen. 2:17b).

God did not say to Adam, “... for in the day that thou eatest thereof I shalt surely kill you.” Adam was beloved by the Lord, who desired for him to be happy. He forewarned Adam of the deadly nature of sin because of this, as Adam soon found out when he defied God:

*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and **death by sin**; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.* (Rom. 5:12)

Apart from any action on God’s behalf, sin has inherent consequences. Such a remark appears to be pantheistic, according to some. However, according to the opening text, humans are killed by their sin because “*they eat of the **fruit** of their own way.*” The word “fruit” appears frequently throughout Scripture in regard to the results of planting seed, bearing offspring, and the natural repercussions of one’s deeds.

In Proverbs 18:21 we are told, “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.*” Stating it in terms of sowing and reaping, the Passion Translations says, “*Your words are so powerful that they will kill or give life, and the talkative person will reap the consequences.*” In this instance, it is stated that our words will bear fruit without the intervention of God.

In Proverbs 10:16 we are told, “*The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin,*”

or, as the New International Reader's Version renders it, "People who do what is right earn life. But sinners earn sin and death." Here, the fruit of wicked actions is the sin and the subsequent death that sin brings. In one more Proverb we read:

*The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh. The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but **to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward. As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death.***
(Prov. 11:17-19)

Making the right decisions brings life, and making wrong ones brings death. All of this happens without God intervening in any way to punish the wrongdoer. Early on in the creation of the universe, God established the law of seed producing after its own type (Gen. 1:11–12; 8:22). Following the establishment of this commandment, harvests of many kinds have been produced by mankind, animals, and devils without any intervention from God (Matt. 13:24–26; 38, 39; John 8:44; 1 John 3:10).

The Bible is consistent in stating that bad decisions are *seeds* that lead to adverse outcomes (Prov. 11:17–19; 22:8; Job 4:8; Isa. 3:10–11; Hos. 8:7; 10:12–13; Psalm 7:14–16). Therefore, this fact is no more pantheistic than the assertion that a farmer can succeed without God's direct participation. In addition, both men and women can conceive children without necessarily needing God's direct participation.

Consequences Within the Sin Itself

The apostle Paul made this argument more clearly than any other author of Scripture. Paul explained that

there are divinely ordained laws that inherently have rewards and consequences. In 1 Cor. 15:56, Paul wrote, “*The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.*” In Romans 8:6 Paul also wrote, “*For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*” Several paragraphs earlier, Paul referred to this reality as a law and offered his thanks to Christ’s Spirit of life, who “*hath made me free from the law of sin and death*” (Rom. 8:2b). This established law was responsible for the consequences of sin:

*For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth **fruit unto death.*** (Romans 7:5)

Paul compared sin and righteousness as masters, refuting myths propagated by those in his day (and even in our own), according to which one might live in willful sin and still be rescued by God’s favor (Rom. 6:15-16). Paul clarified that the reward you receive depends on the master you submit to: “*whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?*” (Rom. 6:15b). A few verses later, Paul, akin to the book of Proverbs, taught that our devotion to either of them influences the *fruit*, or *outcomes* and *consequences*, that we experience:

*For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What **fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.** But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your **fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life***

through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:20-23)

Death is the fruit of planting the sin seed, just as apples are the product of planting an apple seed. The same way that planting cherry seeds does not produce grapes, sowing sin seeds does not produce the fruit of holiness and eternal life. Our harvest depends on the exact seed we sow, as Paul stated in the most well-known teaching on this topic:

*Don't be fooled. You can't outsmart God. A man gathers a crop from what he plants. Some people plant to please their desires controlled by sin. **From these desires they will harvest death.** Others plant to please the Holy Spirit. From the Spirit they will harvest eternal life. (Gal. 6:7-8; New International Reader's Version)*

The Bible in Basic English says, "*Because he who puts in the seed of the flesh will of the flesh get the reward of death.*" Sin is a seed that bears corruption and death's fruit. When a farmer plants the wrong seed and receives cherries instead of grapes, he will never raise his fist at God. However, we frequently hold God responsible for the death and destruction we inflict upon ourselves as a result of our constant wicked decisions.

Neither our sin nor the consequences that follow from it can be placed on God. James compared sin to a sperm (seed) that fertilizes an egg, resulting in a pregnancy that ultimately gives birth (death), in an attempt to distance God from the evil that humans encounter:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (James 1:13-15)

The Bible in Basic English renders verse 15, “*Then when its time comes, desire gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is of full growth, gives birth to death.*” Consider this: many people engage in extramarital sex, which is forbidden by God. However, pregnancy is not prevented by this. God endowed both men and women with the capacity for procreation. They have the potential to wield this power in ways that exalt God or go against His ideal design for humanity. Nevertheless, God is not to blame for the death that results from sin, any more than He is for children born out of adultery, fornication, etc.

Sin Pushes God Away

How can death result from sin? How is the killing process carried out? Sin keeps us far from God, the one and only authentic source of life. According to Isaiah 59:2, “*But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*” The fundamental wellspring of life is cut off when one is cut off from God:

*That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that **thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days:** that thou mayest dwell in the land which the*

Lord swear unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them. (Deut. 30:20)

This basic fact is reiterated in the gospel of John, where we read about Jesus, “*In him was life; and the life was the light of men*” (John 1:4) and “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*” (John 14:6). We are connected to God, our life, when we come to know Christ. According to John 5:24 and 1 John 3:14–15, a person who interacts with Christ “*is passed from death unto life.*”

On the other hand, according to 1 John 5:12, “*He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*” In other words, to be without Christ is to be separated from God. You are walking in death when you are cut off from God. Sinners without Christ, according to Paul, are “*alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them*” (Eph. 4:18). Additionally, he informed them that we “*were dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph. 2:1, 5). Sin and alienation from God are both destructive and suicidal:

*For whoso findeth me **findeth life**, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. But **he that sinneth** against me wrongeth his own soul: **all they that hate me love death.** (Prov. 8:35-36)*

Additionally, Proverbs 14:27 informs us that, “*The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.*” Keep in mind that our connection to the God, the fountain of life, is facilitated by our “fear” or “reverential worship” of the Lord. Moses warned the Israelites because of this in Ex. 20:20b, saying, “.... *that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not*” (Ex.

20:20b). This detachment from Him that traps us in death is brought about by our sin and lack of worshipful reverence, which is what drives us away from this source.

The separation is always initiated by men, not by God. In Jeremiah, the Lord bemoans the fact that, “*they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters*” (Jer. 2:13; 17:13). God does not need to utilize His power to destroy us, bring about our demise, or bring evil upon us. When we make the decision to turn away from Him, we are doing a disservice to our own souls.

We are inherently linked to evil and death when we are cut off from Him (Prov. 19:23; Deut. 31:16–17). In this way, we conform to the government of Satan (Eph. 2:1-2; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8-15).

Death is Not God’s Will

The love of God is great and profound (1 John 4:8, 16). He is a God of great compassion and consideration (Psalm 8:4; 1 Pet. 5:7). He is grieved when people turn away from Him and inflict disaster and death upon themselves (Hos. 11:4–9). Because of this, heaven celebrates when a sinner turns to God (Luke 15:7).

In Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, the father provides a striking example of God’s love for the sinner. The prodigal son had distanced himself from his father but later returned home. Jesus explained, “*But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and **had compassion**, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him*” (Luke 15:20b). The son, in his rehearsed speech, confessed, “*I have sinned against heaven*” (v. 21).

The father ordered his staff to bring him jewels, clothes, and shoes since he was so glad to see his son again. Moreover, he gave him a lavish celebration. For this reason, he declared, “*For this **my son was dead, and is alive again**; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry*” (Luke 15:24). The son died when he was

isolated from his father. At first, the separation from the father looked pleasurable (Luke 15:13). However, sin's joys are fleeting (Heb. 11:25). Separation from his father produced much anguish (Luke 15:14-17). But none of this anguish was the result of the father's resentment or desire for vengeance. Quite the opposite—he yearned for his son to come home. He was thrilled that he and his son could now interact and that the son's life had returned. The Heavenly Father is precisely like this. He is kind and yearns for the transgressor.

In contrast to certain ludicrous doctrines, God did not send Jesus to rescue us from Himself. The angel told Joseph, “... *thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins*” (Matt. 1:21b). We do not need to be saved from God. Sin is the very thing that has the power to kill us both physically and permanently, and Father-God longs to save us from it. Jesus died not to save us from the vengeance of an arbitrary, bloodthirsty God. He died to bring us back to a loving, caring Father (Rom. 5:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:17-21). Jesus stated:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not die but have eternal life. (John 3:16; Unlocked Literal Bible)

We can only be delivered from death and given access to the life that is in God via making reconciliation with Him. Therefore, by His atoning death on our behalf, Jesus opens this path for us. God has no interest in the demise and annihilation of sinners:

*Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so **iniquity shall not be your ruin**. Cast away from you all your*

*transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For **I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth**, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye. (Ezekiel 18:30b-32)*

*Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, **I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked**; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)*

Peter adds, “*He does not want anyone to die, but he wants all people to stop their wrong ways*” (2 Pet. 3:9b; Worldwide English New Testament). For this reason, after presenting Israel with their options, God almost begged them to opt for life:

*See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: **therefore choose life**, that both thou and thy seed may live. (Deut. 30:15, 19)*

The killer is not God. Our decisions determine whether or not we live. God is fond of us. Mainly because He cares about people and wants the best for them, He urges them to make good decisions and abstain from sin (Deut. 5:29; 10:12-13; 32:29; Psalm 81:13-16; Isa. 48:18; Matt. 23:37; Luke 19:41-42).

Chapter Nine

Did the Father Kill Jesus?

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
(Isaiah 53:4)

Jesus, the spotless Son of God and second person of the Triune Godhead, willingly took on the consequences that we merited for our transgressions because God loved us so much (John 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 5:21). God does not destroy; sin does (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12; 6:21–23; James 1:15). Sin allows Satan to bring about the transgressor’s destruction (2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 4:26–27; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8–9; 1 John 3:8).

Tragically, an extensive number of people hold a distorted perception of God’s redeeming activity. They depict a God who is so furious with sinful humans that He must unleash His fury and deal them terrible punishment. They believe that God really needed to punish sin and that He vented all of His vengeful rage on His Son.

This group esteems Christ to be “stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” The Amplified Bible says, “.... yet we [ignorantly] considered Him stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God [as if with leprosy].” Theologians in particular are not exempt from this ignorance regarding Father God’s involvement in His Son’s death. However, did the Father actually assassinate His Son?

Pleased to Bruise Jesus

In verse 10 we read, “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.” Some people see this text as depicting a sadistic God who takes pleasure in torturing His own Son.

It makes more sense to read this passage as an illustration of gradual revelation. We read about a “serpent” that tricked Eve in Genesis 3:1–13. This serpent was declared by God to be at war (Gen. 3:14–15). Later on in Scripture, this serpent is identified as Satan (Rev. 12:9; 20:2; 2 Cor. 11:3, 13–15). Compare Isaiah 53:10 to God’s prophecy regarding the serpent:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. (Isa. 53:10; King James Version)

*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and **thou shalt bruise his heel** (Gen. 3:15)*

In 2 Sam. 24:1 we read, “.... *the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them.*” The same episode is described in 2 Chron. 21:1, which was written several centuries later and states, “*And Satan stood up against Israel.*”

Isaiah 53:10 is to be interpreted as God accepting responsibility for allowing Satan to bruise Jesus, just as we see God accepting responsibility for allowing Satan to seduce David.

Satan is Our Lord’s Afflicter

As one author accurately observed, “There can be no reasonable doubt that the bodily sufferings of our Lord were inflicted through the instigation of Satan.”¹ In response to a criticism raised by Isa. 53:10, another writer explained:

It is asserted, you say, by the prophet, that it pleased the Lord to bruise his well beloved Son. Answer; and it is equally true, that God said, that the serpent should bruise him. From this, it is evident, that in whatever sense the hand of God might be concerned in the event, it was not from his immediate hand, but by the power of Satan through divine permission.²

In the first century of the church, Justin Martyr (100–165), understood Isaiah’s prophecy to actually refer to the devil and demons: “... but now, by the will of God, having become man for the human race, **He endured all the sufferings which the devils instigated the senseless Jews to inflict upon Him**”³ (Emphasis added). Throughout the 18th century, some insisted on underlining this truth:

His Death, which Satan and the Jews contrived as the undermining of his Kingdom; that death pulled up the Pillars of Satan’s Kingdom. While they thought they were destroying Him, God was in and by Him destroying them and their Power. The great Gospel Promise was accomplished; while they were bruising his Head, He broke Satan’s Head. Thus Peter acquaints us, his Death was the Death of Sin and Satan’s Power.⁴

Without a doubt, Satan orchestrated the entire episode. Judas was seduced by Satan to betray the Lord (Luke 22:3-4; John 13:2). When Judas led the soldiers to arrest Jesus, the Lord replied, “... *but this is your hour, and the power of darkness*” (Luke 22:53b; see also Eph. 6:10-12; Col. 1:12-14), or, as the Living Bible paraphrases it, “But this is your moment—the time when Satan’s power reigns supreme.” Previously, Jesus informed the Pharisees, “*But now ye seek to kill me*”

(John 8:40). He stated unequivocally where the impulse to assassinate Him came from:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:44)

The Truth New Testament by Colin Urquhart renders verse 44b, “*He is really your father and you want to kill Me to carry out your real father’s desires.*” The Daniel Mace New Testament renders the first part, “.... you, who have the devil for your father, **will execute the designs of your father.**” Satan, not God, was the one who planned and desired Jesus’ murder. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul described these killers as follows:

*Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and **they please not God**, and are contrary to all men (1 Thess. 2:15)*

The statement “*Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him*” in Isa. 53:10 should not be read to imply that God is a sadist who enjoyed torturing His own Son. God was obviously not pleased with the men who murdered Him. All that God was doing was taking responsibility for the work that He had permitted Satan to do.

Isaiah 53:10 in the Permissive Sense

We would be well advised to interpret Isaiah 53:10 permissively, since Scripture makes it abundantly evident that Satan participated fully in the Lord’s death

and that God was not pleased in any way. Here, Charles Thomson's Septuagint translation is useful:

*....and the Lord determined to purify him from this stroke: when his soul shall **be given up** for a sin offering; of you he shall see a seed which shall prolong their days.*

God's role was to "give up" Jesus, or more accurately, to release His restraint on those who desired to kill Him. This is in line with Romans 8:32, which states, "Surely, He Who spares not His own Son, but **gives Him up** for us all, how shall He not, together with Him, also, be graciously granting us all?" (Concordant Literal Translation). It is understood that by "giving up" Jesus, God allowed men and Satan to act as they did. Therefore, Isaiah 53:10 is rendered in the permissive sense in the *Chaldee Paraphrast*:

"But although God permitted him to be thus far bruised and afflicted with pains, yet because he has made himself a sacrifice for sin, he shall see his posterity, he shall live a long life"⁵

This also aligns with certain academics' observations about this passage:

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, to permit the cruel mockery, and blows, and torture.⁶

It pleasing the Lord to bruise him, was neither in wrath, nor to take vengeance on him, nor yet actually or immediately by himself to bruise him, but *permissively*.⁷

What God permits, according to the usage of Scripture, is just as frequently attributed directly to God, for Scripture is not as concerned as we

westerners are about secondary sources or causes. For example, Scripture says that “it was the LORD’s will to crush [Jesus] and cause him to suffer” (Isa. 53:10)⁸

When Isaiah 53:10 is interpreted in this way, the image of a cruel God vanishes and is replaced with one of a loving God.

God Smiting the Shepherd

We might end this chapter if Isaiah 53:10 was the only Scripture utilized to express notions about God as the literal killer of His Son. However, there is a prophecy regarding the Lord in Zechariah 13:7 that Jesus mentions in two of the gospels:

*And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, **I will smite the shepherd**, and the sheep shall be scattered. (Mark 14:27; see also Matt. 26:31)*

According to this statement, God Himself will smite the shepherd. But in light of the previously provided evidence, this is just another instance of God accepting accountability for the actions He allows Satan to carry out. Charles Henry Hall affirms this truth:

I will smite. God is often said to do whatever He permits to be done. He suffers evil and compels it to work out His purposes of good. He does not compel any man to sin, but when they do evil, He orders that evil, to work out His own glory.... He permitted the death of Christ in order to save the world.⁹

The aforementioned passage should be interpreted permissively as we know that Satan and wicked people,

not God, killed our Lord. As Henry Cowles wrote, “The meaning then is, ‘the sword shall be aroused against My Shepherd, i.e. I will allow Him to be smitten by the Jews.’”¹⁰

Was Jesus Irresistibly Predetermined to be Killed?

