



# The Lord “Sent” It

Understanding what the Bible Means when it  
says that God sent sickness, disaster,  
evil spirits, deception, etc.

Troy J. Edwards

# The Lord SENT

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God sent sickness, disaster, evil spirits, deception, etc.*

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

## **The Lord SENT It**

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Dedicated to Dennis Mendoza:

*For planting the seed of Christ in me even  
when I seemed like a hopeless cause*

## Lesson One

### Understanding Bible Language

“For, pray take notice, God is said in Scripture to *send* what he *can* (but *doth not*) hinder from being *sent*.”<sup>1</sup> – Edward Bird (1726)

This statement by Edward Bird is very important if we are going to read the Bible and receive a correct view of God’s love. Apart from this truth that Bird states, one can read their Bible, find certain statements there, and see God as anything but loving.

There are numerous places in Scripture where God says that He will “send” or is said to have “sent” a disaster, a plague, pestilence, delusion, an evil spirit, a cruel and ruthless enemy army, ferocious man-eating wild animals, and other harsh judgments. Two of the most well-known can be found among the curses listed in Deuteronomy 28:

*The Lord shall **send** upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me. (Deuteronomy 28:20)*

*Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall **send** against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. (Deuteronomy 28:48)*

These and many other passages in Scripture where God is said to “send” or to have “sent” some terrible event has caused some to question God’s goodness and benevolence. Such passages, apart

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<sup>1</sup> Bird, Edward **Fate and Destiny Inconsistent with Christianity or the Horrid Decree of Absolute and Unconditional Election and Reprobation Fully Detected** (London: Charles Rivington, 1726), p. 141

from a correct interpretation, give us a view of God that makes Him appear to be vindictive, harsh, and cruel.

### **Bible Teachers and Theologians Exacerbate the Problem**

The majority of Bible teachers and theologians have not been helpful at all in this regard. For example, Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther taught that God literally “sends” negative things in our lives and that such are His will for us:

“How can it be that we should love God when his will is not settled in our mind? If I love God, I cannot but love his will also. If God send sickness, poverty, shame and ignominy, it is his will: at which we murmur; our minds are carried hither and thither; we bear it very impatiently.”<sup>2</sup>

Luther taught that God sends sickness, poverty and shame. Admittedly, Luther could easily back this idea with numerous quotes from Scripture in which God is indeed said to send such things. We will see later that Luther was never really consistent in these ideas about God. However, since he did present such ideas, men have latched onto them and have taught them to others, thus giving the body of Christ a cruel and harsh picture of God.

Many of our Fundamentalist ministers have been no help either. The late Independent Baptist Evangelist John R. Rice upholds a harsh view of God who literally “sends” disastrous things:

“And as certain as the Bible is true, God himself must take responsibility for sending the curses, the plagues, the tears, the bloodshed, the old age, the pain and death which come as the inevitable result of sin.... It is true that the wages of sin is death, but it is God who is the paymaster and who sees that a sinner receives his just due.”<sup>3</sup>

Rice is opposed to the Biblical truth that sin contains within itself its own seeds of destruction or that inherent with each sin is its own automatic punishment. Rice taught that God is the One who literally sends (assuming by the use of His omnipotent power) the

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<sup>2</sup> Luther, Martin **Thirty - Four Sermons on the Most Interesting Doctrines of the Gospel** (Gale and Fenner, 1816), p. 302.

<sup>3</sup> Rice, John R. **Is God a “Dirty Bully” and other Sensational Sermons** (Wheaton, IL: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1958), p. 17

results of sin which is bloodshed, sickness, death, and cursing. This is indeed a scary view of God. Yet, Rice would have no problem finding Bible passages that support his view. The two passages from Deuteronomy 28 that we opened with are among the many selections that can be used for this endeavor.

Rice was a Fundamentalist Baptist minister who wrote many very helpful books. A Fundamentalist is one who believes that the Bible is the Word of God and is literally true. They rightfully take a stand against liberal ideas that doubt the full and complete inspiration of the Bible, who deny the virgin birth and divinity of Christ, that Jesus is the only way to salvation and they oppose a number of other false teachings that have risen in the past two centuries. We should all be “Fundamentalists” when it comes to these things.

### **The Need for Proper Bible Interpretation**

While Protestants and Fundamentalists are to be commended for their attempts to stay true to the Scriptures, it is important to interpret them in the light of the revelation that Jesus gave us concerning the Father.

The Bible is indeed God’s written revelation to man. But apart from properly interpreting some of its statements then the Bible will appear to be contradictory. Jesus, who is exactly like the Father in every respect (John 8:19; 10:30-32; 14:8-11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:1-3) says, “*For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.*” (Luke 9:56) Jesus also said:

*For God expressed His love for the world in this way: He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not face everlasting destruction, but will have everlasting life. Here’s the point. God didn’t send His Son into the world to judge it; instead, He is here to rescue a world headed toward certain destruction. (John 3:16-17; The VOICE)*

In contrast, Deut. 28:48 tells us, “*Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, **until he have destroyed thee.***” In Ezekiel 5:16 God talks about a famine that He says, “*I will **send** to*



*destroy you.*” In one place God says He will send things to destroy lives but then Jesus said that destroying lives is not the purpose of God. How do we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory views of God in which God is said to “send” destruction and not willing anyone’s destruction?

One way to reconcile this is by properly translating the word “send” as used in some of the seemingly harsh Old Testament statements. The word “send” used in Deut. 28:20, 48 (and other Bible passages) comes from the Hebrew word “shalach”. Here is how the word is defined by some experts on the language:

- “Other special meanings of this verb include letting something go freely or without control”<sup>4</sup> (W. E. Vine)
- “In a number of contexts, however, the meaning ‘let (someone or something) go’ in the sense of ‘allowing’ them to go is indicated.”<sup>5</sup> (Stephen D. Renn)
- “It often takes the modifications expressed by *permit, to declare or hold an, to help.*”<sup>6</sup> (Joseph Rotherham)
- “In like manner, in Psalm lxxxii. 12, Shalach is rendered by Gesenius, ‘relax, loosen, let go, especially one who has been in any way detained; give over into the power of anything.’”<sup>7</sup> (Gesenius)

Gesenius references Psalm 81:12 in relation to how the word “shalach” is used (or meant to be used) in Scripture. The context of this passage gives us more insight into this word:

*I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. Oh that my people had hearkened unto me,*

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<sup>4</sup> Vine, W. E. **Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words** (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1984), p. 221

<sup>5</sup> Renn, Stephen D. **Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew And Greek Texts** (Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), p. 26

<sup>6</sup> Rotherham, Joseph **The Emphasized Bible**, Bradbury, Agnew & Co., ©1902, p. 919

<sup>7</sup> Hassell, Cushing Biggs; Hassell, Sylvester **History of the Church of God: From the Creation to A. D. 1885** (New York: Gilbert Beebe's Sons, 1886), 650

*and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. (Psalm 81:10-14)*

As Gesenius stated, “gave them up” in Psalm 81:12 is from the Hebrew word “shalach” which is the exact same word translated as “send” in Deuteronomy 28:20, 48 and other passages of this nature.