While some people will concede that men and Satan played major roles in Jesus’ murder, many of the same individuals will argue that God had intended for it all to happen. They hold that, prior to the creation of the universe, God predestined who would be saved and who would not, as well as the death of Jesus in order to preserve the people He had already chosen to be saved. Two passages of Scripture are utilized to teach this concept:

*Him, being delivered **by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God**, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain (Acts 2:23)*

*For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever **thy hand and thy counsel determined** before to be done. (Acts 4:27-28)*

The argument is meant to end here because both of these quotes discuss a “counsel” or “will” that was purportedly decided regarding Christ’s death. At least, it does when we decide not to look into this any further. Nevertheless, Jesus refuted the notion that God unilaterally planned His murder when He spoke this parable shortly before He was killed:

*But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, **They will reverence my son.** But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. (Matthew 21:37-39)*

Parables are stories with symbolic language that are meant to impart literal truths. This story teaches the literal truth that the Father thought the Jewish authorities would honor Him if He sent His Son. Rather, they executed Him. In his analysis of this tale, Benjamin Keach pointed out that Satan was responsible for this:

How have some vile wretches (who reproached, and have persecuted God's people) declared that they did believe they were in very deed the servants of God, and holy persons, and yet left so to the power of the devil, that notwithstanding they would not desist persecuting and reproaching them? Wicked men are under the power and influence of the devil, and often sin against most powerful convictions.¹¹

John said, "*He came unto his own, and his own received him not*" (John 1:11). Actually, according to the Bible, these religious leaders disregarded God's "will" or "counsel" for them:

*But the Pharisees and lawyers **rejected the counsel of God** against themselves, being not baptized of him. (Luke 7:30)*

God's determined counsel is mentioned in Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28. Both verses are about the actions of the Jewish leaders. However, Luke 7:30 informs us that we are free to reject God's counsel. This implies that it is not irresistible. As a result, the two Acts chapters must be better understood. *Thankfully, they can be.*

Alternative Understandings

Some Greek scholars insist that "The Greek word [ekdotos], rendered 'delivered,' [in] Acts ii. 23 may, perhaps, more properly be rendered 'given or given forth,' and with this alteration, the sense is materially changed."¹²

How does this "change the sense" of the text? We connect Acts 2:23 to John 3:16 which says, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" The ensuing paraphrases illustrate how Acts 2:23 reveals both God's and our Lord's killers' intents after adjusting the language and drawing a relationship to John 3:16:

Him, who by the determinate counsel—of God, was given [to you as a Saviour] ye have taken and crucified.¹³

Having taken him who had been given you by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God as a Saviour, ye have crucified and slain with wicked hands.¹⁴

This teaches us that the gift of Jesus as a Savior was the result of God's predetermined counsel and wisdom. Jesus' murder did not fall under God's predetermined will. Murder is not sanctioned by God.

Acts 4:27–28 lends even more credence to an alternative interpretation. Luther Lee, a Wesleyan

commentator, is one of many academics providing the following understanding:

The only comment necessary to be offered on this text is to transpose its parts, without altering a word, so as to make it read as follows :—“ For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together.” The things determined by God to be done, were what Christ was anointed to do, and not what his enemies were gathered together to do. They were gathered against him, and not to do what the counsel of God had determined. There is then, no proof here that God decreed any of the wicked actions of men.¹⁵

Lee provides a very good summary, which is corroborated by many other scholars and Bible translations.¹⁶ The Lord Himself was predestined by God to carry out His plan for humanity, not the homicidal deeds of these men (see Acts 10:38).

Scripture also discloses a multitude of elements that may have averted this murder, dispelling the notion that it was all part of God’s *immutable* plan (Matthew 26:39-44, 51-54; 1 Cor. 2:8).

God neither killed the Lord nor foreordained His death. He offered His Son for the salvation of mankind. Because He perfectly foretold what evil men would do, the Father and Son chose death. Satan lost his right to mankind when he killed a sinless man. Jesus defeated him and used that triumph to set us free from the bonds of sin and Satan (1 John 3:8). God overruled what evil men did, bringing salvation to all men as a result.

Chapter Ten

Did God Kill Uzzah?

*And they carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab: and Uzza and Ahio drave the cart. And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets. And when they came unto the threshingfloor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled. And **the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God.** (1 Chronicles 13:7-10)*

Israel once engaged in combat with the Philistines and lost miserably. They believed that they would start to win battles by bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the combat. Sadly, they were soundly defeated, and the Ark was taken by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:1–11). Eventually, the Philistines, who had suffered from illness and death for holding the Ark, brought it to Kirjathjearim.

David planned to bring the Ark to the city of David two decades later. When they loaded it on a cart, the ox stumbled and nearly knocked the Ark over. Uzzah attempted to prevent the Ark from slipping from the cart, and we are told that God killed him for it.

The Importance of Full Knowledge

Uzzah's act could be viewed as sincere by most of us. It is hard to comprehend how God, who is known to

be a merciful, kind, and loving God, could personally execute someone for performing a sincere deed, even if it was wrong. However, by taking into account a few more variables, we can gain a deeper comprehension.

Years ago, I was pulled over by a police officer for exceeding the speed limit by many miles. I stated to the officer that I had not seen any signs showing the maximum speed limit, to which he replied, “Ignorance of the law is no excuse,” and proceeded to give me a ticket. When I drove along the same route again a few days later, I noticed that the sign had been there the entire time. Maybe I had been moving too quickly to notice all along.

An acquaintance of mine who worked as an electrician was also a alcoholic. He received a call one evening to handle an electrical problem. He handled the situation in an inebriated manner that nearly killed him by electrocuting him. Electricity has laws that might be beneficial to us but also lethal when broken.

A thorough understanding of God’s Word is a must for whatever activity you do on His behalf. Regretfully, we typically find ourselves researching ways to prevent catastrophes *after* they have occurred. David investigated the issue of Uzzah and found that the removal of the Ark contravened a significant Levitical law:

*And said unto them, Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, **for that we sought him not after the due order.** (1 Chronicles 15:12-13)*

God had never been consulted regarding the relocation of a highly significant object of worship. The consequences of not seeking God can be disastrous. We are informed about King Asa that, “.... *yet in his disease he **sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers, and died***” (2 Chron. 16:12-13). Asa could have lived had he sought the Lord.

David eventually prayed to the Lord, researched the Scriptures, and learned how to move the Ark of the Covenant after Uzzah passed away:

*So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded **according to the word of the Lord.*** (1 Chronicles 15:14-15)

Recall that speed limit sign that was always there but that I missed? David and the priests had access to God’s Word at all times, yet they never sought it out (Ex. 25:14–15; 37:3-5; Num. 7:9). God had already issued several warnings that touching the holy things would result in death (Num. 4:19–20; Lev. 16:2). That’s the reason God had a procedure that He provided for moving the Ark:

*And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but **they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die*** (Num. 4:15)

The Ark was never to be transported on an Ox cart. It was not to be touched. It was to be moved by two men using long poles. Violation of this law killed Uzzah.

Uzzah's Death Possibly Accidental

The Bible does not indicate how Uzzah died, but one hypothesis among several is that the ark *accidentally* fell on him and crushed him. In previous chapters, we discussed how God accepted responsibility for things He did not intervene to prevent. This includes accidents. In Exodus 21:13 we read, “*And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.*” Another translation reads:

But if an accident happens, and a person kills someone without planning it, then God allowed that thing to happen. I will choose some special places where people can run for safety. So that person can run to one of those places. (Easy to Read Version)

In Hebrew culture, God bears some sort of responsibility for events that He did not prevent.¹ Even if He may not have wanted it or desired it, His established laws frequently prevent Him from meddling with the outcomes of free-will activities.²

When God created man, He gave him dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28; Psalm 8:5-6; 115:16). God thus restricted Himself and, without our cooperation, can do very little to intervene in any circumstance (2 Chron. 16:9; Mark 6:5-6; Luke 7:29-30; Rev. 3:20). To do so would be a violation of His own Word (Ps. 89:33-35; 138:2; Titus 1:1-3; Heb. 6:17-18) which He cannot do (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Rom. 11:29; 2 Cor. 1:19-20). As a result, His intervention is hampered by our

unwillingness to seek Him (2 Chron. 7:14; 14:11-12; 15:1-2; Isa. 30:1-3; Jer. 10:21; Eze. 36:35-37; Dan. 10:12; Matt. 7:7-11; 18:18-19; John 14:12-14; James 4:2; 5:14-16).

Uzzah's failure to seek the Lord resulted in a spiritual law violation. God couldn't intervene to prevent the consequences without breaking His own laws. When we apply our Bibles to analyze this event we will discover that God did not *directly* (by the use of His own power) kill Uzzah. Because Uzzah broke a biblical law, God was unable to stop the consequences. God is only claimed to have smote Uzzah in this sense because in the Scriptural idiom, He accepts responsibility for everything that occurs, including accidents (Job 1:12; 2:3).

God's Anger and Smiting

The disastrous outcomes of carelessly disobeying the precepts of Scripture are exemplified by the life of George Washington, our nation's first president. The president summoned a doctor in 1799 when he woke up at two in the morning with a sore throat and difficulty breathing. Because he was unable to swallow medication, he gave the doctor the order to execute a technique known as "bloodletting," in which blood was drawn from the patient. They thought that this treated illnesses. Washington pushed them to extract more when he thought they had not taken enough. Washington passed away that evening, forty percent of his blood having been drawn.

According to modern medical experts, taking that much blood out of a person will kill them. Despite the fact that medical knowledge was not as developed as it is now, Washington had his Bible, which states that "*For the life of the flesh is in the blood*" (Lev. 17:11). George Washington was slain by his own ignorance of biblical truth, not by God.

I've read about people being hospitalized or killed by work-related equipment because they don't take the time to read the lengthy and dull manuals that would assist them in avoiding the hazards of working with it. This same ignorance is demonstrated when God's people fail to study their instruction manual, the Bible, before embarking on a mission for God. God declares, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*" (Hosea 4:6a). Ignorance, rather than God, destroys His people, as it certainly did Uzzah.

It might be argued that the Bible makes it rather explicit, "*And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him*" (1 Chron. 13:10). That is correct, however the Bible also says, "*.... the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them*" (2 Sam. 24:1). Both passages make reference to "the anger of the Lord" being "kindled" and the action that He takes as a result. However, the latter passage is interpreted for us in 2 Chron. 21:1 where it reads, "*And Satan stood up against Israel.*"

God's anger in moving David to sin is to be regarded in a *permissive* sense. The same understanding applies to how God communicates His wrath in "smiting":

He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham (Psalm 78:50-51)

It should be noted that God "smote" by allowing the disease to take their lives rather than by killing the Egyptian firstborn personally. In essence, God

relinquished His control over the plague that claimed their lives.

How God Exercises His Anger

According to other verses, God's wrath is expressed not by taking direct action but rather by taking away any protection He may have previously provided and letting the offender's adversaries have their way:

*And the **anger of the Lord** was hot against Israel, and **he delivered them** into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. (Judges 2:14)*

The word "delivered" used in this passage is "nathan," which "...is a high frequency verb in the OT and bears a wide range of meanings, some of which are 'to give, present, allow, permit, surrender, deliver, set, put, place.'"³

Likewise, the word "sold" is from the Hebrew word "maw-kar" which, according to Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew Definitions means, "...to be given over to death." Both terms in the passage are appropriately rendered in a *permissive sense* in other translations:

The Lord was so angry at the Israelites that he let other nations raid Israel and steal their crops and other possessions. Enemies were everywhere, and the Lord always let them defeat Israel in battle. The Lord had warned Israel he would do this, and now the Israelites were miserable. (Contemporary English Version)

The Lord was angry with the Israelites, so he let enemies attack them and take their possessions. He let their enemies who lived around them defeat them. The Israelites could not protect themselves from their enemies. (Easy to Read Version)

Therefore, God expresses His anger by *allowing* rebels to experience the consequences of their own rebellion. There is another chapter in the book of Judges that also contains this truth:

*Therefore **the anger of the Lord** was hot against Israel, and **he sold them** into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushanrishathaim eight years. (Judges 3:8)*

Once more the Hebrew word “maw-kar” is employed here and is used in a *permissive* sense in modern translations. The Contemporary English Version renders it as, “*This made the Lord angry, so he let Israel be defeated.*” The Easy-to-Read Version says, “*The Lord was angry with the Israelites, so he allowed King Cushan Rishathaim of Aram Naharaim to defeat the Israelites.*”

God’s wrath is conveyed not via the direct use of His power, but by handing up individuals and allowing them to face the consequences of their disobedience. God’s anger should not be interpreted any differently in the instance of Uzzah.

How the Lord Smites

In a similar vein, when we allow Scripture to interpret itself, we discover that God does not “smite” by

physically killing rebels, but rather by allowing them to experience the consequences of their sin:

*For **the Lord shall smite Israel**, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the Lord to anger. And he shall **give Israel up** because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin. (1 Kings 14:15-16)*

“Give Israel up” is from the Hebrew word “nathan” which is a permissive verb, as we have already established. Another translation renders verse 16, “*He will let the Israelites be defeated because Jeroboam sinned, and then he made the Israelites sin*” (Easy to Read Version).

Additionally, a similar pattern to how God is alleged to smite individuals can be seen in the way God smote Jeroboam:

*Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that **God smote Jeroboam** and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. And the children of Israel fled before Judah: and **God delivered them** into their hand. (2 Chronicles 13:15-16)*

“Delivered” in verse 16 is again the Hebrew word “nathan”. We can better understand how to render this passage by using the Easy-to-Read Version: “*The men of Israel ran away from the men of Judah. God let the army from Judah defeat the army from Israel.*”

Conclusion

Based on the biblical evidence that shows how God “smites” and communicates His “anger,” we can conclude that God did not directly (by His own hand or use of His power) kill Uzzah; rather, He permitted him to suffer the repercussions of breaking a very clear spiritual law.

God’s customary method of expressing His wrath and smiting sinners is to subject them to the natural or supernatural consequences of their actions. In other words, God is frequently said to do what He allows or does not prevent from happening to others.

God is trying to keep us safe from disaster, not to destroy us. He offers us His Word for this reason. However, we have to be aware of it and follow its rules. As it did Uzzah, our ignorance of God’s Word destroys us. Learn from God’s Word in order to be blessed with His presence, favor, and protection.

Chapter Eleven

Elijah and the Consuming Fire

The story of Ahaziah, one of the kings of Israel, who became ill, is told in 2 Kings 1. Since the Ahaziah chose to enquire of a pagan god rather than the true God of Israel, God commanded His prophet Elijah to inform the king of his approaching death. In 2 Kings 1:1–8, the King asked his messengers to give him a description of Elijah. The monarch then dispatched fifty soldiers and a captain to summon Elijah to leave from his perch on the hilltop (v. 9). Following that, we read:

And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. (2 Kings 1:10)

This continues until a more reasonable captain begs Elijah to spare his life (1 Kings 1:11–15). For those who comprehend that God handles His enemies in a particular way and that we should imitate His actions, the text presents a challenge (Matt. 5:43-48). Did God destroy Elijah's adversaries by pouring out fire from heaven? As with other killings in the Bible, God's role in this Elijah incident is all too frequently misinterpreted.

God Did Not Direct Elijah to Kill

God granted man dominion over the earth in the beginning (Gen. 1:26-28; Psalm 8:4-6). After man fell, Satan seized this authority (2 Cor. 4:4; Luke 4:6; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). However, access to God's authority

was always available to anyone who had a relationship with him (Ex. 7:19–20; 8:5, 16; 9:23; 10:13; Josh. 10:12).

Nothing in 1 Kings 1:9–15 suggests that God gave Elijah instructions on how to exercise his delegated authority in this particular situation. Elijah made the choice of how to handle these men. God occasionally gives His servants free reign to exercise the authority He has given them:

And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.
(Rev. 11:5-6)

Take note that these two prophets of the end times will kill their adversaries “as often as *they* will” rather than “as often as God directs.” God will let them choose how frequently to deal with their enemies by using their authority.

In most circumstances, mankind and demons can freely wield the power and authority that God has given them. When Satan attempted to put Job to the test, God said that all Job possessed was within his power:

And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.
(Job 1:12)

Although God gave Satan restrictions on how he may utilize his authority, He never gives him explicit instructions. In the course of using his usurped power, Satan caused havoc by, among other things, sending fire from heaven that was attributed to God:

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. (Job 1:16)

Although the fire that originated in heaven is attributed to God, Satan did not get instructions from God to carry out this act. As a result, Satan abused his granted authority. The same thing will happen in the end times with the beast that Satan uses:

And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men (Rev. 13:12-13)

These instances of both men and devils abusing power indiscriminately demonstrate to us that Elijah enjoyed the same degree of leeway in the exercise of his authority as Satan does.