The phrase “gave them up” is “permissive” and not “causative”. The Hebrew word “shalach” is rendered in the sense that God allowed Israel to do as they wish, sadly, to their own detriment. Some other translations are more emphatic in their rendering of this passage in a permissive sense:

*Therefore I was to be he who let them loose, to the stubbornness of the sensibility of their heart, even were they to proceed in their conspiracy. (Awful Scroll Translation)*

*So I let them go after the stubbornness of their heart, That they might walk in their own counsels. (American Standard Version)*

*So I allowed them to continue in their stubbornness, living by their own advice. (International Standard Version)*

Job 8:4 also uses the Hebrew word “shalach”: “*If thy children have sinned against him, and he have **cast them away** for their transgression.*” Now look at how this word is rendered in two of the more modern translations of Job 8:4:

*If your children sinned against him, he allowed them to suffer the consequences of their sinfulness. (Names of God Version)*

*If your children sinned against him, he allowed them to suffer the consequences of their sinfulness. (God’s Word Translation)*

Here we find that “send” is something more of “permission” than “causation.” Furthermore, “shalach” is actually translated in some parts of the King James Bible as “let”. Here are a couple of examples:

*“And he said, **Let** me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”*  
(Gen. 32:26)

*“Naphtali is a hind **let loose**: he giveth goodly words.”* (Gen. 49:21)

In the passages above the word “let” is from the same Hebrew word translated as “send” in those passages that make God the dispenser of sickness, poverty and death. Furthermore, this same Hebrew word is used where God told Pharaoh, “*Let my people go,*” (Ex. 5:1; 7:16; 8:1; 21, 9:1, 13; 10:3, 4). Based on this evidence, I believe that Jack Blanco’s paraphrase of Deut. 28:48 is more accurate than most of our literal translations:

“So the Lord will let your enemies come against you and take you captive. You will be hungry, thirsty, miserable, poor and half-naked, and they won’t care.”<sup>8</sup>

This interpretation is supported by numerous passages in the King James Version itself (Lev. 26:25; Judges 2:14; 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Kings 21:14; 2 Chron. 6:36; 25:20; Neh. 9:27; Psalm 41:1-2; 78:61; Jer. 15:9; 20:4-5; 21:7; 34:20-21; 44:30; Lam. 2:7; Eze. 39:23). Edward Bird spoke the truth when he wrote, “God is said in Scripture to *send* what he *can* (but *doth not*) hinder from being *sent*.”

### **What we need to Understand from this Truth**

When God is going to “send” or is said to have “sent” some disastrous event, a proper translation of these words helps us to understand the following six facts:

1. First, all sin contains within itself its own seeds of destruction (James 1:13-14; Rom. 6:23; Gal. 6:5-8). Furthermore, sin

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<sup>8</sup> Blanco, Jack **The Clear Word: An Expanded Paraphrase to Build Strong Faith and Nurture Spiritual Growth** (Hagerston, MD: Jack J. Blanco, 2003), p. 233

authorizes the one who is the father of sin to have an advantage over us (1 Pet. 5:8-9; Eph. 4:26-27; James 4:7; 1 John 3:8-12).

2. Second, God, in His mercy, is holding back the evil forces that already have their hearts set on the destruction of men due to the fallen nature of our world.
3. Third, God establishes laws of love that keep men protected from the evil forces surrounding them. Even when men rebel against God and break these laws God looks for ways to lead men to repentance and to restore them to favor with Himself so that they may remain under His protection.
4. Fourth, when men insist on rebelling against God and serving sin and Satan, God finally is left with no choice but to release, loosen, let go, of the evil consequences of such rebellion that He was at one time keeping at bay due to His love.
5. Fifth, when God finally *releases, loosens, lets go, unleashes*, those forces that He held back then in some instances in Scripture He takes full responsibility for what is done. But most times, He states clearly His “method” for how it was done by Him, which is more often than not, He *allowed* or *permitted* (*released, loosened, let go, unleashed*) the natural consequences of our rebellion.
6. Finally, this “permitting” of consequences happens when God is left with no choice but to abandon the rebellious one, thus removing His protective presence.

The understanding of God’s role in sickness, death, poverty, shame, failure, defeat, etc. is not as frightful when we understand these six facts. Granted, when God is no longer protecting us then it is still a frightful thing, but by understanding these facts we can focus on *exactly* what we need to be afraid of.

We need not be afraid of God because He is not the direct inflictor of any of the things that men suffer from. On the contrary He is constantly protecting us from those things that would harm us. What we actually need to be afraid of is rebellion and sin. It is unrepentant of sin coupled with outright rebellion against God that brings about the automatic consequences as God is left with no choice but to turn those who reject Him and push Him away over to the consequences of their sins (Job 21:13-15; 22:15-18).

## The Loss of God's Protective Presence

When God allows men to suffer the consequences of their sin He is not to be blamed. God cannot be where He is not wanted and He will not force His will upon any of His free-will creatures even if it is for our best (Psalm 81:10-16; Rev. 3:20). Let's look at Deuteronomy 28:20 again and take note of the last phrase in the passage:

*The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, **whereby thou hast forsaken me.***

Notice the words, “*whereby thou hast forsaken me.*” If we persist in moving away from God, He will have no choice but to eventually leave us as well:

*And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but **if ye forsake him, he will forsake you** (2 Chron. 15:2)*

*And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? **because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you** (2 Chron. 24:20)*

Here we find a “sowing and reaping” process at work. The people forsake God and God in turns forsakes them. The Lord's method for destroying or sending destruction is not by direct acts of omnipotent power but by removing His protective presence:

*(For the Lord thy God is a merciful God;) **he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.*** (Deut. 4:31; KJV)

Note that God said to the Israelites (upon condition of obedience) that He will *not* destroy them. But does God actually “destroy”. The answer is “yes.” The Bible is the Word of God and it is true in all of its statements.

Therefore, the question is not, “does He destroy?” The question is, “*how* does God destroy?” God destroys by “forsaking” those who rebel against Him. He removes His protection and permits them to be destroyed by the evil forces surrounding them. Another translation of this passage reads:

*Because the Lord your God is a God of mercy, he will not take away his help from you or let destruction overtake you, or be false to the agreement which he made by an oath with your fathers. (Deut. 4:31; Bible in Basic English)*

Men and devils believe in forcing their will on others. If they do not get their way then they will use their power to kill and destroy those who denied them. God is not that way. Though God holds all power, He has no desire to harm any of His creatures.

However, because God has created all things and He is the sovereign of the universe He takes responsibility for everything that goes on under His reign even if He did not actually do it, want it, or decree its existence. When God is rejected He certainly does “destroy” but not in the way that men and devils would. God destroys by forsaking the one setting himself up for destruction. God’s “forsaking” is the removal of His protection. It is then that trouble is given access to us:

*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? (Deut. 31:17)*

God says that many evils and troubles will befall the people because He will have forsaken them. The people themselves will acknowledge that the reason they are suffering from so many evils is

due to the fact that their God is not among them. These troubles come because of the loss of God's protective presence. Another translation says:

*When they do, 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. They'll be in so much trouble and distress then that they'll say, "We must be in all this trouble because our God isn't with us anymore!"* (Deut. 31:17; The VOICE)

The Clear Word, a paraphrase of the Bible by Dr. Jack Blanco, is even more emphatic in its rendering of Deut. 31:17:

"When they do this, I will have to withdraw my protection from them and leave them at the mercy of their enemies. Many terrible things will happen to them and they'll say to themselves, 'All these disasters and sicknesses have come on us because we have turned against the Lord our God, so He's not with us anymore'"<sup>9</sup>

God "sends" disasters and sicknesses indirectly by the removal of His protection which then permits these attacks upon the rebellious. God does not directly "send" any of these things. When these things happen then the best recourse is to turn back to God rather than blame Him for what is being suffered. Genuine repentance restores God's presence, blessing, and protection. He is very kind, loving, forgiving and merciful.