Man's Abuse or Failure to Use Authority

An aspect of our Lord's teaching ministry was to teach men that they have authority (Luke 10:17-20; 17:6;

Matt. 17:20; 18:18-19; 21:21; Mark 11:22-24). One can sense a slight amount of disappointment with Jesus when His disciples panicked rather than use their authority (Matt. 8:23-27).

Basically, Heaven does nothing until God's agent here on earth exercises his or her delegated authority:

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matt. 18:18)

The Easy-to-Read Version interprets the former part of the passage, "*I tell you the truth. When you speak judgment here on earth, that judgment will be God's judgment.*" Since Elijah passed judgment on Ahaziah's soldiers then God permitted it at the time.

Whether or not God directed Elijah to use his authority in the manner that he did there is still no doubt that sometimes God gets frustrated with His servants for failing to use the power that He delegates to them when they are in a crisis situation as was the case with Moses:

*And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. And the Lord said unto Moses, **Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall***

go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. (Numbers 14:13-16)

Take note of how God appeared a little irritated that Moses would call out to Him considering that Moses already had the divine authority to part the sea. Here's an illustration of how people fail to use the authority and power that God bestowed upon them.

If one carefully examines the plague narratives in Exodus, they will see that not a single epidemic occurred or subsided until Moses acted decisively in accordance with God's intention. Regretfully, as demonstrated once more in the example of Moses, individuals occasionally misuse the authority that God gives them and fail to wield it as God commands:

*And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and **speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water,** and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And **Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly,** and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of*

Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. (Numbers 20:7-12)

It's worth noting that God provided Moses specific instructions. God had already granted Moses the authority and power to accomplish the act, but He wanted Moses to do it in a certain way. Instead, Moses chose to lose his cool and do things his own way. He still obtained spectacular results, yet he lost out on entering the Promised Land. Nonetheless, Moses' situations provide ample Biblical evidence that one can have God's delegated authority and either fail to use it or misuse it.

Jesus is the Example that We Follow

Did Elijah mishandle God's power? That would be a question the reader would have to answer for himself. For my part, I don't think Elijah misused the authority that God gave him any more than the two witnesses in the book of Revelation will do in the end times.

We must keep the nature of progressive revelation in mind. Because their prophecies were destined for our generation, the Old Testament prophets did not even have full revelation of what they were writing about (1 Peter 1:10-12). Only Jesus can open our eyes to these realities (Luke 24:25-27, 44-48; John 5:39-40). As a result, despite his closeness to God, Elijah and most of the Old Testament prophets did not have the whole revelation of God's character that we have in Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 18; 8:19; 10:30; 14:7-11; 17:25-26; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Heb. 1:3; 1 John 1:5; 5:20).

James 5:17-18 tells us that Elijah gives us an example of how to pray fervently and expect an answer. But the Bible instructs us to imitate our Lord Jesus in terms of character (Luke 6:35-36; 1 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 5:1-

2). This point is highlighted by an event in which our Lord encountered rejection from the Samaritans and the censure He bestowed upon His disciples in response:

And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village. (Luke 9:54-56)

Jesus never told His disciples that they couldn't summon lightning. It is irrelevant whether they could or could not. Jesus' principal goal was to inform His disciples that their desire to exercise their allocated authority in the same way that Elijah did was based on an incorrect spirit.

Jesus chastised them for even considering destroying the community rather than telling them they couldn't. God gives us authority, but He wants us to use it to save the lost, not to get revenge on those who have wronged us.

Luke 9 is the text through which we must interpret Elijah's deeds in 2 Kings 1. Was Elijah in the wrong frame of mind? Again, this is up to the reader to decide. However, as previously indicated, the two witnesses in Revelation will have the same ability to defend themselves if they are attacked. Elijah, too, was in a tough circumstance and realized that the only way to defend himself was to use God's power.

However, neither Elijah nor the two witnesses in Revelation truly reveal God's nature. Jesus Christ is the

perfect example of the divine character. When His enemies approached, He had the power to summon a host of angels to slay them, but He chose not to do so:

And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels. (Matthew 26:51-53)

Jesus had the power to halt His own crucifixion. But our Lord didn't prioritize His own survival over everything else. He had you and me at the top of his priority list. We would not have hope for redemption if the Lord had chosen to protect Himself against His adversaries by using His power. After all, we have been redeemed via the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord (Col. 1:12–14; 1 Peter. 1:18–19).

Conclusion

Although the Bible accurately chronicles historical events, God's personal perspective on those events is not always included. Scripture faithfully and precisely documents the events around Elijah. However, nothing instructs us to imitate His use of the authority that He was delegated in this instance of calling down lightning.

While there are certain lessons to be learned from Elijah's life, Jesus is the primary model for us to follow since He is the perfect representation of God.

Chapter Twelve

“Little Children” and Mauling Bears

And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. (2 Kings 2:23-24)

Of all the episodes recorded in the Bible, none stirs readers' emotions more than the story of the “little children” who were attacked by bears because they called Elisha offensive names. Does this sentence actually fit the crime? Did Elisha's cursing of these “little children” really cause God to send these bears?

Little Children?

Some Bible readers are distressed by the concept that God would deploy bears to “tare” young children. Children are typically immature and can be harsh. In our modern culture we do not feel that small children are responsible for their behavior until they reach a particular age. It is possible that our standards of accountability do not always align with those of God.

However, a number of scholars have confirmed that the term “little children” in 2 Kings 2:23 is a mistranslation. The word translated “children” is the Hebrew word *na'ar*. This same word is used in 2 Samuel 18:5a where we read, “*And the king commanded Joab*

and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom.”

The term “young man” is derived from the Hebrew word *na'ar*. Absalom was by no means a small child, as anybody familiar with his rebellion against his father, King David, will attest. He was an adult in every sense. When referring to the Amalekite troops who managed to flee David, the word *na'ar* is used in 1 Samuel 30:17: “.... *there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled.*”

In 2 Kings 2:23, *na'ar* is accurately translated as “young men” in certain contemporary translations. For example, the International Standard Version says, “.... *some insignificant young men came from the city and started mocking him*” and the Jubilee 2000 translation renders it, “....*and as he was going up by the way, the young men of the city came forth and mocked him.*” Consequently, we don't think that “little children” were the victims of this bear attack.

The Nature of the Insult

According to the majority of the Bible commentaries I have consulted, the phrase “Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head,” was not merely a crude taunt. Many of these scholars believed that this alludes to Elisha's master, Elijah, having ascended to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha was being told by the young men, “We don't need your presence here. Why don't you leave too? Go up with your master.”

Due to their deep-rooted idolatry, these towns were hostile to anyone who dared to represent the true God. They then insisted that Elisha leave their midst and ascend to heaven, just like Elijah. Rejecting God's servant is equivalent to rejecting God (1 Samuel 8:7). Their actions resemble those of the pre-Flood Antediluvians:

Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him? (Job 21:14-15)

In the very next chapter we read, “*Which said unto God, Depart from us: and what can the Almighty do for them?*” (Job 22:17) God cannot remain where He is not welcomed if we force Him away. If not, He would be imposing His will on people who genuinely do not desire Him (Matt. 23:37-38). God doesn’t abandon us because he is offended. We do not desire Him; thus, He departs from us (Deut. 31:16-17; 2 Chron. 15:2; 24:20).

Elisha’s Curse

God will not impose His will on anyone; rather, He longs for them to listen to Him and submit to Him (Rev. 3:20). Sadly, when we reject God’s will for us and push Him away, terrible things happen that could have been avoided (Psalm 81:10-16; Hosea 9:12).

Readers may assume that Elisha used profanity or summoned God’s wrath if they are unaware of this information. Elisha would have come across as ungodly and vindictive in both gestures. This Elisha would be different from the one who prevented the Israelite king from executing his foes, even though they wanted to murder him. Rather, Elisha commanded the king to provide water and bread for them (2 Kings 6:21–23). This aligns with the ethical approach we should take towards our adversaries according to scripture (Prov. 25:21; Romans 12:20; Matthew 5:43–44).

The curse attributed to Elisha was primarily about giving these young men what they desired. God will depart from them if they did not want Him. However, all

that had previously shielded them vanished with that departure. Another author provides further details:

Cursing stands in contrast to the word blessing or favor (cf. Gen. 27:11, 12). The emphasis is on the absence, reversal, or removal of a blessed state or rightful position which brings God's protection, provision and blessing. The principle is very simple: without God's blessed salvation and protection we all stand cursed. The moment God removed His wall of protection from Job, Satan attacked him and wrecked havoc in Job's life.

So Elisha, as a prophet, saw their hardened and rebellious condition, unresponsive to correction. In the name of the Lord (i.e. by His authority) Elisha simply turned them over to the Lord and to their own devices, which had the effect of removing them from even the common protection of God. He probably said something like, "may God deal with you according to what you deserve," or "may you be cursed for your sins of rebellion." This would demonstrate to the city and to people all around a vital truth: without the Lord there is no protection and that blasphemy of God's servants and His Word in order to hinder God's message is serious business.¹

Scripture lends credence to this interpretation. The curse vanishes when God is present: "*And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it*" (Rev. 22:3a). Conversely, the curse manifests itself in the absence of His presence. Regarding the curses in Deuteronomy 28, God predicts that Israel will exclaim, "*Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?*" (Deut. 31:17). "Evils" are synonymous with "curses" (Deut. 30:15, 19).

Because the Israelites failed to tithe God said, "*Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts... Ye are cursed with a curse*" (Malachi 3:7, 9). God's presence, blessing, and protection was

diminished when the people neglected to pay their tithes. This is made evident by the fact that God promises them that if they obey Him, He will *return* to them. His separation from them is linked to the curse.

When Joshua inquired as to how Israel's adversaries were able to defeat them, God replied:

And the sons of Israel have not been able to stand before their enemies; they have turned the back before their enemies because they have become cursed. I will not be with you again if you do not destroy the cursed things from among you. (Joshua 7:12; Hebraic Roots Bible)

The curse occurs when God is no longer there to safeguard His people. A "curse" is defined in Scripture as the removal of God's presence and protection from an individual. The absence of God implies that God *permits*, rather than *causes*, undesirable occurrences. As a result, a curse can also be characterized as God permitting something to happen or does not stop it from happening. Therefore, the New International Reader's Version of Joshua 7:12 says:

That is why the Israelites can't stand up against their enemies. They turn their backs and run. That's because I have decided to let them be destroyed. You must destroy the things you took that had been set apart to me. If you do not, I will not be with you anymore.

When God says that the Israelites, "*have become cursed*" He is saying, "*I have decided to let them be destroyed*". As a result, the curse that Elisha pronounced

that triggered the bear attack was the removal of God's protective presence and His permitting, rather than initiating, the ensuing repercussions.

The Curse Includes Animal Attacks

In the specific case of Elisha, the people desired that the prophet leave since He signified God's presence. Instead, they preferred their counterfeit deities. As a result, Elisha pronounced the curse that corresponded to their wishes. With God's protection gone, the bears had no restraint.

God, speaking and writing via Moses, stated that wild beast attacks will be one of the various indications of the curse for disobedience:

*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. And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me (Lev. 26:22-23)*

The word "send" is the Hebrew word "shalach" which means to "let loose" (Gen. 49:21). An alternative rendering of Leviticus 26:22 is more beneficial:

*"I will **let loose** the beasts of the field among you, and they will take away your children and send destruction on your cattle, so that your numbers will become small and your roads become waste."*
(Bible in Basic English)

When the people reject God, the restraint that God has on the wild beasts will be removed. The young men

who yelled at Elisha to “go up, you bald head” suffered what followed. Deuteronomy also tells us that God “letting loose” His restraint on wild beasts is a symptom of the curse:

They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. (Deuteronomy 32:23-24)

Once again, “send” is a permissive verb. Two more recent translations are useful in this context:

*Wasted by famine, ravaged by plague and pestilence so bitter, fangs of beasts **I’ll let loose on them, with venom of creepers in the dust.** (Tree of Life Version)*

*They shall be wasted with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter deadly disease; also the tooth of beasts will **I let loose against them, with the poison of serpents that crawl in the dust.** (Leeser Old Testament)*

In this instance, the verb “send” is understood *permissively* rather than *causatively* due to the context and alternate translations. It is believed that God “sends” what He no longer restrains or inhibits.

Affirmed by Ezekiel

Additionally, God warned Israel through the prophets of what would happen to them if He stopped

protecting them and controlling wild animals. According to the King James Version of Ezekiel 32:4, we read:

*Then will I leave thee upon the land, I will cast thee forth upon the open field, and will **cause** all the fowls of the heaven to remain upon thee, and I will fill the beasts of the whole earth with thee.*

As an outcome for their rebellion, God says He would *cause* the fowls of Heaven to feed on His people. However, as various translations have presented it, this should be read permissively:

*Then I will drop you on the dry ground. I will throw you down in the field. I will let all the birds come and eat you. **I will let wild animals** from every place come and eat you until they are full. (Easy to Read Version)*

*Then I will throw you on the land. I will toss you into the open field. I will let the birds of the sky rest on you. And **I will let the animals of the earth eat you** until they are full. (International Children's Bible)*

*I will leave you on the ground, I will fling you on the open field, **I will allow** all the birds of the sky to settle on you, and **I will permit all the wild animals** to gorge themselves on you. (New English Translation)*

The curse is permissive in nature, and attacks by untamed animals is one of its symptoms. Contrary to what

many interpretations of this event teach, God did not use his infinite might to force the bears to maul the young lads. Neither did God command these bears to attack these young men in the same manner that a man would order his trained attack dogs on his adversaries. He just did not intervene to prevent the catastrophe from occurring since His presence was driven away by the individuals who were attacked by bears.

The young men had no desire to interact with God or His messenger. They disassociated themselves from God's watchful eye. The wild animals were unrestrained once more, and the bears could now assault the young men. In the strict sense, God is not a killer. But He will give His free-will creatures what they want, even if it leads to their own demise.

God Prefers to Protect

God's removal of His protection from the bears was not motivated by vengeance. Conversely, there's no denying that it made Him sad. God would rather keep His people safe from ferocious animals:

*And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will **cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.... And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, **neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid**** (Eze. 34:25, 28; KJV)*

God does not send animals to harm humans or wipe them out. But since individuals like the young men who drove Elisha away don't want God, He is forced to take away the protection that kept the animals from

harming anyone: *“I will take away the hedge around it, break down the wall that protects it, and let wild animals eat it and trample it down”* (Isaiah 5:5b; Good New Translation).

Elisha’s role was simply to announce the unavoidable curse that comes with rejecting God. God prefers to keep His people safe from wild animals that would kill and consume them. When God’s people choose to abandon Him and worship false gods, they forfeit that protection. God addresses the people of Israel, *“Do you think you can steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and **chase after other gods and still expect Me to protect you?**”* (Jer. 7:9; The VOICE). The obvious response is, of course, “no”.

Chapter Thirteen

God Commands Total Annihilation of Nations

Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.
(1 Sam. 15:3)

God demands that everything be killed, even women, children, and newborns. It makes sense that Christians who disagree with the “killer God” theory would find this challenging.

Several “interpretations” or “explanations” have been put forth by some, to the point that they dispute if God genuinely gave Saul this instruction. Unfortunately, some “defenders of God” are willing to cast doubt on the inspiration and veracity of the Scriptures by contesting that this is a directive from God. However, God removed Saul from his position as ruler of Israel because of his disobedience to this instruction (1 Samuel 28:17–18). In addition, the Bible states that in reference to Samuel’s prophesies, “... *the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground*” (1 Sam. 3:19). Therefore, God gave Samuel the authority to speak this instruction.

God gives many similar instructions, of which 1 Samuel 15:3 is just one (see also Deuteronomy 2:34; 3:6; 20:16–18; Joshua 6:21; 8:25). Without contesting the inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of Scripture as some theologians have done, how do we balance these directives with the reality that God is not a literal killer?

God Hates War and Bloodshed

Let’s begin with some basic information regarding God and war. God refused to allow David to construct His

temple because He did not want to be connected to David's history of conflict and violence:

And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God: But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. (1 Chron. 22:7-8; see also 28:3)

God *tolerated* David's wars, but He did not necessarily want them. God's aversion to war and bloodshed is also expressed in the millennial reign that Christ will soon usher in:

*And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: **and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.** (Isaiah 23-4; see also Micah 4:2-3)*

God wants His creation to live in love, peace, and harmony rather than in conflict and bloodshed. In regards to warfare and death, Jesus articulated the ultimate nature

of God (Matt. 5:43–45; 26:51–53). When we choose to love people who want to hurt us instead of trying to hurt them back, we are reflecting the heart of God. This is the fullest realization of God’s nature and the essence of His heart.

God’s Initial Nonviolent Plan

Amalek was simply one of several nations with which Israel engaged in combat, as Bible readers are aware. Canaan, for example, was one of the countries that occupied a large portion of the land that God desired for Israel to live in. Canaan also demonstrates how God first intended to deal with Israel’s foes.

Practices adopted by the Canaanites caused significant harm to their land (Lev. 18:1-28; 20:1-22). The damage was so extensive that God declared, “... *and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants*” (Lev. 18:25). As Charles A. Hobbs put it, “The very soil had become so overwhelmed with pollution that it could no longer endure it. We must not call this language figurative and forget its force.”¹

As a result of the corruption these irreverent people brought to their environment, they had to be removed. However, negligence has led many Bible readers to conclude that God’s design involved a great deal of violent conflict. On the contrary, God’s original plan was for these depraved inhabitants to be removed peacefully. God initially told the Israelites, “*And I will send hornets before thee, which shall **drive out** the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee*” (Exodus 23:28). Concerning this passage Hobbs writes, “... expulsion, and not death, would be the more natural result.”² Hobbs then makes the following observation:

One word, *garash*, *drive*, is employed some fourteen times in relation to the Canaanites. But it is also used first with reference to Adam when

driven from the garden of Eden (Gen.iii. 24). Then to Cain when *driven*, as he says, from the face of the earth (Gen.iv. 14). God also declares that Pharaoh shall *drive forth* the Israelites (Ex. vi. 1). And the king *drives* Moses and Aaron from his presence (Ex. x. 14). If the Canaanites were similarly treated, they might have to go in a hurry, like Moses and Aaron, and with profound regret yield up a beautiful heritage, like Adam, but there the matter would end.³

Instead of killing the Canaanites, God's goal was to only "dispossess" or expel them from the land (Ex. 34:11; Num. 32:21, 39; 33:53; Deut. 4:38; 7:17; Judges 11:23). Without causing any harm, he would compel them to abandon the territory they were contaminating. Another translation of Exodus 23 demonstrates this point:

When you fight against your enemies, I will send my great power before you.[a] I will help you defeat all your enemies. The people who are against you will become confused in battle and run away. I will send the hornet[b] in front of you. He will force your enemies to leave. The Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites will leave your country. But I will not force all of them out of your land quickly. I will not do this in only one year. The land will be empty if I force the people out too fast. Then all the wild animals would increase and control the land. And they would be much trouble for you. (Exodus 23:27-29; Easy-to-Read Version)

In Joshua 24:12, we have an illustration of this truth:

*As your army went forward, I sent the Hornet ahead of them and **made the people leave the land**, as I did to the two Amorite kings. **It was not your swords and bows that brought you victory!** (Easy to Read Version)*

The Israelites are reminded by God that He is able to remove the people without resorting to physical violence. God has frequently assisted Israel in defeating their adversaries without requiring them to engage in combat (Ex. 14:23–31; 2 Chron. 20:14–25; 32:6-23).

However, detractors quickly bring up the fact that, according to Scripture, God sought to *destroy* Israel’s adversaries (Ex. 23:27). In response, Paul Copan writes in his book, *“Is God a Moral Monster”*:

In fact, even the verbs “annihilate/perish [*’abad*]” and “destroy [*shamad*]” aren’t all that the critics have made them out to be. For example, God threatened to destroy Israel as he did the Canaanites. How? Not by literal obliteration but by removing Israel from the land to another land.⁴

Copan affirms this by citing Deut. 28:63 and Jer. 38:2, 17. Copan concludes that, “... utter annihilation wasn’t intended and that escape from the land was encouraged.”⁵ We can conclude from this information that God would have preferred a less brutal eviction of the Canaanites.

The Law of Divine Accommodation

Given the aforementioned facts, we can conclude that God is not a warmonger and that His command to Saul to destroy the Amalekites was not His usual course of action. However, it still raises the question of why God gave Israel these kinds of instructions in the first place.

The explanation is that God frequently offered instructions out of a need to placate or accommodate sinful humanity until they are shown “*a more excellent way*” (1 Cor. 12:31). Take for example the issue of divorce. Scripture says, “*For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away*” (Mal. 2:16a). Yet, despite His disdain for it, God *commanded* divorce (Deut. 24:1-3). Jesus provides an explanation for this:

*They say unto him, Why did Moses then **command** to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts **suffered** you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. (Matt. 19:7-8)*

God needed time to teach fallen men, indoctrinated by a self-centered, chauvinistic society of the past, about His methods of compassion and mercy, therefore He decreed what He detested. As a result, He *commanded* what He, in fact, merely *permitted*.

God’s directive to send spies into the Promised Land serves as another illustration. Oddly, the Lord orders spies to be sent into the land in order to *verify* His promise that He would bring the entire people of Israel into the land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5; Lev. 20:24; 23:10; 25:2; Num. 13:2):

*And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them. And Moses **by the commandment of the Lord** sent them from*

the wilderness of Paran: all those men were heads of the children of Israel. (Num. 13:1-3)

Regretfully, the information sent back by 10 of the twelve spies caused the Israelites to lose faith in God's promises, compelling the Lord to keep them in the desert for another forty years. But why did God issue a commandment that eventually led to such terrible consequences? Once more, He was accommodating and patronizing fallen men:

And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come. And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe (Deut. 1:22-23)

Note that it was Israel who desired to send the spies. God merely *accommodated* their request. God *commanded* what He *permitted*. These same principles hold true for God's directives to Israel to wage war. The Israelites were part of a culture that was engaged in ongoing conflict. God had revealed to Israel the less-violent means by which He intended to expel the neighboring heathen nations (Exodus 23:27-28; Joshua 2:9-11; 6:1). But it appears that Israel, shaped by the civilization around them, favored a combat-oriented way of life. Israel implored God to bring their enemy, King Arad the Canaanite, to them:

*And Israel vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou wilt indeed **deliver this people***

into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah. (Num. 21:2-3)

The Good News Translation renders verse 2, “*If you will let us conquer these people.*” Verse 3 in the New Century Version reads, “*The Lord listened to the Israelites, and he let them defeat the Canaanites.*” One significant factor is that Israel offered to demolish those cities on their own initiative. This was *not* initiated by God. S. D. Gordon, the wonderful author of the “Quiet Talks” book series, provides a reasonable explanation of God’s original intentions for dealing with the Canaanites and how those plans were ultimately derailed:

God chose a nation to be, not only His messenger to the others, but to be that messenger chiefly in the way it lived and did things. When that nation, not yet formed as a nation, was leaving Egypt’s slavery, God gave a model of action regarding war, defensive war.

They were attacked by Pharaoh’s forces. The attack was overcome. The Egyptian militarists were overwhelmed. But it wasn’t done by physical force. Force attacked, but force didn’t defend. The defeat was by direct divine intervention. The leadership was human. The strategy used was daring. Moses went forward as he was advised to do. Through that human initiative God helped.

That was the model of action as the new nation started off on its career. But when the Amalek attack came, Moses didn’t follow that model. He worked on another level. And God helped him on the level he chose. The same thing happened again at another turning-point, the entrance into their national domain. God gave Joshua the model of action for taking Canaan. The first city, Jericho,

was taken by supernatural power alone, acting through the human initiative suggested to Joshua by God. Then Joshua dropped to the Moses level.⁶

Israel believed that they had to adopt the same practices as the surrounding culture (1 Samuel 8:4–22). In accordance with what some have called *the divine law of accommodation*, God allowed this. One academic writes:

Here then instead of anything to discompose us or to excite unbelief, we recognise one great law or principle on which God proceeds in making Himself known to men. This has been called the Law of Accommodation. It is the law which requires that the condition and capacity of those to whom the revelation is made must be considered. If you wish to instruct a child, you must speak in language the child can understand. If you wish to elevate a savage, you must do it by degrees, accommodating yourself to his condition, and winking at much ignorance while you instill elementary knowledge. You must found all you teach on what is already understood by your pupil, and through that you must convey further knowledge and train his faculties to higher capacity. So was it with God's revelation. The Jews were children who had to be trained with what Paul somewhat contemptuously calls "weak and beggarly elements," the A B C of morals and religion. Not even in morals could the absolute truth be enforced. Accommodation had to be practised even here. Polygamy was allowed as a concession to their immature stage of development: **and practices in war and in domestic law were permitted or enjoined which were inconsistent with absolute morality.** Indeed the whole Jewish system was an adaptation to an immature state.... No doubt this teaching did actually mislead them in some of their ideas; but it kept them on the whole in a right attitude toward God, and prepared them for growing up to a fuller discernment of the truth.⁷ (Emphasis added)

God may advance His goal of redemption more effectively by working with men on their level in order to forward His purpose than to lose humans entirely. Once God has condescended to humanity and their desires, He delivers commands in conformity with those wishes and expects them to be totally obeyed.

God's "Permission" for War

It is worth noting that, while God accommodated Israel's bellicose mindset, His role was essentially *permissive* rather than *causal*. In several Old Testament narratives of "holy wars," God appears to be safeguarding these nations just as He did Israel:

*If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: **their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not** (Num. 14:8-9)*

The Living Bible paraphrases verse 9, "*The Lord is with us and he has removed his protection from them!*" Although God promised Israel victory over their adversaries, the language is *permissive* (Deut. 7:22-24; 21:10; Joshua 10:19, 30). In essence, God removed His protection from Israel's foes, *allowing* them to vanquish them:

*And the Lord said unto Moses, **Fear him not: for I have delivered him into thy hand, and all his people, and his land; and thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto***

Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon. (Num. 21:34)

The Easy-to-Read Version renders it, “*Don’t be afraid of that king. I will allow you to defeat him.*” God also *permitted* them to defeat Og:

And the Lord said unto me, Fear him not: for I will deliver him, and all his people, and his land, into thy hand; and thou shalt do unto him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon. So the Lord our God delivered into our hands Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people: and we smote him until none was left to him remaining. (Deut. 3:2-3)

Again, the Easy-to-Read Version is more helpful in its rendering of verse 3: “*So the Lord our God let us defeat King Og of Bashan.*” As a matter of fact, the Easy-to-Read Version renders a number of “holy war” passages in this manner: “*Don’t be afraid of those armies. I will allow you to defeat them*” (Joshua 10:8), “*The Lord allowed the Israelites to defeat that city and its king*” (Joshua 10:30), “*The Lord allowed Israel to defeat them*” (Joshua 11:8), “*The Lord allowed the Israelites to defeat every enemy*” (Joshua 21:44), “*But I allowed you to defeat them all*” (Joshua 24:11). God’s shield protecting Israel’s adversaries was broken, allowing them to be vanquished.

Offer Peace: Israel’s First Option

While 1 Samuel 15:3 is one of the more extreme examples of God’s condescending directives to destroy, this is probably far less common than some Bible critics assert. For instance, in His instructions to Israel regarding

the cities to be captured, God instructed them to first make a peace offer:

When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. (Deut. 20:10-14)

They were allowed to save the women, children, and animals under this instruction. This further demonstrates how God made accommodations for humans in order to alleviate some of the unnecessary brutality that is frequently seen in conflict.

In his study of the Jewish dispensation, Francis Webber wrote the following regarding 1 Samuel 15:3:

....it was not the natural tendency of the Jewish constitution to encourage cruelty and inhumanity: but that they were extraordinary cases, and such as were peculiar to the circumstances of the Jews, that oblig'd them sometimes to those rigorous methods of proceeding, which otherwise they could not have justified.⁸

Consequently, we have to draw the conclusion that commands for total annihilation were quite uncommon.

Why Condescend to War at All?

The revelation of God's loving nature is progressive throughout the Scriptures. The whole truth of spiritual battle in the heavenlies also needed to be *gradually* revealed to God's people. The pagan nations were devil worshippers and worshiped the devil and disseminated their religion to other nations (Deut. 32:17; Lev. 17:7; 2 Chron. 11:15; Psalm 106:35-38; 1 Cor. 10:20-21; Rev. 9:20).

These countries practiced homosexuality, bestiality, and incest. The worth of human life and dignity was minimal. Children were tortured and sacrificed in order to placate their local deities. As already mentioned, these transgressions caused the whole land to become contaminated (Lev. 18:26-27). If God allowed it to continue, it would mean the annihilation of the entire planet, as it does with any plague. Once more, S. D. Gordon clarifies:

The story of the destruction of the inhabitants of Canaan may seem like a horrible butchery. A surgeon thrusting a knife into a man's vitals, and death actually resulting, may seem like murder. Yet no one who understands, ever thinks of using such a word in either case. The whole purpose is beneficent. When all the knowledge available regarding Canaan is gathered up, the gracious purpose of the divine Surgeon is seen. It is an effort to save the race by removing the horrible cancerous growth threatening its life. God's first thought was directed toward these people, whose sin had gone to such extremes; Israel getting into the land came in as the second consideration. Such is the story of judgment, told in this Book, by picture and word. It is directed against sin, not man.⁹

Jesus had yet to appear in order to destroy Satan and His works (1 John 3:8). Only after Jesus defeated Satan in the wilderness and returned in the power of the Spirit could He legitimately liberate the captives trapped by Satan's power (Matthew 4:23-24; Luke 4:1-18; Matt. 15:21-28).

Until then, Israel's only line of defense against demonic authority was to destroy the people and things that the demons inhabited. This included animals, children, and inanimate objects (Joshua 7:1-26). When Israel failed in this job, the pagan nations became a snare for them, causing them to partake in the same heinous activities, resulting in the same sicknesses and other repercussions of demonic worship (Exodus 23:33; Deut. 7:16, 25; Joshua 23:13; Judges 2:3; 8:27; Psalm 106:36).

In the context of Saul's failure to honor God by destroying everything in Amalek, we must remember that Amalek treated Israel with terrible harshness shortly after they left Egypt (Deut. 25:17-19). Amalek was a murderous country (1 Samuel 15:33). They persisted in harassing Israel until shortly before Saul assumed the throne (1 Samuel 14:47-48). This menace to Israel's existence had to be eliminated since their depravity was beyond repentance (Hos. 4:17; Eph. 4:19; 1 Tim. 4:2; Rev. 9:21; 16:9, 11; 22:11).

Evidence of their depravity is found when one of those Amalekite children Saul failed to exterminate contributed to his death (2 Samuel 1:13-14). Many years afterwards, one of the Amalekite King's descendants, Haman, attempted to destroy all of the people of Israel (Esther 3:1-10). While God certainly was not in favor of killing, this was the only option for Israel to survive until Jesus could come and bring deliverance from Satan to the world.

Chapter Fourteen

Capital Punishment for Man's Protection

Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. (Genesis 9:6)

Bible critics frequently evaluate the Bible by drawing comparisons to contemporary Western norms. Worse yet, some analyze Scripture in light of leftist political beliefs. Many people believe that God is vengeful, cruel, and tyrannical since He imposed the death penalty on murderers.

There's no getting around this conundrum by dismissing this as an exclusively Old Testament problem. The New Testament itself informs us that God approves of the death penalty:

For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. (Rom. 13:4)

For a great number of people, this does not seem to be the Father-God that Jesus demonstrated and preached. Are such anti-death penalty protests justified?

As it was in the Beginning

God made man in an upright manner, but sin introduced death into the world (Eccl. 7:29; Rom. 5:12). God, however, was not done with His creation and wished to show mercy even to the worst violators. God mercifully

spared Cain from the death penalty even after he murdered Abel, the first homicide in human history:

Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. (Gen. 4:14-15)

Because of his love, God spared Cain from the punishment he deserved for his heinous deed. Cain ought to have repented after learning of God's kindness (Rom. 2:4). Unfortunately, instead of repenting, Cain descended even deeper into sin. More murderers descended from his line (Gen. 4:23-24).

The lack of quick repercussions for murder only encouraged men to become more violent (Gen. 6:11-13). Men were so corrupt that God began to regret creating them (Gen. 6:5-7). Despite such depravity, God gave mankind 120 years to repent. He dispatched Noah to preach to them and warn them of coming judgment, but the people refused to repent (Gen. 6:3; 2 Peter 2:5). God had no alternative but to let them be destroyed by a flood of water, save only Noah and his family.

Why the Flood of Noah?

When the flood story is carefully examined, it becomes clear that sin—rather than God using His infinite power—caused the flood that wiped out the majority of humankind:

*They lived at a time when the world had become vile and corrupt. Violence was everywhere. **God saw that the earth was in ruins**, and He knew why: all people on earth except Noah had lived corrupt lives and ruined God's plans for them. **He had to do something.*** (Gen. 6:11-12; The VOICE)

All sin has a harmful impact on our environment, but especially sins of violence and bloodshed (Leviticus 18:25-28; 20:22-23; Psalm 106:37-39; Ezekiel 36:18; Hosea 4:2-3; Joel 3:19; Isaiah 24:4-6). Sin has supernaturally devastating powers.

Genesis 8:2, describing the conditions that existed prior to the deluge, says, “.... *the rain from heaven was restrained*”. As Nicholas Gibbons stated, “.... the waters are restrained from overflowing the earth, only by the power and decree of God.”¹ God's protective presence restrained the flood but the antediluvians preferred that God leave them alone (Job 21:14-17; 22:16-17). Therefore, we are told that He, “.... *only kept safe Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when he let loose the waters over the world of the evil-doers*” (2 Pet. 2:5; Bible in Basic English).