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<sup>9</sup> Jack Blanco, *The Clear Word: An Expanded Paraphrase*, p. 236

## Lesson Two

### God “Sends” Israel’s Enemies Against Them

“For, pray take notice, God is said in Scripture to *send* what he *can* (but *doth not*) hinder from being *sent*.”<sup>10</sup>  
– Edward Bird (1726)

We believe that this statement by Edward Bird, when taken seriously, will prevent us from having a distorted picture of God as we read our Bibles and come across passages that tell us that God sent sickness, disease, tragedy, enemy armies, ferocious animals, and other harmful evils. The understanding of the principle stated by Bird enables us to understand that God is not the inflictor of evil but rather the protector from it. He is only said to inflict it when people force Him to remove His protection.

#### The “Permission” Principle

The Bible is God’s Word and should be taken seriously. However, due to cultural differences between those who God inspired to write the Scriptures and Bible readers today, it becomes necessary to provide principles of interpretation.

Our Western minds have trouble with some of the ways that the Ancient Near Eastern cultures, from which our Bible is derived, spoke. They held the ruling deity responsible for all that happened under his reign regardless of whether or not he had anything to do with it. The Israelites adopted this same pattern of speaking and God used their cultural idioms to have His Word recorded. Thankfully, He provided us Westerners with sufficient methods for interpreting the language.

In our last lesson we examined two passages from the list of curses in Deuteronomy 28 in which God threatens to “send” some terrible things. Let’s look at one of them again:

*Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall **send** against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he*

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<sup>10</sup> Bird, *Fate and Destiny*, p. 141



*shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. (Deuteronomy 28:48)*

Based on the Biblical evidence we discovered in the last chapter, we saw that a paraphrase by Dr. Jack Blanco placed this passage in a much better light:

“So the Lord will let your enemies come against you and take you captive. You will be hungry, thirsty, miserable, poor and half-naked, and they won’t care.”<sup>11</sup>

In this lesson we will dig a little deeper into this issue of God “sending” enemy armies to attack and destroy His covenant people as punishment for their sins. We will discover that God wanted only to protect His people from the enemy but their choices forced Him to remove His protection and allow their enemies to have their way.

### **Methods of Interpretation**

Reading the passages that God says that He will “send” or that He “sent” some destructive punishment upon an individual or nation can be understood when we compare them to other Scriptures dealing with the exact same subject as well as comparing them to other English translations.

For example, the Bible says that God “sent” the Chaldeans and other enemies against His people (2 Kings 24:2). However, in other passages this is defined as God removing His protection and giving the people into the hands of their enemies (2 Chron. 36:15-17; Ezra 5:12; Jer. 22:25; 32:24, 28, 36; 38:18).

I have found the principle of “interpreting Scripture with Scripture” to be extremely helpful in understanding the principle that God is only said to “send” what He did not hinder or prevent. Another method I have found to be of utmost assistance is comparing some of these difficult “sent” passages to modern translations. For example, let’s look at Jeremiah 25:9 in the King James Version:

*Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Lord, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this*

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<sup>11</sup> Blanco, Jack *The Clear Word*, p. 233

*land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations.*

Now, let's look at Jeremiah 25:9 in the Contemporary English Version:

*.... and now **I will let you be attacked by nations from the north**, and especially by my servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. You and other nearby nations will be destroyed and left in ruins forever. Everyone who sees what has happened will be shocked, but they will still make fun of you.*

Note that the CEV renders Jeremiah 25:9 in a more permissive sense which shows that God is only removing His protection from rebellious people. He is not actively causing the circumstances to come about. Now let's look at another passage in which God threatens to "send" an enemy against Israel and compare it to a more modern translation:

*In those days the Lord began to **send** against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah. (2 Kings 15:37; King James Version)*

*During his rule, the Lord **let** King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel start attacking Judah. (2 Kings 15:37; Contemporary English Version)*

In our last lesson we saw that the word "send" was from the Hebrew word "shalach" which can be translated "let loose". This implies that God is actually holding back enemy forces that were already determined to destroy His people. Israel's constant pushing God away through their idolatry forces Him to remove His restraint and let these evil armies have their way. Therefore, we believe that these modern translations are justified in their renderings.

Apart from this understanding, the Father represented by Jesus Christ appears in the Old Testament to be a violent war-mongering God who loves violence and bloodshed. He seems to be

no different than Ares, the Greek god of war (or “Mars” in the Roman version of this mythology). Thus, it is important to study this truth in order to separate the true God from these satanic beings.

### **Comparing Scripture with Scripture**

Sadly, there are a number of people that are skeptical of the use of any English translations outside of what they might claim are “established Bible versions”. In some cases, this is understandable, although in many cases people simply do not want to be relieved of their pet doctrines about God.

Nevertheless, the truth that God is said to “send” that which He merely did not hinder or prevent can be proven even from the standard translations. We will do this first by comparing two of the standard translations and then taking one of them (the King James Version) and compare Scripture with Scripture.

There are a number of places in Scripture where God says that He will personally “send” the sword (enemy armies) upon His people for their rebellion (Jeremiah 9:16; 24:10; 25:16, 27; 49:37; 29:17; Ezekiel 14:21). In Jeremiah 29:17 (King James Version) we read:

*Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Behold, **I will send upon them the sword**, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil.*

And now, let’s compare this same passage with its rendering in the New Revised Standard Version:

*Thus says the Lord of hosts, **I am going to let loose on them sword**, famine, and pestilence, and I will make them like rotten figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten.*

The New Revised Standard Version translates “send” (“shalach”) in its more permissive sense. But is this justified? As we go back to the KJV and compare it with other passages from this same translation we will see that “let loose” is actually a better understanding of the passage than the word “send”:

*She that hath borne seven languisheth: she hath given up the ghost; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed and confounded: and the residue of them **will I deliver to the sword** before their enemies, saith the Lord. (Jer. 15:9)*

*Therefore **deliver up their children** to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows; and let their men be put to death; **let their young men be slain by the sword** in battle. (Jer. 18:21)*

*A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; **he will give them that are wicked to the sword**, saith the Lord. (Jer. 25:31)*

*Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied; and thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest **will I give up to the sword**. (Micah 6:14)*

*Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, **been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword**, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day. (Ezra 9:7)*

*They shall fall in the midst of them that are slain by the sword: **she is delivered to the sword**: draw her and all her multitudes. (Ezekiel 32:20)*

All of the passages above deal with God “sending” the sword against His people but uses a more permissive verb to understand what God is saying. The words “deliver” and “give” used in these passages is the Hebrew word “nathan.” According to John Hale Murray, “But the words here used signify only a permission of the things spoken of, and not the very doing them. The Hebrew word

‘nathan,’ means to suffer or permit.”<sup>12</sup> Here we learn that “shalach” often translated as “sent” and “nathan” often translated as “suffer” (permit), “give up” and “deliver” are *synonyms* (two different words that have the exact same meaning) and can be used interchangeably in Scripture.