Man's sin, not any intentional act on God's side, destroyed the earth, resulting in a flood. When people refused to repent, God, who had been holding back this torrent, just let it loose. Only by maintaining the land's cleanliness can such tragedies be prevented. The only way this purging could occur is if the offenders perished:

*Failure to honor life in this way **contaminates the very land itself**. Do not pollute the land where you live by allowing*

blood guilt to go unpunished. Once the land has been subjected to such violence, it must be purified, so the blood of the one who caused bloodshed must be shed. (Num. 35:33; The VOICE)

Keep in mind that sin, particularly the sin of violence, pollutes the environment and acts as a trigger for other catastrophic events such as natural disasters. God did not cause the deluge; sin did. In addition to the land being purified—something that can only occur through the perpetrator’s death—the innocent would also suffer in tandem with the guilty.

Capital Punishment: Prevention of Destruction

God was grieved over the immense death and destruction resulting from the flood and did not desire a recurrence of this catastrophe:

And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. (Gen. 8:21)

Note two words God used here in relation to the flood: *curse* and *smite*. God is said to “smite” when He allows men to suffer the consequences of their rebellion (Psalm 78:50-51; 1 Kings 14:15-16; 2 Chronicles 13:15-16; Isaiah 57:17; Judges 20:28, 35). As we have already seen, God’s curse occurs when He removes His protective presence (Deut. 31:17; Joshua 7:12; Malachi 3:7-9).

According to Genesis 6:3, “*And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man.*” This remark,

according to one writer over a century ago, signifies that God's Spirit, "... shall be finally withdrawn, he shall cease to contend with them; and they shall be hopelessly left to the ruin which threatens them."² As a result of God's Spirit no longer striving with man, He lost His supernatural protection, His delaying power, against the forces of destruction.

God saw that before the arrival of Christ, humanity would only continue to live in depravity. Despite this, His love and compassion inspired Him to take action that would spare Him from having to permit another global disaster. The only way to do this was for the perpetrator to *die at the hands of men*:

And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. (Gen. 9:5-6)

It should be noted that God was not going to carry out the execution. Because humans murder, God mandated that other humans absolve the land of its sin by executing the murderer. This may still appear cruel, but it was the only option to save the land and its people.

There are various examples in the Bible that show that entire groups of people or nations can suffer as a result of the crimes of one man. Thirty-six soldiers were murdered in Joshua 7 because one man rebelled against God by stealing forbidden demonic spoils from a different conflict (vv. 1-5). This revolt caused Israel to lose God's protection, resulting in a large number of deaths (vv. 11-

12). Only when capital punishment was instituted at God's command did Israel reclaim their victory.

Opening Doors to Satan

Another example can be found in Numbers 25, where a plague struck Israel as a result of one person's idolatry and immorality. There was only one way to put an end to the plague:

And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand. (Num. 25:8-9)

Neither diseases nor plagues originate from God. Illness finds an opening thanks to sin (Psalm 107:17-21; John 5:14; Mark 2:5-12; James 5:15). By allowing Satan and his evil agents to have their way, God, in this manner, subjects rebels to the consequences of sin:

He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them. He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence (Psalm 78:49-50)

Satan is a *legalist*. Sin provides Satan legal authority to harm people's lives (Eph. 4:26-27; 1 Peter 5:8-9). He is ready to assert his right to intervene against insurgents (Luke 22:31-32; Rev. 12:9-11). Satan is legally entitled to attack if there is sin (1 John 3:8; 1 Cor. 5:1-5).

God must permit the rebels' execution in order to lawfully preserve the lives of the innocent.

Many people believe that capital punishment contradicts God's nature. However, if the disease could be prevented by the killing of the rebels who let it in, and God refused to direct it because He despises killing, this would be an even harsher indictment of His character. Twenty-four thousand people had already died as a result of a few rebels' insurrection, and the only solution to the situation was the rebels' death.

Although God hates the death of the wicked, failing to repent results in death (Ezek. 3:19; 18:23, 32; 33:11). The failure to execute rebels has resulted in the unjust death of countless more individuals. To safeguard and save lives, capital punishment was required.

Some people think that love and the death penalty are incompatible. However, in light of these facts, its absence is irresponsible, thoughtless, and incompatible with genuine love. Because of sin and its destructive nature, God was compelled to impose some laws that He truly detests. God must address everything that jeopardizes the majority's existence and safety.

Minimization of Blood Feuds

Reducing the prevalence of the "blood-feuds" that were prevalent at the time was another crucial justification for the death penalty (Num. 35:18-27). The blood feud occurred in ancient times when someone was killed (whether purposefully or unintentionally).

The victim's nearest male relative thereafter had a sacred obligation to assassinate the killer in order to exact revenge. The family honor was meant to be restored by this. The first killer's family, on the other hand, feels betrayed and feels that retribution is necessary. It was believed that the cycle would continue into a *blood feud*.

God recognized He couldn't immediately abolish men's bloodlust for vengeance, so He worked via Moses to limit and minimize it, just as He did with the heinous system of slavery:

By such checks upon the degradation of slavery, the Jew began to learn the great lesson of the sanctity of manhood. The next step was to teach him the value of life, not only in the avenging of murder, but also in the mitigation of such revenge. The blood-feud was too old, too natural a practice to be suppressed at once; but it was so controlled and regulated as to become little more than a part of the machinery of justice.³

Another author adds, "The practice of blood-revenge, being one of long standing, and founded upon 'an imaginary sense of honor,' was tolerated by Moses; but he took measures to prevent its abuse."⁴ Another source for comprehending Israel's necessity for the death penalty to quell vengeful bloodlust is Gardner C. Hanks:

The death penalty is allowed in the Hebrew Scriptures only for crimes that tear the fabric of society apart. It is instituted primarily as an alternative to the blood feud, which had led to unacceptable levels of unregulated violence as the seminomadic Hebrews settled into agricultural communities. Capital punishment provided a more systematic form of justice through a court system that allowed specific levels of revenge relatively equivalent to the injury done. To a large degree, as envisioned in the law, this system equalized the position of the rich and poor.⁵

God was aware of people's propensity for taking revenge on one another. He would have to suppress their natural need for personal justice at least until He could reveal more about His nature to them (Matt. 5:43-48;

Luke 6:35-37; Rom. 12:14-21; Eph. 4:31-32; 5:1-2; 1 John 4:11-12).

A corrupted kind of justice that was frequently applied in that area was left in the hands of man and went beyond straightforward retaliation. In Genesis 34:1-31, Jacob's sons burned an entire village because *one* man had raped their sister. Due to the over-the-top "tit-for-tat" retaliation practiced in the Ancient Near East, the death penalty was intended to uphold justice while introducing fairness, which was uncommon in that region.

Minimizing the Pain of Execution

Stoning was one of the techniques of death that God mandated. In Leviticus, for instance:

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones. (Leviticus 20:1-2)

Atheists frequently bring up the supposed brutality of stoning. However, this has alarmed some Christians as well. Is God being unkind here? According to certain academics, stoning was practiced in Israel as follows:

When the offender came within four cubits of the place of execution, he was stripped naked, only leaving a covering before, and his hands being bound, he was led up to the fatal place, which was an eminence twice a man's height. The first executioners of the sentence were the witnesses, who generally pulled off their clothes for the purpose: one of them threw him down with great violence upon his loins; if he rolled upon his breast,

he was turned upon his loins again, and if he died by the fall there was an end; but if not, the other witness took a great stone, and dashed upon his breast, as he lay upon his back; and then, if he was not dispatched, all the people that stood by threw stones at him till he died.⁶

According to some Jewish customs, the individual was frequently thrown into a pit already filled with large stones. The plan was for them to fall into the hole and die instantaneously. If not, the task would be completed by hurling a large stone into their chest, crushing it, and purportedly ending their life right then and there. Rather than torturing them, the goal was to swiftly kill them.

Compared to the more brutal means of punishment used by the heathen nations surrounding Israel, such as cutting someone in half, skinning them alive, burning, impalement, drowning, beheading, and throwing them to hungry wild animals, stoning was a quicker and far more humane manner of execution.

In addition, stoning the perpetrator for this offense is not as cruel as offering children to Molech. Idols were constructed in the likeness of Molech, a god with a fire-belly. A live, healthy baby would be placed on the idol's arms by the idolater, who would then let it roll into the belly to be burned alive. The process of death by stoning was considerably faster and less painful than the horrible act perpetrated by the idolater on an innocent baby. Paul Copan says it best when he writes, "So we should evaluate the severity of harsh laws and punishments in their ancient Near Eastern context instead of in light of Western culture."⁷

Jesus: The Perfect Picture of God

The fact that the death penalty is a reflection of the horror of sin is what matters most. It is not, however, a representation of God in any way. We must look to Jesus

Christ, the second person of the Triune Godhead, for the ideal representation of God. The Pharisees attempted to put Jesus to the test about the death penalty:

They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?
(John 8:4-5)

Here, Jesus' reply is crucial. Jesus commanded them, "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*" (v. 7b). It was not stated by Jesus that it was improper to stone this woman. However, He was also aware that these religious leaders' motivations had little to do with following God's instructions. As the Torah expressly indicates, they should have brought the man she was sleeping with for stoning as well if their intentions were pure (Lev. 20:10).

The Pharisees wanted to use Jesus' disobedience of the law as justification for condemning Him. But they couldn't judge the woman because they knew about their own guilt. Following that, we read in John 8:11b, "*Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*" This statement shows us that God is reflected in Jesus and not the law requiring death. Jesus did not come to condemn the world (John 3:16-17).

However, Jesus did not denounce the law. The law is good, but it was instituted as a result of sin (1 Timothy 1:8-9). There would have been no need for a law to curb the spread of sin and its destructive force if there had been no sin. Because of fallen man's predisposition to be hard-hearted and corrupt, the law and its death sentence were necessary provisions. As a result, the law does not reflect God. In opposition to the law, Jesus demonstrates what God is like:

The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But God the only Son is very close to the Father, and he has shown us what God is like.
(John 1:17-18; New Century Version)

God and Jesus are identical. Hard-hearted people are willing to stone someone to death. Jesus demonstrates the nature of God by choosing to show mercy and grace. Jesus wanted the religious authorities to know that *mercy* was indeed the preference of the God who gave the law (Hosea 6:6; Matt. 12:1-7). According to Jesus, the most significant feature of God's law is mercy (Matt. 23:23).

Because he declined to apply the death penalty to Mary when she was discovered pregnant before they were married (and before he learned that the pregnancy was supernatural – Matthew 1:18–20), Joseph, Mary's husband, is referred to be a righteous man. This demonstrates once more that God only permitted specific allowances because most people have hardened hearts. Despite the fact that both the death penalty and divorce are allowed by God's law, they are not any more indicative of who He is than they are of what He is like (Mal. 2:16; Matt. 19:8). Therefore, the true reflection of what God is like is found in “.... *the Good News about the glory of Christ, who is exactly like God*” (2 Cor. 4:4b; New century Version).

Chapter Fifteen

Are Angels God's Secret Assassins?

The Bible describes angels of God who are good. However, it also reveals that Satan is aided and abetted by evil angels who joined him in their rebellion against God (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:7-9). The angels will adopt or imitate the traits of the person they choose to follow. It follows that since Satan is a murderer and killer, there is no reason to doubt that his angels have these traits as well.

But, if God is not a physical killer, and if God's angels reflect God's personality, do they kill? Angels appear to be God's assassins in various passages in the Bible. This, in turn, implies that God is a killer, even if He did so through the use of angels. Ultimately, the mob boss bears equal blame with the hitmen he gave the order to kill. So let's examine some of the texts that mention this more closely and see if we can get any different conclusions about it using the same guidelines that we used in previous lessons.

Angel Smiting 185,000 Assyrians

The Assyrians were threatening King Hezekiah. God promised to protect him and the city after he prayed. We later learn:

Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. (Isa. 37:36; see also 2 Kings 19:35)

Like most of us, I don't find it objectionable when someone has to kill in order to save the innocent. Still, a

consistent knowledge of God's methods is more important than the morality of this particular instance.

Previous lessons have taught us that God never kills directly; instead, He kills by taking away any shield or restraint He may have over those deadly forces that are already in motion because of the introduction of sin and death into the world (Rom. 5:12). Thus, how do we square this reality with Isaiah 37:36's description of the "killer angel"? Earlier in chapter 37, God declares about the Assyrians and their king, Sennacherib:

Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land. (Isa. 37:7; see also 2 Kings 19:7)

The word "send" in verse 7 is the Hebrew word "*nathan*" which we are told that "The original word is frequently used in a permissive sense."¹ Furthermore, "Accordingly our translators in other places often render the verb *nathan*, by *suffer*, or *let*, in the sense of *permitting*."² This "blast" was something that occurred due to the removal of God's protection. Rotherham's Emphasized Bible properly renders the passage, "*Behold me! about to let go against him a blast of alarm.*"

The Hebrew word for "blast" is "ruach". Richard A. F. Barrett says that the word "blast" in the Hebrew means "a wind, a storm or tempest, by which name God's judgments are oft called."³ Although most English translations render it as *spirit* this is not compatible with other passages where the word is employed to indicate God "sending" (permitting, allowing) a scorching or blistering wind to destroy rebels:

*Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will raise up against Babylon, and against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me, a **destroying wind** (Jer. 51:1)*

Jeremiah 4:11-12 also says:

*The time is coming when the Lord will say to the people of Jerusalem, “My dear people, a burning wind is blowing in from the desert, and it’s not a gentle breeze useful for winnowing grain. **It is a roaring blast sent by me! Now I will pronounce your destruction!**” (New Living Translation)*

We can see how destructive the winds are here. This same “blast” or “destructive wind” is responsible for the Assyrian army’s destruction. Scripture generally teaches that God allows things that are already here and ready to destroy but are being restrained to have their way. God assumes whole accountability for such things as if He had carried them out Himself when He allows them to occur.

Angels and Destroying Winds

In his study of Isaiah 37:7, Adam Clarke refutes those who understand “ruach” to mean “spirit” as opposed to “wind”. He writes:

I believe ruach means here a pestilential wind, such as the Arabs call simoom, that instantly suffocates both man and beast; and is what is termed “the angel of the Lord,” God’s messenger of death to the Assyrians.⁴

Albert Barnes agreed and wrote in his commentary, “This wind, called simoom, has been usually supposed to be poisonous, and almost instantly destructive to life.”⁵ One account of this simoom talks about some travelers who:

.... fell asleep at the open window, and were found dead, and their bodies very black and disfigured, in consequence of a blast of the simoom having passed over them while they lay, unconscious of their danger, in that exposed situation.⁶

Since the Assyrians were annihilated at night, it is plausible that they were asleep when the simoom struck, leaving them unprepared. Those who have visited the area where these instances occurred and felt the simoom argue that this is the “blast” mentioned in Isaiah 37:7:

The prophet, in the elevated style of his age and country, states that the enemy were smitten by an “angel of the Lord,” an assertion which by no means precludes the operation of a second cause. The piety of the Jewish prophets was accustomed to acknowledge the divine hand in whatever was greatly beneficial, whether effected by direct interposition or the familiar agencies of nature. Isaiah’s words threaten the insolent conqueror with a “hot blast,” and Jeremiah speaks of them as being cut off by a “destroying wind,” or more literally, “a hot pestilential wind:” words which favour the probability that Sennacherib’s army was destroyed by one of those hot winds which to this day sometimes envelope and destroy whole caravans.⁷

It is widely acknowledged by other simoom survivors that this is the most likely agency responsible for the Assyrian deaths. Furthermore, we found in our investigation that many more experts concur that the “blast” stated in Isaiah 37:7 is most likely the simoom,

although we have restricted our sources to the more well-known Bible expositors for the sake of space. For some, this calls into doubt the inerrancy of the Bible. Why does the inspired passage credit the Lord's angel with killing the Assyrian army if it was actually a simoom?