## The Jesus Revelation

Even more interesting is that our Lord Jesus uses language concerning His mission on earth that has bothered a number of Bible students:

*Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: **I came not to send peace, but a sword.** For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matt. 10:32-37)*

Jesus told His listeners that He came to “send” a sword. Many people accept the erroneous idea that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New. This idea is false based on the fact that Jesus *is* the God of the Old Testament (John 5:39; Luke 24:27). This is further proven by the fact that Jesus uses the same language concerning “sending a sword” that God used in the Old Testament.

However, it is still a perplexing statement to read without background and contextual knowledge. After all, the Bible refers to Jesus as the “Prince of peace” (Isa. 9:6) and the “God of peace” (2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 3:16; Heb. 13:20). He is said “not to be the author of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33).

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<sup>12</sup> Murray, John Hale **A Help for English Readers to Understand Mis-translated Passages in Our Bible** (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1881), p. 145

His mission was to bring “peace on earth” (Luke 2:13-15; Eph. 2:14-17; Col. 1:20). Therefore, Jesus’ words in Matthew 10 seem to contradict everything Scripture says about Him and His reason for coming to earth.

Concerning our Lord’s statement, one commentary explains, “This is a forcible, but not unusual idiom—a mode of expression by which the foreseen consequence of any measure is represented as the purpose for which that measure was adopted.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, the Lord was using idiomatic language which takes responsibility for the results of our unswerving commitment to Him.

We are to place Jesus above family and friends. This will naturally bring opposition from those who do not share this same commitment. In some cases, this opposition will be hostile. The Lord would prefer that everyone be committed to Him but He knows that this will not happen. Neither can He water-down the standard. Therefore, He takes responsibility for “sending the sword”. But we must be careful not to read any intentional violent tendencies into our Lord’s idiomatic expression:

“We are not, however, to suppose that Jesus here represents himself as the immediate promoter of discord and dissension amongst men. His language is only a strong mode of expressing the certainty of an anticipated result, by representing it as the very object contemplated by the course of conduct which ultimately leads to it, but which leads to that result, not in consequence of any immediate arrangement or direct agency on the Saviour’s part, but because the enmity of men, instigated by the power of Satan, has risen against his Church, so as to produce such results.”<sup>14</sup>

Thomas Jackson also adds some insight into our understanding of our Lord’s statement that He will “send a sword”:

“The meaning certainly is, not that Christ designedly, or by any direct exertion of His power, stimulates the passions of bad men, causing them to hate and persecute His servants, and even to slay them with the ‘sword;’ but that the introduction of His religion into states and families would be followed by these results;

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<sup>13</sup> Forster, John **The Gospel-Narrative, According to the Authorized Text of the Evangelists** (London: John W. Parker, 1845), p. 147

<sup>14</sup> Bagot, Daniel **An Exposition of the Gospel according to St. Matthew** (London: R. Groombridge and J. Nisbet & Co., 1844), p. 27

ungodly children persecuting their Christian parents, and ungodly parents persecuting their godly children, through their own innate hatred of spiritual religion; and civil rulers, hostile to the truth, subjecting the followers of Christ to imprisonment and to martyrdom.”<sup>15</sup>

Hence, the full understanding of our Lord’s words is that He will take responsibility for the consequences of our undying commitment to Him. This is how we must understand all of the language in the Bible in which God is said to “send” the sword against His people. Just as Jesus takes responsibility for the inevitable outcome of our commitment to Him, God took responsibility for the inevitable consequences of His people’s rebellion. God takes responsibility for these things even though He may not have desired the outcome. In many of these cases, since He was the One protecting the people, He takes the responsibility for what happens when His protection is withdrawn.

### **Satan is the Evil Agent behind Violence**

The book of Job is the primary key to understanding all of those passages in which God is said to have “sent” sickness, tragedy, enemy armies and other such judgment. It was actually Satan that stirred up Israel’s enemies against them (as he does today):

*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.... While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. (Job 1:12, 17)*

God told Satan that all that Job had was in Satan’s power. This authorized Satan to send the Chaldeans to kill Job’s servants with the “edge of the sword”. Every place in the Bible where we read

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<sup>15</sup> Jackson, Thomas **The Providence of God, Viewed in the Light of Holy Scripture** (London: John Mason, 1862), p. 296

that God “sent” the sword against Israel we should see that Satan is the actual influence.

Satan is the “prince” and “god” of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4). He is the one who holds sway and influence over evil men (John 8:44; Acts 26:18; Eph. 2:1-5; 1 John 3:8-12; 5:18-19). God is the One attempting to protect His people from Satan’s influence. However, there are times when He has had to remove that protection. Job shows us that it is when He removes this protection that God often takes responsibility for the work of Satan:

*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)*

Note that God takes responsibility for having destroyed Job. The book of Job is the key to understanding all Bible passages that attribute evil to God. Yet, this book shows us that God only says that He did the thing He merely permitted. An Alternative understanding of Job 2:3 brings this out better:

*The Lord said to Satan, “Have you thought about My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth. He is without blame, a man who is right and good. He fears God and turns away from sin. He still holds to his good ways, **even when I allowed you to go against him**, and to destroy him for no reason.” (Job 2:3; New Life Version)*

Quite often experts complain about Satan’s seeming absence from the Old Testament. However, Job lets us know that he is very much present and is the agent behind all of the horror that is sometimes attributed to God. God *allowed* Satan to attack Job and to send enemy armies against him. This is the case with every passage in the Bible in which God is said to have done such things. Thomas Jackson, stated it best when he wrote:

“It is then so common in Holy Scripture to speak of God as actually doing that which He simply permits, and does not



absolutely hinder men from doing, that this may be justly regarded as an idiom of eastern speech.”<sup>16</sup>

It is totally reasonable to replace statements where God is said to have “sent” the sword or some other tragic event with “God allowed or permitted the sword” or some other horrendous evil. We can even go further to say that God “allowed” Satan to do it. We will look at more Biblical proof of this in our next lesson.

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Jackson, *The Providence of God*, p. 304

## Lesson Three

### God “Sends” Deception

“For, pray take notice, God is said in Scripture to *send* what he *can* (but *doth not*) hinder from being *sent*.”<sup>17</sup>

– Edward Bird (1726)

We continue to examine the Bible’s teaching in which God is said to send such horrendous evils as sickness, disease, tragedy, enemy armies, ferocious animals, and other harmful events. We believe that if we understand such passages in light of Edward Bird’s statement above then they will not give us the distorted understanding of God that we have been given in the past.

#### The “God of Truth” Sending Delusions

No doubt that the majority of troubling Bible passages are found in the Old Testament. Some have attempted to resolve this problem by teaching the idea that God changed His ways of doing things after the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is now fashionable for some to solve Old Testament difficulties by ignoring any portion of the Bible that is before the redemptive work of Christ. Some even believe that focusing only on the epistles of Paul is enough for the Christian.

However, anyone who reads far enough into the New Testament, to include Paul’s writings, discover that they cannot escape the problems presented in the Old Testament or any other portion in the Bible. In Paul’s writings we still find idiomatic expressions in which God is said to be the “sender” of evil:

*“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 2:10-12)*

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<sup>17</sup> Bird, *Fate and Destiny*, p. 141

Here in the New Testament we are told that God is the One sending delusion to people. Yet, deception has its foundations in lying. This is why it is especially troubling for us to be told that God is the One who sends such things. After all God is described the following way in Scripture:

- God is a GOD OF TRUTH – Deut. 32:4; Isa. 65:16; John 14:6; 15:26; 16:13
- God's Word is TRUTH – Psalm 33:4; 119:41-43; 138:2; Prov. 22:17-21; John 17:17; Eph. 1:12-13
- God does not lie because He is NOT subject to the same weaknesses as men – Num. 23:19 (see also Psalm 50:21; Isa. 55:7-8; James 1:13-14)
- God is UNABLE to Lie – Titus 1:1-3; Heb. 6:17-18
- God HATES Lying – Prov. 6:16-19; 12:22; Zech. 8:17
- God's HOLINESS Prevents Him from Lying – Psalm 89:33-35

Not only do we have these facts about God recorded in Scripture, we are also told that God never tempts men with evil. James writes, “*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). Sending people delusion in order for them to believe a lie is certainly tempting men to do evil. This means that there is a possible contradiction in the divine record.

We certainly cannot resolve this the way some tell us to by altogether ignoring the Old Testament or ignoring any portion of Scripture outside of Paul's epistles. After all, 2 Thessalonians is both New Testament and written by Paul (by divine inspiration). Therefore, the only method for resolving such difficulties is by the method that we have been presenting in these lessons. That method is the understanding that “God is said in Scripture to *send* what he *can* (but *doth not*) hinder from being *sent*.”

### **Interpreting Scripture with Scripture**

We must resolve this by looking to the immediate and wide contexts of 2 Thessalonians 2. Let's begin with the *wide* context. Again Paul writes, “*And **for this cause** God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.*” Note the phrase, “for this

cause”. This is not the only time Paul has used this phrase. In Romans Paul wrote:

*Wherefore **God also gave them up** to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: **Who changed the truth of God into a lie**, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. **For this cause God gave them up** unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature (Romans 1:24-26)*

We are told that it was sinful men who “changed the truth of God into a lie.” Men desire to be deceived. We are then told “For this cause God gave them up.” Compare the two statements:

- **And for this cause** God shall **send** them strong delusion
- **For this cause** God **gave them up** unto vile affections

God “sends” by “giving the sinner up” to the thing that they wanted in the first place. Another translation gives this sense in its rendering of 2 Thess. 2:11: “*And for this cause, **God will give them up** to the power of deceit and they will put their faith in what is false*” (Bible in Basic English)

God, in His abundant love and mercy, protects men and women from suffering the full consequences of their rebellion. But after continuing to reject God’s consistent attempts to draw sinners to Himself, He is left with no choice but to finally “give them up” or “allow” them to suffer the consequences of their rebellion. Connecting the Romans and 2 Thessalonians passages one author states:

“St Paul teaches that God makes sin work out its own punishment.... In each case the result is inevitable, and comes about by what we now call a natural law. That persistent rejection of truth destroys the sense of truth and results in fatal error, is an ethical principle and a fact of experience as certain as any in the world. Now he who believes in God as the Moral

Ruler of the Universe, knows that its laws are the expression of His will.”<sup>18</sup>

As this author wisely points out, God’s “sending” of strong delusion is merely God “giving them up” or permitting them to suffer the automatic consequences of their sin. Sin contains within itself its own seeds of destruction. Inherent within each sin is its own punishment.

### **The Surrounding Context**

The *immediate* context of 1 Thessalonians 2 confirms the truth that the “sending” of deception in verse 11 is permissive rather than causative:

*“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.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:6-10)

How does the “God of Truth” send “strong delusions”? By no longer restraining or holding back the devil, the one who will actually bring delusion: *For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.* (2 Thess. 2:7). I like the Phillip’s New Testament’s rendering of 2 Thess. 2:6-7:

*I expect you remember now how I talked about this when I was with you. You will probably also remember how I used to talk about a “restraining*

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<sup>18</sup> Findlay, George Gillanders (editor) **The Epistles to the Thessalonians** (Cambridge: University Press, 1904), p. 152

*power” which would operate until the time should come for the emergence of this man. Evil is already insidiously at work but its activities are restricted until what I have called the “restraining power” (of God) is removed. (2 Thess. 2:6-7; J.B. Phillips New Testament)*

God does not actively send any evil, be it deception, sickness, poverty, etc. This is the work of Satan. God often restrains or holds back the full consequences of man’s rebellion. However, when He finally removes the restraints and allows the devil to have his way, God takes full responsibility as if He is the One that does it.

It is sad that some theologians skip this context in order to prove their ideological premise that God is so “sovereign” that He intentionally deceives. Furthermore, atheists use verse 11 out of context in their attempts to denigrate the God of the Bible. Let us look at the statement by Edward Bird that we have opened each lesson with. Within the context of his statement, Bird is actually chastising an opponent for neglecting to examine the context of 1 Thessalonians 2:11:

“In this Text, you have exactly set forth the Method of those Persons, who if they can but find one Place of Scripture, which they think for their Purpose, immediately repeat it, without looking into the Context, either to observe the Words before or after. For, had you done so, you wou’d have found the Sense to have been this, That because they received not the love of the Truth, that Truth which the Text saith, was offer’d, that they might be saved, ver. 10. for this Cause, (or to punish this Wickedness,) God will suffer the Man of Sin to be revealed, ver. 3. whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all Power, and Signs, and lying Wonders, ver. 9. to come upon them with such Advantages of Strength and Subtilty, as would gain Credit with them, if not wonderfully restrained. For, pray take Notice, God is said in Scripture, to send what he can (but doth not) hinder from being sent.”<sup>19</sup>

Hence, the context is important to understand the permissive sense of verse 11. It is also important in understanding *why* God permitted this.

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<sup>19</sup> Bird, Edward *Fate and Destiny Inconsistent with Christianity*, p. 141

In verse 10 we are told that men refused to receive the love of the truth. Men refused to be saved. This is man exercising his free will and the authority that God delegated to him. Those who love sin prefer deception over truth. The Message Bible paraphrases 2 Thess. 2:10-11 with this truth in mind: *“And since they’re so obsessed with evil, God rubs their noses in it—gives them what they want. Since they refuse to trust truth, they’re banished to their chosen world of lies and illusions”* (2 Thess. 2:10-11; The Message Bible). Isaiah affirms this understanding:

*“That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits”* (Isaiah 30:9-10)

God is trying to protect people from satanic deception. God is “withholding” or “holding back” Satan’s man of sin, the anti-Christ, from manifesting himself. However, as people persist in wanting lies over truth, God will “let” or “allow” them to have what they have decided that they want. That is God’s method for “sending” delusion.