How the Angel of the Lord Killed

The Bible is error-free and divinely inspired. The progressive nature of revelation, however, requires that it be interpreted in light of other passages of Scripture. For example, God frequently uses His angels to tame natural phenomena like windstorms in the book of Revelation:

*And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, **Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.** (Rev. 7:1-3)*

Verse 2 tells us concerning the angels that “*it was given to hurt the earth.*” The word “given” is the Greek word “*didōmi*” which often means “to permit.” Another has explained, “Given, *that is*, permissively God did suffer them to do, but the time of their power was restrained by Christ.”⁸

Other translations have correctly rendered it in the permissive sense. The Tree of Life Version translates the passage, “*the four angels who were permitted to harm the*

earth and the sea,” The International Standard Version says, “*the four angels who had been **permitted** to harm the land and sea,*” and the James Moffatt Translation reads, “*the four angels who were **allowed** to injure the earth and sea.*” As one author properly explained:

It is said here, that it was given to the four angels to *hurt* the earth and the sea; but just before they are represented as those who were to protect them. The meaning of this latter sentence then is, according to a phraseology to be met with in all languages, that it was in the power of the four angels to *suffer* the earth and the sea to be hurt, they who afforded the occasion of the action being regarded as the cause of it, in the same manner as God is said to harden Pharaoh’s heart, when he only *suffers* it to be hardened (compare Ex. iy. 21, with ix. 34). See also Matth. X. 34 ; Luke xii, 49, 51 ; Rev. xi. 6. And so again “Hurt not the earth, neither the sea,” means *suffer* them not to be hurt.⁹

According to Scripture, the four winds were already determined to blow on the earth, producing enormous challenges for it. The only thing preventing these deadly winds from reaching their targets were the angels who were preventing them. Alternative translations state that these angels were “*restraining the four winds of the earth*” (Christian Standard Bible) and “*They were stopping the wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree*” (Easy to Read Version). The angels of God were deflecting disaster at His gracious command:

It is perfectly apparent that God’s angels are doing their appointed work. They are restraining the destructive forces that stand ready to break loose. But when this divine restraint is withdrawn because the vast multitude has resisted the warnings and entreaties of the merciful Father until their time of probation is closed, then will there be scenes in this world too terrible to describe. And it is to save men

from this that the Lord has bidden His messengers hold the winds of strife while He pleads with them to hasten to the shelter He has provided.¹⁰

Hence, as another has rightly explained, these angels to whom “*it was given to hurt the earth and the sea*” otherwise means, “that is, when they should be permitted to let loose the invading hordes of barbarians.”¹¹ It is obvious that these angels’ strategy to “hurt the earth” would entail releasing the control they held over the forces of destruction that were ready to do harm, *allowing* the disaster to occur rather than directly inflicting it.

This is also how “*the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians.*” He accomplished this by unleashing the simoom that he had previously restrained. This is the fundamental meaning of all passages in which it is stated that one of God's angels smote or killed someone.

Angels Killing With Pestilence

In another incident, we learn that God sent an angel to strike and destroy Israel with a pestilence. This was because David sinned by imposing a consensus on the people:

*And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the **angel that destroyed the people**, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite. And David spake unto the LORD when **he saw the angel that smote the people**, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done*

wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house (2 Sam. 24:16-17)

Do angels of God spread disease? Is illness God's work? In a previous passage from 2 Samuel 24 we read:

*So the LORD **sent** a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men. (1 Sam. 24:15; see also 1 Chron. 21:14)*

The word "sent" is again the Hebrew word "*nathan*" which we already noted "...is frequently used in a permissive sense." It is the same word translated as "suffer" (permit) in Exodus 12:23:

*For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and **will not suffer** the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.*

God declares that He will smite but then clarifies it by stating that He will allow the destroyer (or death-angel) to do the smiting. Regarding this same incident the psalmist wrote, "*He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but **gave their life over to the pestilence***" (Psalm 78:50).

According to some scholars, the work of the angel that is alleged to inflict illness in 2 Samuel 24 should be interpreted as *permissive* rather than *causative*:

He [Satan] tempted David merely to make a census, knowing that God's protecting shield being removed from Israel, punishment would follow, for he delights in suffering. It is added, and "God smote Israel." But it is well known that God is frequently said to do in Scripture what he only permits to be done, for God cannot be the author of evil. Satan was the author of the plague, as he was of the sin, for it is said, "Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel."¹²

We are not, however, to suppose that the Hebrews, in using these expressions, mean to attribute the pestilence to the immediate agency of God; nor would they permit us to understand by the messenger, who they assure us is the agent in business of so disastrous a nature, the true and appropriate angel or legate of Jehovah. It is true, they tell us that God sends forth the pestilence, and that the angel goes with it, and smites the people with its power, but let it not be forgotten that every angel is the creature of God, and that, in a certain sense, God is the author of all things, and all events, whether prosperous or afflictive, whether good or bad.the ancient Hebrews do not appear to have distinguished with sufficient accuracy that liberty or permission which is given us, in the course of Divine providence, to do or not to do, to do good or evil, from the direct and immediate agency of God himself.¹³

God guards us from pestilence as our shield (Psalm 91:1-6). When we remove Him as our shield, however, we face the consequences.

Angel of the Lord Smiting Herod

In a comparable instance, we witness that Herod permitted himself to be exalted as a god, which is why the Lord's angel struck him, or smote him:

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost (Acts 12:21-23)

This issue with Herod presents no real difficulty when we remember that God “smites” by allowing us to suffer the consequences of our rebellion (Exodus 12:23; Judges 20:28, 35, 48; 1 Kings 14:15-16; 2 Chron. 13:15-16; Psalm 78:50; Isa. 57:17). When it comes to sickness Jeremiah writes, “*He shall come and strike [smite] the land of Egypt, **giving over** to the pestilence those who are doomed to the pestilence*” (Jeremiah 43:11a; English Standard Version).

Because they were pining for the meat they had eaten in Egypt, the Israelites grumbled about the manna that God had provided them in the wilderness. Although God granted their prayer for meat, we also learn that, “.... *the LORD smote the people with a very great plague*” (Num. 11:33). But even more insight into this episode can be found in Psalm 106:15, which states, “*So He gave them what they wanted, but He allowed their souls to become weak because of it*” (New Life Version). God is said in Scripture to do that which He only permitted to be done.

This is the way God’s angels work, as we have previously discovered. They “hurt” because they are no longer preventing negative forces like illness and bad weather. Angels of God are not assassins any more than God is.

Chapter Sixteen

Other Killings Attributed to God

In this last chapter, we'll examine several additional killings mentioned in Scripture that are either attributed to God or that the reader typically assumes He carried out.

Er and Onan

Er and his brother Onan figure in two of the earliest stories in the Bible where killings are directly attributed to God:

*And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and **the Lord slew him** And the thing which he did displeased the Lord: wherefore **he slew him also**. (Gen. 38:7, 10)*

*The sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah: which three were born unto him of the daughter of Shua the Canaanitess. And Er, the firstborn of Judah, was evil in the sight of the Lord; and **he slew him**. (1 Chronicles 2:3)*

Er and Onan's deaths are ascribed to the Lord, and no explanation is provided. It is not made clear to us how the Lord is supposed to have caused these deaths. As a result, we don't have much information to go on.

Furthermore, most Bible expositors provide no insights that are not already included in the text, nor do we gain much assistance from Bible dictionaries. Nonetheless, if we learnt nothing else in the previous

chapters, we should have understood that Scripture is the best dictionary and commentary on the Bible.

The best explanation for how God is alleged to have slain Er and Onan can be found in the Scriptures. Finding God's pattern in Scripture, where He is mentioned as having slain others, is the greatest approach to comprehend how He *slew* Er and Onan.

One example that we have examined already, but is worth repeating here, is Concerning King Saul where we are told that he “.... *enquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him*” (1 Chron. 10:14a). However, several verses before that we are told, “*So Saul took a sword, and fell upon it So Saul died*” (1 Chron. 10:4b, 6a). Saul actually killed himself. He committed suicide.

So, why is it said that the Lord *slew* him? It all comes back to a simple Hebrew idiom found throughout Scripture in which God is said to perform what He permitted or did not prevent (1 Sam. 28:19). Because God did not intervene to prevent Saul's adversaries from seriously hurting him, causing him to commit suicide, the ancient Hebrews attributed it to God in their common parlance.

Scripture also states that shortly before Egypt's Exodus, God slew its firstborn children:

*And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that **the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt**, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem.*
(Exodus 13:15)

But again, as we saw in earlier chapters, God's only means of having slain the firstborn is by permitting

another who brings death (Satan) to do it. By following God's instruction, the Lord promised, "*He will not let the one who brings death come into your houses and kill you*" (Exodus 12:23; New Century Version).

The Psalmist wrote, "*He did not keep them from dying but **let them die by a terrible disease**. God killed all the firstborn sons in Egypt*" (Psalm 78:51b-51a; New Century Version). Here we see that God killed (slew) the firstborn by not intervening to stop the sickness that were brought by Satan's evil angels upon them (see Psalm 78:49).

Another verse that we find beneficial where we are told that the Lord slew someone is found in Joshua 10:10, where we are told about Israel's adversaries, "*.... the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon.*" Nevertheless, in verse 8 God told Joshua that He "*delivered them into thine hand*" or, as the Easy-to-Read Version renders it, "*I will allow you to defeat them.*" Because these foes were no longer protected, Israel was able to pursue and smite them (Josh. 10:10; Num. 14:8-9).

All of these places in Scripture where we are told that God *slew* certain individuals by permitting them to be slaughtered by their enemies, by satanic agents, or even by their own hand are the interpretive model for understanding how God slew Er and Onan. It is the language of Scripture to say that God did that which He merely permitted, and Scripture is clear on this same point when we are told that God slew someone.

God Sought to Kill Moses

One of the most puzzling accounts of God's alleged killing is His attempt to kill an obedient Moses. Moses was sent by God to Egypt to deliver His people from slavery. We are told that God attempted to

assassinate Moses while he was on his way to perform exactly what God commanded:

*And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that **the LORD met him, and sought to kill him**. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision (Exodus 4:24-26)*

Does this make sense at all now? If we keep in mind some of the things we've learned in earlier lessons, it will. First, as the tale of Uzzah taught us, we can carelessly or inadvertently transgress God's commandments, leaving ourselves vulnerable to accusations and even execution by Satan.

Only until one of his sons was circumcised by his wife Zipporah did the threat to Moses' life lessen. Due to his failure to circumcise his children as required by the Abrahamic covenant, Moses almost perished (Gen. 17:10–13; 21:4). Moses was no longer under God's covenantal protection as a result of this disregard (Gen. 15:1).

And yet, having sent Moses to Egypt to save His people, would the Lord now want to execute him directly for this transgression? Unlikely, but Satan was determined to prevent Moses from rescuing them. As a result, Satan discovered a legal loophole that would allow him to execute Moses in the event that he disobeyed God's commands.

One scholar, who did extensive research on the interpretation of Exodus 4:24-26 writes, ".... several rabbis opposed the idea that Yahweh sought to kill Moses,

and thus replaced the assailant as the angel of the Lord, the Destroyer, Prince Mastema (Satan).”¹ According to one of the Jewish Targums, which are ancient Jewish commentary on the Bible, verse 26 describes Zipporah confronting the Angel of Death:

And when the Destroyer had ceased from him, Zipporah gave thanks and said, How lovely is the blood of this circumcision which hath saved my husband from the hand of the angel of death!²

Another scholar, commenting on this targum, explained, “It was not the Lord who met Moses in the inn and sought to kill him (Ex. iv. 24), but the angel of the Lord, according to the T. P., which calls him the destroyer, and the angel of death.”³ This “destroyer” and “Angel of Death” is none other than Satan (Heb. 2:14-15; Rev. 9:11). Other Jewish interpreters of Scripture agreed that the one truly seeking to kill Moses was Satan. From the book of Jubilees, we learn:

And you yourself know what He spoke to you on Mount Sinai, and what prince Mastema desired to do with you when you were returning into Egypt. Did he not with all his power seek to slay you and deliver the Egyptians out of your hand when he saw that you were sent to execute judgment and vengeance on the Egyptians? (Jubilees 48:2-3)

Again, Prince Mastêmâ is none other than Satan. This is the moniker given to him by the early Jews. The Jews were given a progression in their understanding of God’s character and Satan’s actions, and they read Scriptures like Exodus 4:24 accordingly. According to Charles Arthur Hawley’s analysis of the text in Jubilees:

Judaism must go out and become the universal religion, but it can do this only by making its God

universal. No Gentile nor high-minded Jew could ever be brought to worship a god capable of the acts attributed to him in the story in Exodus 4. It is worthy of note that Jesus in all cases adopts the conception of Jubilees rather than that of Genesis.⁴

Keep in mind that the Scripture itself is clear as to the progress of revelation in Scripture. Remember that we are told in one passage, “.... *the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them*” (2 Sam. 24:1) but we are told in another passage written centuries later, “*And Satan stood up against Israel*” (1 Chron. 21:1). There’s no good reason to argue against the application of the same fact to Exodus 4:24–26. Ultimately, I concur with the observation made by Old Testament expert Walter Kaiser on this text: “.... what God permitted is often said in the Old Testament to be done directly by him.”⁵

Hophni and Phinehas

In the book of 1 Samuel, two sons of the high priest Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, are the subject of another one of God’s “kills.” The men were expected to support their father in his role as priest. Rather, they had sexual relations with the ladies, pilfered from the offerings, and disregarded Eli’s grudging admonitions. Most of our English translations imply that all of this occurred as a result of God’s predetermined plan to have a purpose for killing them:

*If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, **because the LORD would slay them.*** (1 Samuel 2:25)

We know that this perspective runs counter to the biblical teaching that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Eze. 18:23; 33:11). As a result, the KJV and comparable translators' renderings are unreliable. This, according to one man, is an illustration of the flaws in several of our English translations:

Imperfections in our translations have given rise to many things hard to be explained. The English translation now in use, is probably the best ever made; yet there are imperfections in it, where the true sense of the original has not been conveyed, or conveyed only in part 1 Sam. ii. 25, "Because the Lord would slay them." The Hebrew is: "Therefore the Lord would slay them."⁶

Another has noted, "The proper rendering, then, of this passage is, Notwithstanding, they hearkened not unto the voice of their Father. Therefore, the Lord would slay them."⁷ This is the most accurate rendering, according to at least one older translation: "*Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, **therefore** the LORD purposed to destroy them*" (The Holy Bible with Emendations by J.T. Conquest).

While this clearly refutes the notion that God would purposefully predestine Hophni and Phinehas to act wickedly in order to have a reason to kill them, it nonetheless portrays God as the actual executioner of the wicked. As a result, it is beneficial to delve a little deeper into the original Hebrew. As a result, according to one researcher, "The Hebrew particle *vau*, neither designates the cause of their destruction, nor the direct and absolute intention of God to cut them off in their sins."⁸

Allowing the Scriptures to speak for themselves will lead one to this conclusion without the necessity for a Hebrew scholar. The plain truth is that Hophni and Phinehas were slain by the Philistines, not by God. When

Israel went to war against the Philistines, accompanied by Hophni and Phineas, we are told, “*And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain*” (1 Samuel 4:11). Due to their lack of divine protection, Eli’s sons and numerous other Israelites were slain by the Philistines and the ark of God was taken from them:

So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand. He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance. (Psalm 78:60-62)

The ark of God is referred to as God’s “glory” (1 Sam. 4:21-22). It’s also known as God’s “strength” in other places (2 Chron. 6:41; Psalm 132:8). God allowed the Philistines to take it from Israel. We are also told, “*He allowed His people to be killed with the sword*” (Psalm 78:62a; New Life Version). I believe the following perspective sums it up well:

When it says of the sons of Eli, that “they hearkened not to their father,” it simply means what it says, viz., that of their own deliberate and wicked free-will, they refused his advice. And when it implies that this came to pass, “because the Lord would slay them,” what more does it teach of necessity, than that God was so displeased with their wilful and obstinate wickedness, that He did not rescue them from it by his grace? **He fulfilled his purpose of slaying them by leaving them to themselves.**⁹ (Emphasis added)

There is no need to attribute the deaths of Hophni and Phineas to an irresistible predestination or to God’s

active involvement. Men bring death upon themselves when they disassociate themselves from under the wings of God's protection (Deut. 32:11; Ruth 2:12; Psalm 17:8; 57:1; 61:4; 91:1-4; Matt. 23:37). When this occurs, God, by the Hebrew idiom, is said to have done it because He did not prevent it.

“Though He Slay Me”

Anyone who has attended a few Christian funerals has heard the following statement from Job, “.... *the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*” (Job 1:21b). The scripture is frequently used to support the belief that the deceased person's body is resting in the coffin because the Lord has killed that person or has taken them away.

Job made the comment in response to the deaths of his children and the bulk of his staff. He credited God for his woes once more when he reprimanded his wife for advising him to curse God and die (Job 2:9-10). Job, however, is not the only one who does this. The divinely inspired narrator, or author of the book, also attributes Job's troubles on God (Job 42:10-11), and God even accepts responsibility for them (Job 2:3).¹⁰

While many Christians have no issue with the idea that God caused all of the tragic events that Job experienced, others are often discouraged to hear about a God who inflicts such cruelty upon someone He claimed to be a perfect servant. However, the more astute and attentive reader of the book of Job will keep in mind that God did not actively participate in Job's trials other than to step aside and permit Satan to bring them about (Job 1:6-12; 2:4-7). Basically, the book of Job, when read correctly, iterates the Hebrew idiom in which God is said to do that which He permitted or did not prevent (2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:1; Ex. 12:23).