### **The Permissive Sense**

It is important for God’s people to recognize the holy love character of God who does all that He can to deliver people from their sin. That is why it is vitally important to understand passages such as 2 Thessalonians 2:11 in the “permissive” rather than in a “causative” sense. Thomas Jackson states that the type of phrases used in 2 Thess. 2:11 were not meant to be understood as though God is actively sending deception:

“On this subject, also, Dr. Thomas Pierce, one of the most learned theologians of a learned age, has observed, ‘When God is said to harden men's hearts,—to deliver them up to a reprobate mind,—**to send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie**, and the like;— it is infinitely far from being meant of an efficacious impulse in God Almighty.’ ‘That all those verbs,— to harden, to blind, to deliver up, to send delusions, to deceive, and the like,—are by an ordinary Hebraism only

permissive in signification, though active in sound, is placed without all controversy.”<sup>20</sup>

Statements such as God sending strong delusion are “only permissive in signification.” In other words, God is not the One who tempts men into deception. He is the One who holds it back. Due to man’s desire to be deceived, He will *permit* it. Jackson explains that statements like the ones we find in 2 Thessalonians 2:11 is due to the “poverty” of the Hebrew language:

“Perhaps this form of expression may have been occasioned, in part at least, by the poverty of the Hebrew language, which contains no term that accurately expresses what is understood by simple permission: so that things which God did not choose absolutely to hinder, He is said to have done; although the very permission of them was a proof of His righteous displeasure, the parties having previously offended Him by acts of presumptuous transgression.”<sup>21</sup>

E. W. Bullinger, an expert on Bible languages, wrote, “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.”<sup>22</sup> Bullinger provides us with several Biblical examples of this truth, one of them being 2 Thessalonians 2:11:

“2Th\_2:11.—“For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie”: i.e., God will leave them and suffer them to be deceived by the great Lie which will come on all the world.”<sup>23</sup>

Bullinger and Jackson both affirm that God’s “sending” of delusion should be understood in a permissive sense. Therefore, we believe that these alternative translations of 2 Thessalonians 2:11 are properly rendered:

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<sup>20</sup> Jackson, *The Providence of God*, p. 295

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Bullinger, E. W. **Figures of Speech Used in the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968, 2008), p. 823

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 824



*For this reason, God will allow them to follow false teaching so they will believe a lie. (New Life Version)*

*That is why God lets them be fooled so that they will believe what is not true. (Worldwide English (New Testament))*

*wherefore God will suffer a spirit of delusion to work them into the belief of a lye: (Daniel Mace New Testament)*

*Now, it is for this reason and this reason alone, that God will allow them to be essentially efficient and led actively astray by believing (expressing-faith, trusting-in, acting-upon) in this lavish lie (Gospel of God in Christ by Kevin A. Krall)*

Therefore, Edward Bird is correct when he says, “God is said in Scripture to *send* what he *can* (but *doth not*) hinder from being *sent*.” God is only said to have sent that which He merely allowed to be sent or what He no longer protected them from.

### **Satan is the Great Deceiver**

From the evidence we have presented it should be clear to the reader that God is not the active sender of deception. In other places in Scripture God emphatically states that He does not send deception or deceivers to delude people:

*Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: **I sent them not**, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. (Jer. 14:14)*

*Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; **yet I sent them not**, nor commanded them: therefore they*

*shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD (Jer. 23:32)*

Therefore, all Scripture must be interpreted in the light of other Scripture in order to fully understand the truth about God's character. If any portion of Scripture appears to put a blight on the loving nature of God then it behooves us to search out the Scripture and compare them with each other in order to get the full revelation of God. The Bible is its own dictionary and commentary and Scripture itself offers the best explanation of Scripture. There are no *contradictions* in Scripture, only *explanations* and *clarifications*.

The work of deception is not from God in any way, shape or form. Scripture reveals that Satan is the only deceiver of mankind:

*“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)*

Satan has been revealed as the deceiver of man since the beginning (Gen. 3:13; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:14). This evil being is the one who brings deception to the world today (2 Cor. 4:4; 11:13-15; 1 John 5:18-19) and is the one who will be bringing about all of the end time deceptions spoken about in 2 Thessalonians 2:11 (Rev. 13:14; 20:2-3, 7-10). God's only part in this is to finally permit Satan to give men what they have been asking for and what He has been protecting them from.

Again, 2 Thess. 2:11 says, *“And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that **they should believe a lie.**”* Apart from permitting people to have what they want, God has nothing to do with lies. Satan, on the other hand, has been a liar since the beginning. He is the “father” (creator) of lying:

*“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)*

Deception has its foundation in lies. Satan is the inventor, the father of lying. He birthed lying into existence. God had no part in it. It is a complete work of Satan that God only permits because people reject the truth.

Note that when Satan speaks a lie he “speaketh of his own”. When Satan lies and deceives he does this totally apart from God’s commission or coercion. Satan does all of his lying and deceiving of his own initiative and free-will. Therefore, when God is said to “send” delusion we must see it as *permitting* (not hindering) what men themselves want from Satan.

## Lesson Four

### God “Sends” Poisonous Snakes

“For, pray take notice, God is said in Scripture to *send* what he *can* (but *doth not*) hinder from being *sent*.”<sup>24</sup>

– Edward Bird (1726)

Edward Bird’s statement, if taken seriously, will eliminate much of the uneasiness we have with certain Bible texts that, apart from proper interpretation, makes God appear to be cruel and vindictive. In the Bible God is said to send many things that, for the average reader, makes Him appear as anything other than a loving and gracious God. In these lessons we are learning that God is only said to send that which we bring upon ourselves through rebellion.

### God Sends Wild Beasts

Jesus gave us the revelation of God as a benevolent Father. However, any human father who is willing to release a dangerous animal upon his own children as punishment for misbehavior is rightfully considered by society as a cruel, unfit father. Yet, in many passages of Scripture God is said to “send” or have “sent” wild beasts to attack and kill his erring children:

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

Animal violence is certainly one of the consequences of disobedience. But what loving father would intentionally send a pit bull to attack his own children for misbehaving? Are human fathers more loving than Father-God?

Remember that the word “send” is the Hebrew word “shalach” which means to “let loose” (Gen. 49:21). Another translation of Leviticus 26:22 is more helpful here:

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<sup>24</sup> Bird, *Fate and Destiny*, p. 141

*“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)

In other words, the restraint and hold that God has on the wild beasts in order to protect His people will be removed if they should choose to remove themselves from God’s protective presence through sin and idolatry.

### **Serpent Attacks as Judgment**

One of the primary sources of animal violence that results from disobedience is snakes:

*“For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the Lord.”* (Jeremiah 8:17)

In Jeremiah God is more specific about the type of beasts that He will send as punishment for rebellion. But again, we must understand that God is not using supernatural power to make this happen. On the contrary, God was using supernatural power to protect His people from these snakes. Sin legally forfeits God’s protection. He is left with no choice but to stop supernaturally hindering these serpents from attacking the people. Other English translations help us understand this truth better:

*For look, I am letting loose among you snakes, adders for which there is no incantation, and they will bite you,” declares Yahweh.* (Lexham English Bible)

*See, I am letting snakes loose among you, adders that cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you, says the Lord.* (New Revised Standard Version)

*Eternal One: Look, I have released an army of serpents against you; they slither like vipers across the land. There is no hope of charming them. There is no escape from their deadly bite.* (The VOICE)

God is “letting loose” and “releasing” these snakes that He had once kept bound in order to protect His people. This is how we must understand passages that tell us that God will “send” such harsh punishments.

### **The Value of Context**

Reading the passages that God says that He will “send” or that He “sent” some destructive punishment such as poisonous serpents on rebellious people can be also be understood when read in its surrounding context. In Deuteronomy 32 we read:

*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. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. (Deuteronomy 32:20-22)*

God “hiding His face” in Deuteronomy 32:20 means that He will no longer help and protect. The Good News Translation says, “‘I will no longer help them,’ he said; ‘then I will see what happens to them, those stubborn, unfaithful people.’” When God “shines His face” upon His people this is a metaphor indicating His presence and protection (Numbers 6:23-27). But when God “hides His face” He is handing the impenitent sinner over to forces already poised to destroy him:

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

Another translation reads, “*This is why I turned My back on them and **allowed their enemies to do with them as they pleased. As a result, all of them fell by the sword.***” (Ezekiel 39:23b; The VOICE) Therefore, anything that happens to an individual as a result of God “hiding His face” is mere permission and *not* causation. All of this is important to note because in Deuteronomy 32:23-24 God again threatens to “send” serpents among the rebellious people:

*I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. 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)

Here God says that He will “send” the poison of serpents as punishment. However, a few verses before this He tells us that He will “hide His face” indicating that He will remove His protection from the people. It is only after this that the people can expect to suffer from poisonous snakes.