Nonetheless, proponents of the “killer-God” approach to Job frequently cling to another reasonably well-known line from the book that they assert provides the best explanation of what it means for men to trust in God:

***Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him:
but I will maintain mine own ways before
him.*** (Job 13:15)

We are told by the “killer-God” adherents that this statement is “a wonderful expression of faith” and “the most sublime utterance of faith in the whole of the Bible.” It is also meant to serve as a prime illustration of submitting to the “will of God,” even in cases where that “will” involves misfortune, illness, destitution, and death.

The Hebrew word usually translated as “trust” is the word *bâṭach*. It is translated as “trust” in the KJV 103 times. It is also translated as “confidence” at least four times. Thus, *bâṭach* is the word that is normally associated with having confidence in God.

The Hebrew word translated as “trust” in Job 13:15 is *yâchal*. It only appears twice as “trust” in the Old Testament (Job 13:15; Isa. 51:5). It is typically translated in various places in the Old Testament as *hope*, *wait*, *tarry*, *pained*, and *stayed*. In contrast to *bâṭach*, *yâchal* is largely unrelated to having faith in God.

The apparent mistranslation of this passage in the KJV and other English Bible editions has thankfully come to the attention of numerous Bible scholars. One scholar noted, “Unfortunately, this phrase represents a hallowed mistranslation, suggested by a pious correction of the scribes in the margin of the Hebrew manuscripts.”¹¹ Another has given us the correct translation:

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him”—an utterance which Cooke calls an expression of the most triumphant hope in the salvation of God.” Unfortunately for him, however, the proper translation of this passage is, “Lo, he may slay me, yet will I wait for him.” Delitzsch renders it, “I wait for him that he may slay me.”¹²

Thankfully, more precise renderings have been offered by several English translations. One example among many is Jay P. Green, Sr.’s *Literal Translation of the Bible* which reads, “*Behold, He will cut me off; I will not wait, but I will justify my ways before His face.*”

Job was essentially expressing his desire to meet with God and declare his innocence. Job felt that he did not deserve all the suffering he has experienced and he wanted to confront God about this, even if it meant running the danger of losing his life. Consequently, the message to be derived from Job 13:15 certainly isn’t one of equating faith with a fatalistic passivity in which one believes that God has some mysterious purpose in violently destroying His people’s lives.

Ananias and Sapphira

Ananias and Sapphira, a couple who sold some land, are mentioned in the book of Acts. They pocketed a portion of the proceeds from the sale while pretending to donate the entire sum to the church in an effort to impress the saints. Peter openly confronted both individuals as the Holy Spirit disclosed their scheme to him. Both passed away immediately after being challenged:

And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and

the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. (Acts 5:5, 10)

It is easy to understand how one would instinctively infer that Ananias and Sapphira are examples of rebels executed by God, especially if students of Scripture start their study in the Old Testament and work their way to the New Testament, which contains numerous comments to the same effect. However, it is not stated in the Bible that God killed them. It only says that they “gave up the ghost” and died.

Whether these deaths were caused by the natural shock that anxiety produced to their systems or if it was a miraculous judgment of God is a matter of debate among scholars. Frank Stagg, the late Baptist theologian, argues that the couple passed away naturally:

The prevailing New Testament view seems to be that wrath is operative as a natural, not arbitrary, law; sin is serious enough to carry its own consequences. Many have concluded that Ananias and Sapphira died of shock, not the arbitrary decree of God. This view, if true, is more readily harmonized with the larger New Testament teaching. These deaths can be accounted for psychologically. The many signs accomplished in those days gave all the believers an awareness of divine power operative in their midst and struck awe and fear in their hearts. The sudden exposure of Ananias’ sin against God could easily have produced the shock resulting in his death. Sapphira experienced that shock and also the shock that came with the news of her husband’s death.¹³

Another scholar, Ben Witherington, adds, “.... it is not impossible that we are talking about death by heart attack brought on by double shock.”¹⁴ Therefore, since God is not directly implicated in the deaths of Ananias

and Sapphira, it is just as valid to assume that shock of exposure killed them.

However, even if one is persistent in believing that God was the executioner here, His method is no different than what we have learned concerning how He is said to kill in the Old Testament. For example, the future king David asked a rich man Nabal for some sustenance for he and his men (1 Sam. 25:2-9). In return, Nabal rejected David's request and insulted him in the process (1 Sa. 25:10-12). As a result, David decided that he would kill Nabal and destroy his property (1 Sam. 25:12-13).

Thankfully, Nabal's wife, Abigail, intervened and prevented this massacre (1 Sam. 25:14-35). However, when Abigail told Nabal how close he came to both death and ruin, similar to Ananias and Sapphira, the news brought about a shock in his system:

*But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that **his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.** And it came to pass about ten days after, that **the Lord smote Nabal, that he died.** (1 Samuel 25:37-38)*

Medically speaking, Nabal was so frightened about how close he came to death that he suffered a heart attack and this paralyzed him. This eventually led to his death. Yet, we are told that the Lord *smote* him.

However, as we learned in chapter four, God's smiting is not by utilizing divine power destructively but to abandon rebels to the consequences of their rebellion. As we are told in 1 Kings 14:15-16, "**For the Lord shall smite Israel.... And he shall give Israel up**" or, as the Easy-to-Read Version says, "*He will let the Israelites be defeated.*"

With Ananias and Sapphira, the same concept can be readily implemented. Egregious sin such as lying to the Holy Spirit can quench, grieve, and drive Him away (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19; Gen. 6:3; Isa. 63:10). This can result in the loss of His protection and could have easily given Satan access to bring about the death-blows as he enjoys killing and destroying. Allowing Satan access to unrepentant sinners in the church is a Biblical means of judgment (1 Cor. 5:1-5). Consequently, Scripture is the foundation for both the natural explanation and the supernatural judgment explanation, and neither one calls for God to take a direct role in the situation.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Scripture has numerous examples of instances when God is held responsible for a killing or death in some other way that have not been discussed. But it would be pointless to try to address each and every scenario in the Bible when God is cited as the cause of someone's death. There's no amount of proof that could persuade those who think God actually kills people to change their perspective. They are convinced that this is what the Bible says, and no exegesis of the Bible will make them think otherwise. As a result, these people will always have some sort of proof-text to support their claims.

Still, for those who are troubled by the idea that God literally kills in any form, we believe that the passages already covered in this book presents the Biblical principles for interpreting all passages of this nature. Most importantly, as one understands the interpretive principles outlined in this book, one should understand that the God, whose nature is revealed in Jesus Christ, is not the death-inflictor, but the Savior from the infliction of death.

Appendix A

Denying the Permissive Sense: Response to Dr. Michael L. Brown

Certain individuals have repeatedly brought to my attention that some scholars disagree that the Hebrew Scriptures have a *permissive sense* and that some passages—especially those found in the King James Version and other comparable English translations—should be interpreted as they are written in the English language.

A prominent Messianic Jewish apologist named Dr. Michael L. Brown was one of the scholars who I heard cited several times. When I had more time, I planned to investigate his claims for this; but, it wasn't until recently that someone actually brought his publication "*Compassionate Father or Consuming Fire*" to my attention.

Denying the Permissive Sense

Dr. Brown gives a critique of some so-called Word of Faith doctrine in this publication. Dr. Brown's book focuses on the answers supplied by Faith proponents for passages in which God is implicated in the distribution of disease and other calamities. Dr. Brown states in the book's preface:

It is my conviction that many of the standard "faith" answers have robbed the Word of its integrity and have failed to rightly apprehend all of God's message. The emphasis on "intermediate agents" (carrying out God's will, as if this absolves Him) or unknown secret sins (allegedly committed by those suffering) has evaded the problem rather than solved it. The question still remains: What do we do with the God of the Old Testament who says,

“I kill and make alive; I have wounded and it is I
Who heal” (Deuteronomy 32:39)?¹

Dr. Brown references Deuteronomy 32:39 multiple times throughout his book to support his case against faith proponents. Nonetheless, the “standard ‘faith’ answers” that Dr. Brown rejects tell us exactly what to do with Deuteronomy 32:39: interpret it *permissively*. However, claiming his credentials as a Semitic scholar, Dr. Browne maintains that the “permissive sense” in Hebrew does not exist:

.... I say this as someone with a bachelor’s degree in Hebrew and a master’s and Ph.D. in Semitic languages; I also own every single major, scholarly grammar of the Hebrew language, and I assure you that the “permissive sense” does not exist.²

The main point of contention raised by Dr. Brown is that certain biblical passages, including Exodus 15:26, seem to suggest that God causes sickness in humans. In light of his personal knowledge of the Semitic languages, he feels that verses like Exodus 15:26, Deuteronomy 32:39, and other passages should be read as they are written in the KJV and comparable versions.

I would never minimize Dr. Brown’s academic accomplishments. A lot of effort and commitment are needed to obtain these degrees. Furthermore, individuals who have the self-control and the time to finish such a course of study are a true asset to the body of Christ. As I own several of Dr. Brown’s publications, I can vouch for the benefits that come with his academic credentials. Dr. Brown’s ministry is a blessing to the church, in my opinion. Consequently, it is not intended to be harsh when I refute his views on the permissive sense in the following. He is a preacher of the gospel, a scholar, and

most importantly, a brother in Christ, for whom I have the utmost respect.

God Hardened Pharaoh's Heart

Having said that, some Semitic language specialists believe in the existence of a “permissive sense” or “permissive idiom.” Most individuals would agree that passages in the Bible in which God is claimed to harden Pharaoh's heart have perplexed people for millennia. In an attempt to address this, British biblical scholar Joseph Bryant Rotherham (1828–1910) released *The Emphasized Bible* translation in 1902.

In Exodus 4:21 where the King James Version reads, “*but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go,*” Rotherham rendered it, “*but, I, will let his heart wax bold, and he will not suffer the people to go.*” In relation to this “hardening,” Rotherham explained that “It often takes the modifications expressed by permit”³ Moreover, Rotherham justified this understanding on the grounds that it rightly reflects “.... the known character of God, and **the well attested latitude of the Semitic languages** which are accustomed to speak of occasion as cause”⁴ (Emphasis are mine).

Furthermore, Exodus 4:21 was rendered similarly by the late Jewish Rabbi and professor of Hebrew to the Jews, Dr. Abraham Benisch, who was undoubtedly also conversant in the Semitic languages: “.... **but I will suffer his heart to be hardened, that he shall not let the people go**” (Jewish School & Family Bible, Volume I).

Some experts on Hebrew claim that the text has a hiphil stem or conjugation that supports interpreting some portions as permissive. The notes on Exodus 4:21 in one older study Bible stated that, “Verbs in the Hiphil voice denote to suffer, to permit to be done, as well as to cause to be done.”⁵ The permissive sense of this hiphil is confirmed by Dr. Robert Young, the scholar most faith

proponents consult when referencing a permissive sense in Scripture, in his remarks on Exodus 10:1:

X. 1. DECLARED HARD.] See 3. 19; the causative (or Hiphil) form of the Hebrew verb is often simply permissive or declarative, as has been already repeatedly noticed, and as is universally admitted by all Biblical critics; see Ex. 23:7; 22:9; De. 25:1; 2 Sa. 15:4; Is. 2: 21; 1 K. 8:32; Job 9:20, &c.⁶

Dr. Young remarked that this truth was accepted by *all* Bible critics at the time. Two examples from a long list should suffice to demonstrate this.⁷ In his 1805 publication, *An Entrance into the Sacred Language; Containing the Necessary Rules of Hebrew Grammar in English*, Cornelius Bayley stated, “Verbs in Hiphil are to be understood either in a declarative, causative, or permissive sense, as the subject matter and analogy of faith require.”⁸ Similarly, Hubbard Winslow argued in his 1829 book defending Trinitarian doctrine:

Every Biblical scholar is familiar with the nature and force of the Hiphil conjugation in Hebrew, in which words are taken in a causative and permissive sense. He is also aware, that the Hebraistic idiom is carried from the Old into the New-Testament.⁹

Did the truth of the hiphil conjugation’s permissive connotation disappear with time, or do contemporary findings refute the conclusions drawn by experts from earlier eras? Not according to contemporary academic Chaim Bentorah, who teaches Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek in Chicago and holds a master’s degree in Old Testament and Hebrew.

Bentorah writes in one of his volumes on Hebrew Word Studies, “.... We have now learned from the Dead

Sea Scrolls and the discovery of the Ugaritic language that when a verb is in a hiphil active form, it becomes permissive.”¹⁰ From this Bentorah concludes, “We now have grammatical evidence that this phrase should be rendered, ‘I will permit Pharaoh’s heart to be hardened.’”¹¹

Additionally, Dr. Brown claims to own “every single major, scholarly grammar of the Hebrew language” which leads me to assume that the ones in his possession do not teach the permissive sense of the hiphil conjugation or they deny its existence. While I lack the credentials or authority to identify which Hebrew grammatical works are the most important, I am aware of various older and recent scholarly Hebrew grammar publications that support the permissive connotation of the hiphil.¹² We will return to this hiphil conjugation shortly.

David Moved to Number Israel

Because I lack theological and academic credentials, I rely significantly on the scholarly works of learned individuals. I value the multiple commentaries and Bible dictionaries that are available. Nonetheless, God’s Word remains its greatest dictionary and commentary. Despite the fact that Dr. Brown was unable to find proof in his own knowledge of the original Semitic languages, the preceding chapters demonstrated that by “interpreting Scripture with Scripture,” a strong case is made for the permissive sense of such Scriptures as Deuteronomy 32:39, as well as being able to comprehend it from a progressive revelation perspective. As a result, if our education leads us to conclusions on a particular topic that are refuted by an exegesis of Scripture, we must abandon our education in *that* area.

It’s not like Dr. Brown is oblivious of this fact. Dr. Brown’s book provides a good explanation of progressive

revelation by contrasting 2 Samuel 24:1 with 1 Chronicles 21:1.¹³ The issue is in Dr. Brown's belief that God selects or *appoints* these agents of destruction in the same way that someone would employ a hitman. To be fair, he does try to distinguish between God's activities and those of intermediate agents.¹⁴

It would be completely unnecessary to use semantical gymnastics in this earnest endeavor to differentiate between God and "intermediate agents" if Dr. Brown did not reject the permissive sense. For this reason, in the first chapter of this book, I interpret 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1 differently, showing that the latter establishes the *permissive* interpretation of the former.¹⁵ I have shown in this same chapter that other scholars support my view.

However, we may still use the idiom of permission to resolve it on our end, even if Dr. Brown—based on his expertise—is adamant that the wording in these passages supports his thesis that God actually *appoints* Satan (and other intermediates) to bring about evil. In one of his sermons, Henry Arthur Woodgate (1801-1874), Rector of Belbroughton, understood this seeming "appointment" in 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1 as idiomatic of God's *permission*: "In Scripture language, God is often said to order and appoint what He permits; and thus this device of Satan is permitted by God for the punishment of Israel."¹⁶ Another late scholar, Isaac Brown, concurred: "God, as Supreme Controller of all things, is said to have done what in reality He permitted Satan to do."¹⁷

God's Policy of Non-Interference

Therefore, rather than literally *appoint* Satan to this task as Dr. Brown believes, in essence, making God a party to sinful temptation (James 1:13), God merely permitted or rather, no longer held Satan back from

moving David. This is the position taken by the late Henry P. Linton, a Lecturer in divinity in St. Aiden's Theological College. Linton countered the alleged difficulties of the two passages by appealing to God's "permissive providence:"

The difficulty alleged to exist in this passage may be altogether removed by distinguishing between God's permissive and his directing or special providence. By the former, He *allows* men and Satan to act as his unconscious instruments, overruling their evil so as to bring out of it good for his people. By the latter alone could he be said to be the *direct* author of all human actions; thus, in 2 Sam., we have THE LORD mentioned, without whom none can act, whether Satan or man; while in 1 Chron., we find the instrument whom He permits to act specified, so that David was moved by both; by Satan directly, whose evil suggestion influenced him in his illadvised measure; by THE LORD indirectly, whose permissive providence allowed his error-at least, by its non-interruption-and made it the instrument of his chastisement afterwards.¹⁸

Note that Linton believed that the Lord's part in this incident was *indirect* and that, rather than commissioning or *appointing* Satan to the task, He simply did not interrupt or prevent Satan from doing so. There is a vast difference between appointing someone to a task and no longer restraining someone from taking on a task they themselves desire to do.

Satan did what he did to David, not because God appointed him to do it, but because this was in Satan's nature to do. God merely lifted any restraint He once held over Satan. In 1875, Horatius Bonar wrote, "It was in God's anger that he was permitted to do so (2 Sam. xxiv. 1), yet none the less was it truly Satan's work; his work as the murderer, his work as the enemy of Israel and of the Church."¹⁹ Similarly, in 1919, Isaac Brown stated

concerning the two passages, “The older record speaks only of God’s permissive action: the later tells us of the malicious instrumentality of Satan.”²⁰

Quotes of this nature can be multiplied but this will suffice to demonstrate that Dr. Brown’s viewpoint is rejected by more than just proponents of faith teaching. If revelation is progressive, and Dr. Brown agrees that it is, and 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1 makes the best case for it, then it necessitates understanding the former passage in a permissive sense. The entire purpose of progressive revelation is to show that God is not the guilty party. He just assumed responsibility for Satan’s actions until His people were ready for a more in-depth revelation of this evil spirit without worshipping him.²¹ As a result, God would not *assign* Satan, subsequently revealed to be His own adversary, to do the very things He condemns, such as causing people to sin. Furthermore, the *good intermediaries* (such as God’s angels) will function similarly to the Lord Himself (see Chapter 15).

The permissive sense hermeneutic recognizes God’s protective hand and restraint over the forces of evil (2 Thess. 2:7-11). This protection is only removed when people disobey God; at that point, they are *turned over* to the powers that are waiting to kill them (Matt. 23:37-38; Luke 19:41-44; Psalm 81:10-16). This truth has been discussed extensively throughout this book and in other works. In previous chapters, we showed how this applies to passages like Deuteronomy 32:39 (and 1 Samuel 2:6).

Does God Literally Deceive?

Therefore, while Dr. Brown asks the question as to what do we do with the God who says, “I kill and make alive” I challenge him with another question: “What do we do with the God of the Old Testament who says, ‘*And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet*’” (Ezekiel 14:9a)?

In chapter one, we provided an answer to that question by demonstrating how texts such as Eze. 14:9 must first be understood in the context of progressive revelation. God frequently accepted responsibility for the actions of Satan since the early Hebrews were ill-prepared for the truth about him. We see that all deception is attributed to Satan only because God has been able to gradually reveal more and more truth about him (John 8:44; 2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Thess. 2:9-10; Rev. 12:9-11; 20:7-10).

Consequently, it is a leap to suggest that God personally commissions or appoints others to deceive on His behalf, given that we know He does not physically engage in deception. After all, we are told in Deut. 32:4b, “*He’s the faithful God, **never deceiving**; altogether righteous and true is he*” (Complete English Bible). Dr. Brown would have to concur that God is a deceiver by default if God assigns Satan to lie and mislead as someone who has hired a hitman. Based on my understanding of Dr. Brown and his sincere devotion to our Lord, I don’t think he could conscientiously adopt such a stance.

Hence, I would behoove Dr. Brown to reconsider his view in regards to the legitimacy of the permissive sense. As we demonstrated in chapter one, scholars such as E. W. Bullinger and B. Boothroyd believed that a proper translation of Ezekiel 14:9 is that God merely permitted the deception. Other renowned scholars affirm that there is a *hiphil* conjugation which means that there is a *permissive sense* underlying the text.

For the form called *hiphil*, in Hebrew, often denotes only permission, and is rendered elsewhere to that sense by our translators.... To the same sense many interpreters understand those words of Ezekiel, (xiv. 9.) *I the Lord have deceived that prophet*. And in general we may observe, that the Scripture

commonly speaks of what is permitted by Providence, as if it were directed by it.²²

And that the Author of the Vowel points understood the deceiving in Ezekiel only in a *permissive* sense, is plain, because פתח is there pointed as in Piel, which, as well as *Hiphil*, is *permissive*. So the word in Jeremiah is in Hiphil, and may be understood *permissively*.²³

Furthermore, one scholar, John Thein, noted concerning Ezekiel 14:9, "... here, like in so many other passages of the Bible, the verbs which properly indicate an action, are also to be taken by metonymy in the sense of a simple permission."²⁴ Hence, passages such as Ezekiel 14:9 must be read in the sense that God merely removes His restraint from deceivers and permits them to act upon rebellious men. Even a die-hard Calvinist such as W. G. T. Shedd agreed that God's operation in this area is via His *restraint* rather than His *causation*:

The permissive decree is executed in part by the withdrawal of restraints, as a punitive act of God which St. Paul speaks of in Rom. 1: 24, 28. This is a punishment for sin previously committed. "When God 'gives up' the sinner to sin, he does not himself cause the sin. To withdraw a restraint is not the same as to impart an impulse. The two principal restraints of sin are the fear of punishment before its commission, and remorse after it. These are an effect of the Divine operation in the conscience; the revelation of the Divine in human consciousness. When God 'gives over' an individual he ceases, temporarily, to awaken these feelings. The consequence is utter moral apathy and recklessness in sin" (Shedd, On Romans, 1: 24). The view of Augustine is expressed in the following extracts, and is the same as Calvin's. "When you hear the Lord say, 'I the Lord have deceived that prophet' (Ezek. 14: 9), and likewise

what the apostle says, 'He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth' (Rom. 9: 18), believe that in the case of him whom he permits to be deceived and hardened his evil deeds have deserved the judgment.²⁵

I am sure that Dr. Brown does not embrace predestination theology. Yet, as we see, even some Calvinists can see the necessity of comprehending such passages from the perspective of permission. It is also worth noting that, according to *The Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament, Volume I*, there is a hiphil conjugation (future tense) in Deuteronomy 32:39.²⁶ Based on the confirmation given by other scholars in relation to the hiphil conjugation in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and Ezekiel 14:9, is there not at least the *possibility* that Deuteronomy 32:39 be read in a permissive sense? I will leave that for Dr. Brown to decide.

Repercussions for Denying this Truth

The Scripture examples above have been cited by many who have failed to interpret them properly and used them to disparage God's character. The clearest way to understand them is in light of the permissive sense, which Dr. Brown and others are intent on rejecting. James Kendall has stated how ignorance of the permissive sense has culminated in destructive teaching:

There is likewise an idiom peculiar to the language of every nation, more especially of the Eastern nations, which it is necessary, as far as may be, to learn; otherwise we shall make the sacred writers say more, or less, than they intended to say; and shall be liable to wrest some things, which they do say, to their dishonour and our own destruction. **For instance, in the language of Scripture God is sometimes said to do what he only permits to**

take place under his moral government; to do what he gives power or opportunity to his creatures to do themselves; to do what he foretells will take place by the agency of others; to do what naturally results from his having withdrawn those influences of his grace, which have long been abused, resisted, and quenched.²⁷ (Emphasis are mine)

Failure to understand this truth has led to blaming God for things He has not done. This has also allowed us to justify our own sin. No doubt it was the habit of misinterpreting Scripture for such purposes that led James to address this matter in the early church:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. (James 1:13)

Kendall alludes to the statement in James to address the neglect of the permissive sense hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture and how it has led to mischaracterizing God:

Now to understand such passages literally and without any qualification would be to make a pure and holy God, with whom is no iniquity, and who cannot look upon sin; the principal and immediate agent in the most horrid crimes recorded in the inspired volume; and this, too, in the face of the most solemn prohibitions of the inspired writers themselves, who forbid any man to say, or even think, when he is tempted, that he is tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man.²⁸

History documents the issues that arose in the Jewish community as a result of rejecting the idea that Scripture has a permissive sense. Dr. James McKnight,

another scholar, has pointed out that the Apostle James was speaking to Jewish Christians who were misinterpreting parts of the New Testament's epistles and the Old Testament's scriptures to enable them to blame God for their transgressions. A large number of the early converts from Judaism to Christianity were followers of pharisaical cults that propagated a fatalistic ideology:

Many of the converted Jews having formerly been of the sect of the pharisees, who held the doctrines of fate, and of the decrees of God, brought into the church, not these doctrines alone, but the errors which the corrupt part of the nation had built on them: Such as, that God is the author of sin, and that whoever professes the true religion is sure of salvation, whatever his temper or practice might be. In these mistaken notions, the converted Jews seem to have been confirmed, by certain passages of Paul's epistles, which they wrested to their own destruction.²⁹

Because they thought that God Himself had brought the temptation their way, these Jewish converts felt that their sins were justified. The author ascribes these incorrect notions to their incapacity to see that Scripture must be interpreted in the context of the idiom of permission:

It seems the Judaizers in the Christian church, not willing to acknowledge, that according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, God is said to do what he permits, inferred from the passages just now mentioned, that the sinful actions of men being all decreed by God, there is no resisting his will; and that the temptations by which men are seduced to sin, being all appointed of God, he is actually the author of men's sins.³⁰

The author concludes that the church leaders of James' time felt compelled to rectify such doctrines "... which were not only ruinous to the souls of men, but most dishonourable to the character of God as the governor of the universe."³¹ In our own day, we not only have people blaming God for their sin, but for people who were killed by drunk drivers, unhealthy practices that led to cancer and other sicknesses, abortions, etc.

Aside from realizing that there is an underlying permissive sense, Scripture can be misapplied to promote the notion that God is responsible for every death that has ever happened in human history. Such verses are used by Calvinists to bolster their theories of an all-controlling deity, and by atheists to defend their hate of the God of the Bible.

Conclusion

While I disagree with Dr. Brown's assessment of the permissive sense, I have to appreciate him for his efforts to be fair. While I am well aware that Dr. Brown does not sympathize with the faith movement, I do not detect any hostility in his book. He makes an effort to comprehend our inclination toward this particular hermeneutic. Put differently, he approaches this matter without the same vitriol that characterizes a great deal of the many opponents of what has been dubbed Word of Faith.

My disagreement with Dr. Brown on this point does not diminish my admiration for him as a Christian and a servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. I have no doubt that God will continue to use his ministry to win many lives for Christ and to provide additional Biblical insights to many of those who follow Christ, including myself. Nonetheless, I hope he would revise his view on the permissive sense.

Notes

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Chapter Two

1. Some contest the idea that Satan is being alluded to as the thief in John 10:10. Some assert that Jesus was referring directly to the corrupt prophets and teachers of the past, as well as the religious authorities of His day. This argument, however, is non sequitur because the Bible makes it very evident that Satan is the driving force behind each and every one of them (Matt. 13:38-39; John 8:38, 41, 44; Acts 13:10; 2 Cor. 11:3, 13-15; 1 John 3:8-10). Others have recognized this fact and challenged those who contest that Satan is the thief to whom Jesus references in John 10:10: “The thief here answers both to the evil man and to Satan, and comes to kill or destroy the sheep in the manner shown above to be the only manner possible.” Bell, J. H. **“Everlasting Destruction”: (2 Thess. I. 9) Being the complete testimony of Scripture on the Future Judgment of God** (London: John F. Shaw and Company, 1873), pp. 74, 75; “Though by the thief here may be meant any deceiver, yet, perhaps, our Lord chiefly refers to satan. Indeed when deceivers

come, satan the grand thief comes, whose purpose is to steal, kill and utterly destroy.” Keach, Benjamin **Gospel Mysteries Unveiled, Or, An Exposition of All the Parables, and Many Express Similitudes, Spoken by Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Vol. IV** (London: L.I. Higham, 1818), p. 566; “Must not He here allude to him who sends and inspires and is the father of all those who rend and devour the flock, and tread down their pasture and foul the pure water; just as in verse 12, He calls him the wolf?” Sadler, M. F. **The Gospel According to St. John with Notes Critical and Practical** (New York: James Pott and Co. 1887), p. 262; “They carry us beyond scribes and Pharisees, beyond all merely human teachers, good or bad, and contrast Jesus Christ with the great adversary of men. When he said, “All that came before me are thieves and robbers,” he certainly did not refer to Old Testament prophets who spake by his spirit; no[r] did he refer primarily to the scribes and Pharisees, but to Satan, the arch enemy, who first seduced mankind, and to the human teachers in all ages who have been actuated by Satan’s spirit.” Gibson, Joseph T. **Jesus Christ: The Unique Revealer of God**, © 1915 by Fleming H. Revell, p. 294

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- have killed the people of the Lord,' said of those destroyed agreeably to the declaration of Moses and Aaron :-Also Isa. vi. 10, 'Make the heart of this people fat,' &c. Ezek. xliii. 3; 'When I came to destroy this city;' where the margin reads, 'When I came to prophesy that the city should be destroyed.' So too Jer. i. 10, &c." Elliott, Edward Bishop **Horae Apocalypticae: Or, a Commentary on the Apocalypse, Vol. II** (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1847), p. 205.
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Invitation and prayer for salvation

To become a TRUE Christian One must be born again -1. John 3:1-7

We must be born of the water and the Spirit. This water is not speaking of water baptism but of the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23; James 1:18; 1 Cor. 4:15; Eph. 5:25-27).

There is only ONE avenue into heaven and that is to be born again. Water baptism, church membership, religious duties, giving to the poor, living a moral life, taking the Lord's supper, being a member of a denomination, or an INTELLECTUAL reception (vs. a heart reception) of Jesus Christ cannot save you. You must be born again.

Are you born again? If you are not you will not spend eternity in heaven with Jesus Christ but instead you will enter into eternal damnation. I urge you to consider accepting Jesus Christ as your savior.

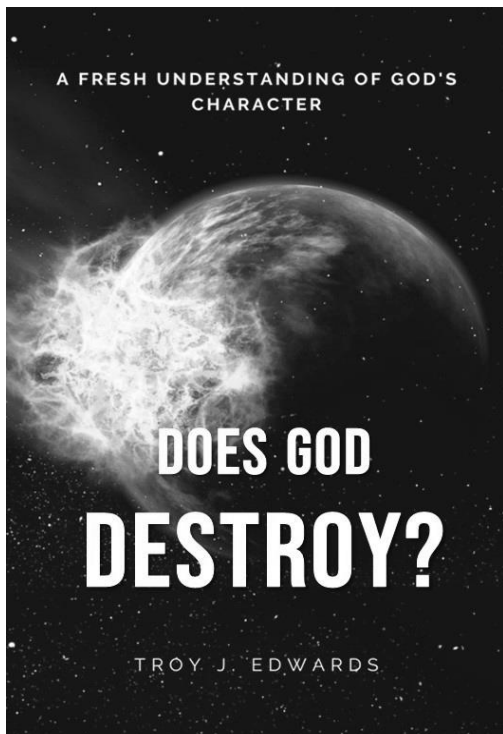
To be born again is very simple. You need only accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Why not give your heart to Him today. All you need to do is ask Him to come into your life. Here is a simple prayer to pray:

Lord Jesus

I ask you to come into my heart right now. You said in your word that if I confess you with my mouth and believe in my heart that God raised you from the dead then I will be saved (Rom. 10:9). I recognize that I am a sinner and I need your forgiveness and a change in my nature. I repent of all my sin. I know that all that come to you, you will not reject (John 6:37). Thank you for your dying for me so that I can be born again. Thank you Father for Jesus. Thank you Holy Spirit for coming in to my life. AMEN.

You are now born again. It's that simple. By the way, welcome to the family!

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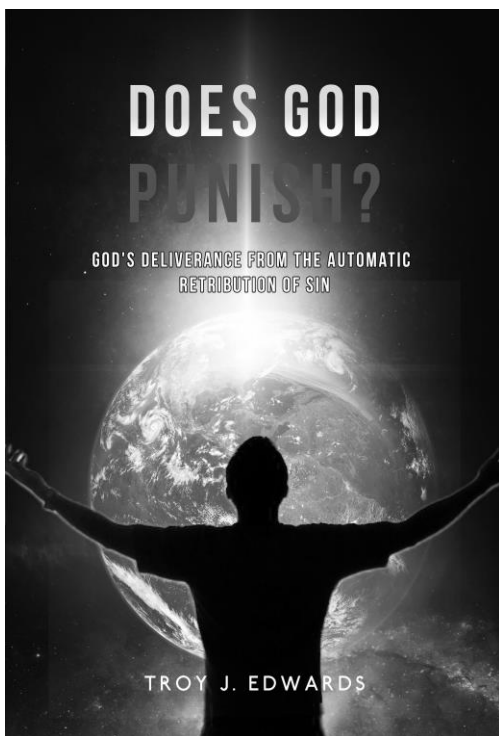


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Does God Punish?

God's Deliverance from the Automatic Retribution of Sin

In Scripture God is alleged to punish sinners but they also portray Him as wanting people to approach Him fearlessly. How do we reconcile these seemingly contradictory ideas? This book will demonstrate that God is not a literal punisher, but rather a Savior from sin's retribution.

www.vindicatinggod.org

What we believe about God has an impact on how we live. It will shape how we raise our children, treat our spouses, deal with strangers, engage with coworkers, and carry out our ministry to the Lord and others. Therefore, this study is extremely significant. We believe that after completing this study, you will love God and your Bible even more, and that while you will continue to fear (reverence/worship) God, you will no longer be afraid of Him because you will realize that He is a loving God who is exactly like Jesus.

And you will yearn to be just like Him.