Therefore, we must again conclude the word “send” when used in relation to God is “permission” rather than causation. God will no longer hinder the poisonous snakes from attacking His people as these alternative translations of verse 24 express:

*They will be weak from hunger, ravaged by pestilence and bitter plague; **I will unleash on them wild beasts with fangs, as well as venomous snakes that slither in the dust.*** (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

*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)

Here the context as well as the alternative translations understand the word “send” in the permissive rather than in the causative sense. God is said to “send” what He no longer hinders or keeps leashed.

### **The Practical Experience of Israel**

Israel, from their experience, knew that God made good on such threats. During one of their “complaining and griping” sessions, Israel suffered a snake attack that killed hundreds of their people:

*“And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.”* (Numbers 21:5-6)

The Leeser Old Testament renders verse 6, “***And the Lord let loose against the people poisonous serpents, and they bit the people; and there died much people of Israel.***” The Jewish Targums, which were explanations and translations of the Scriptures by the Jewish rabbis in earlier centuries, affirms this understanding of Numbers 21:6:

“On account of the matter of the spies who had been sent from the wilderness of Pharan, the decree (came forth) against you, that you should not enter into the land of Israel; and for that of the manna, of which you said, Our soul is afflicted with this bread, whose eating is too light, **the serpents were let loose upon you.**”<sup>25</sup> (Emphasis are mine)

Here the earlier Jewish Rabbis affirm that the understanding of these types of passages is that God removed His protective restraint and allowed certain things to take place as a consequence of rebellion. Some scholars within the last several centuries also affirm this understanding:

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<sup>25</sup> Etheridge, John Wesley **The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch: With the Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum** (London: Longman, Green, and Roberts, 1865), p. 558



“The misery which the Israelites at this time experienced, was the fruit of their murmurings, which so increased, that they slight and despise manna, therewith the Lord had fed them so miraculously for about thirty-eight years. All which time, though in the wilderness, which was full of fiery serpents, yet **the Lord suffered none of them to sting the people: but now he lets loose the fiery serpents upon them**, as Amos ix. 3. ‘I will command the serpent, and he shall smite them.’ Paul takes notice of it, and of this dispensation of the Lord, 1 Cor. X. 9. saying, ‘Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.’ It was Christ the Lord who was with the people in the wilderness, he it was whom the Israelites tempted.”<sup>26</sup>

Note that this writer states that the Lord “suffered,” or in more modern English, “did not allow” these people to be stung but their rebellion caused Him to “let loose” this protective restraint. Comparing this incident to the attacks of Satan upon Christians today, another Bible commentator writes:

“All the while till now, though that Wilderness through which they Travelled was full of fiery Serpents, and Scorpions, and Drought, as Dent. 8. 15. **Yet the Lord had not suffered any of them to be stung. But now he lets loose these fiery Dragons to fly upon them**, as Amos 9. 3. I will command the Serpent and he shall bite them and \*tis upon occasion of their ungrateful Murmurings against the Manna, Numb. 21. The Instruction we may learn and see in it is this, **That God lets loose those fiery Serpents**, Satan and their Lusts, to sting the Consciences and torment the Souls of Men, for contempt of Christ, and Gospel-Mercies.”<sup>27</sup>

Again we are told those who took the time to read the Bible and understand it in earlier centuries recognized that God did not use divine power to make the snakes go into the camp to bite and kill the people. This was a matter of God no longer restraining the forces that

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<sup>26</sup> Pierce, Samuel Eyles *“An Essay Towards an Introduction to the Profitable Reading of the Holy Scriptures”* in *The Spiritual Magazine, or The Sain't Treasury*, Vol. IX (London: E. Palmer, 1833), p. 302

<sup>27</sup> Mather, Samuel *The Figures Or Types of the Old Testament: By which Christ and the Heavenly Things of the Gospel were Preached and Shadowed to the People of God* (London: Nath Hillier, 1705), p. 147

were already determined to harm and kill. In *The Clear Word* by Jack Blanco we are given this paraphrase of Numbers 21:6:

“The Lord heard their complaints and decided to stop their criticisms by removing the restraint that He had placed on the poisonous snakes in that area. The snakes made their way into the camp, struck the Israelites and many of them died.”<sup>28</sup>

Based on the evidence we have presented we believe that Dr. Blanco paraphrased the passage correctly. By their murmuring and complaining against God and Moses the people forfeited their right to be protected by God.

### **God’s Protection from Serpents**

As we study the Bible we can see further why “send” is always better understood in a “permissive” rather than in a “causative” sense. It was God who was restraining the snakes by His divine power and protecting the people during their time in the wilderness:

*“Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint.”*  
(Deuteronomy 8:15)

God’s leading always includes His divine protection (Psalm 78:52-53; 106:6-12; Neh. 9:21) and snakes are covered in His protection policy (Psalm 91:11-14; Mark 16:15-17; Luke 10:17-20). Moses also related the wilderness experience of Israel in Psalm 91:

*Because thou hast said, The Lord is my protection, the Most High hast thou made thy refuge.... Upon the fierce lion and asp shalt thou tread: thou shalt trample under foot the young lion and serpent* (Psalm 91:9, 13; Leeser)

It is God who personally protects us and gives us authority to trample serpents under our feet. It is when we break the “hedge of

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<sup>28</sup> Blanco, *The Clear Word*, p. 179

protection” that we are bitten by snakes. Solomon wrote, “*He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him*” (Ecclesiastes 10:8).

How do we go about breaking the hedge of protection that God has for us, thus opening ourselves up to danger? The New Testament gives us more insight into this truth as it connects the incident in Numbers 21 to how we treat Christ:

*Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer (1 Cor. 10:8-10)*

Note the statement in verse 9, “Neither let us tempt Christ”. The Word Study Greek New Testament renders the passage this way, “But not we might pressure out the Christ, just as some of them pressured and by the snakes were destroyed.”<sup>29</sup> The people complained and, as we see momentarily, pushed God out of their lives. Life and death are in the power of the tongue (Prov. 18:21). Albert Barnes puts it this way, “...to presume on the grace of Christ to keep them in all circumstances, would be to tempt him, and provoke him to leave them.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Opening the Door to Attacks from Satan**

To be left without Christ’s presence is to be without His protection. This, of course, means that Satan is able to have a foothold in our lives in order to bring destruction. 1 Cor. 10:10 says that because of their murmuring they were “were destroyed of the destroyer.” They were not destroyed by God (not directly) but by the one that Jesus said comes to “steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10).

When God’s protection was removed then Satan was able to work through the snakes to hurt the people. Paul connects this snake attack in the wilderness to “the destroyer” or the “angel of death:”

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<sup>29</sup> McReynolds, Paul R. **Word Study Greek-English New Testament** (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999), p. 616

<sup>30</sup> Barnes, Albert **Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians** (London: Thomas Ward and Co., 1841), p. 131

“We must not complain, as some of them did—and they were destroyed by **the Angel of Death.**” (1 Cor. 10:10; Good News Translation). Satan, who is a fallen angel, is the one who held this authority of death:

*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. (Hebrews 2:14-15)*

Everything that has to do with death, to include animal attacks of any kind, is usually Satan’s doing:

*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.** (Revelation 6:8)*

Death and hell will have authority to kill men in multiple ways and some of them include using the beasts of the field. While God is said in some portions of Scripture to send the wild beasts to kill, the word “send” in its permissive rendering as well as interpreting the Bible with the Bible helps us to understand that God is only said to do this in the permissive sense.

God simply removed His presence and this gave Satan, the angel of death, access to destroy the people using snakes. Some theologians also understand this to be the case. John Owen writes:

“... the psalmist treating of great and sudden destructions, which they [Jewish theologians] affirm to be all wrought by Satan. .... And this the apostle seems to allude unto, 1 Cor. x. 10, where he says that those who murmured in the wilderness were destroyed ‘by the destroyer;’ that ‘the destroying angel,’ or ‘the angel of death;’ as in this epistle he terms him [Hebrews], chap. xi. 28.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> John Owen, *Works of John Owen*, p. 435

Albert Barnes also writes, “The ‘destroyer’ here is understood by many to mean the angel of death, so often referred to in the Old Testament, and usually called by the Jews Sammael.”<sup>32</sup> Satan is the death-dealer and he uses whatever is in his grasp to bring death and destruction to the lives of men whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Some theologians such as Ralph Winters believes that Satan is responsible for the evil that we find among the animals:

“... Humans have concluded that cock fights and contrived animal-versus-animal shows are illegitimate and are now illegal. How much less likely should we suppose God to have created the nearly universal, vicious, animal versus animal world of nature? Indeed, were carnivorous animals originally herbivorous (as is implied in Genesis 1:29, 29)? Does the Evil One and his assistants have sufficient knowledge to tinker with the DNA of God’s created order and distort nature to become ‘red tooth in claw’?”<sup>33</sup>

Genesis 6:4 suggests that Satan is able to manipulate DNA and Matthew 13:36-43 suggests that Satan is able to plant seeds of wickedness within God’s good creation. Therefore, Dr. Winter’s speculation may have some merit. When we go to the garden of Eden Satan was somehow able to work through a serpent to bring the downfall of mankind (Gen. 3:1-15) so it is entirely possible that Satan is also able to manipulate the animal kingdom to become dangerous and violent.

When Satan is thrown into the bottomless pit for 1000 years snake attacks and other animal violence will no longer be a problem (Rev. 20:1-2; Isa. 11:1-10; 65:18-25). This again hints to us that Satan, and not God, is behind the dangers found among many wild animals. The fact that serpents are especially used to punish sinful men is significant. Satan started his history with man through a snake. Part of the curse is snake attacking man (which Christ would take upon Himself) (Gen. 3:15, 19). All of this demonstrates how Satan is behind the animal violence, especially snake violence suffered today.

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<sup>32</sup> Barnes, *Notes*, pp. 131, 132

<sup>33</sup> Winter, Ralph **Foundations of the World Christian Movement: A Larger Perspective** (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012), p. 179

## Lesson Five

### God “Sends” Sickness

“For, pray take notice, God is said in Scripture to *send* what he *can* (but *doth not*) hinder from being *sent*.”<sup>34</sup>

– Edward Bird (1726)

We believe that Edward Bird’s statement has much support in Scripture based on original Hebrew word studies, surrounding context of some passages that allude to God “sending” some disastrous event, and interpreting Scripture with Scripture. Some claim that Scripture contradicts itself. We vehemently beg to differ. Scripture never contradicts itself; it always explains itself. Scripture in its immediate and wide contexts gives us the correct picture of the loving character of God.

### God “Sends” Pestilence

If there is any teaching that casts aspersions on God’s character in our day, it is the teaching that God wills sickness upon people. We are told that He does this for our piety and growth. We are also told that God inflicts sickness for mysterious reasons but He knows what He is doing. God too often receives the blame for sickness and disease.

Those who espouse this ideology are not without “biblical” support. In a number of places in Scripture God does threaten to send “pestilence” and “plagues” (sickness/disease) *among the disobedient* (Exodus 9:14; Leviticus 26:25; 2 Samuel 24:15; 1 Chronicles 21:14; 2 Chronicles 7:13; Jeremiah 24:10; 29:17; Ezekiel 5:17; 14:19, 21; 28:23; Amos 4:10).

While the passages above talk about God sending sickness, not one of them allude to the false idea that He sends this for anyone’s piety, spiritual growth, or for mysterious reasons that He would never make us aware of. All of the references above are passages dealing with judgment and punishment.

However, even in judgment, does God, using His divine miraculous power, supernaturally inflict those who hate Him with

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<sup>34</sup> Bird, *Fate and Destiny*, p. 141

sickness? Let us look at some examples of passages where God says that He will “send” pestilence:

*Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Behold, **I will send upon them** the sword, the famine, and the **pestilence**, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. (Jeremiah 29:17)*

“Send” is the Hebrew word “shalach” which means to “let loose” (Gen. 49:21). Another translation of Jeremiah 29:17:

*Thus says the Lord of hosts, **I am going to let loose on them** sword, famine, and **pestilence**, and I will make them like rotten figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten. (Jer. 29:17; New Revised Standard Version)*

When “send” is understood in this sense then we can see how God is often the one holding back sickness and disease. In this fallen world there are plenty of microscopic germs, bad food, pollution, and other factors that contribute to diseases in people. God certainly does not need to use His creative power to inflict sickness upon anyone. He only needs to “let loose” what is already in the atmosphere.

Let’s look at another passage in the King James and compare it to an alternative translation:

*So **will I send upon you** famine and evil beasts, and they shall bereave thee: and **pestilence** and blood shall pass through thee; and I will bring the sword upon thee. I the Lord have spoken it. (Ezekiel 5:17; KJV)*

*So **will I let loose over you** famine and wild beasts, and they shall make thee childless; and **pestilence** and blood shall pass through thee; and the sword will I bring over thee. I the Lord have spoken it. (Leeser Old Testament)*

Here again we learn that God can be said to “send” sickness merely by “letting loose” what is inevitable. Part of the judgment we see in both of the passages we have cited above is that there would be

war and famine. Sickness always comes as a result of these two things. Since God will no longer protect Israel from their enemies He can be said to “send” everything that comes as the result of an enemy attack when He no longer holds it back.

### **God Removing His Blessing and Protection**

A very good illustration of this truth is found in Num. 11:4-33. The people complained about the manna that God was supernaturally feeding them. They longed for meat like they had when they were in Egypt. God listened to their request but while they were eating the meat that He provided we are told, “... *the LORD smote the people with a very great plague*” (verse 33). Psalm 106 also refers to this incident:

*“They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but **sent** leanness into their soul”* (Psalm 106:13-15)

Regardless of how the people may have been behaving, it still makes God appear to be petty and vindictive by giving them meat and killing them with the meat He provided. However, the word “sent” in Psalm 106:15 in its more permissive form rescues God’s reputation from this indictment. It is the Hebrew word *shalach*. One translation renders it in a more permissive sense: “*So He gave them what they wanted, but He **allowed** their souls to become weak because of it.*” (v. 15; New Life Version).

Because of their complaining and their attack on God’s character, He was left with no choice but to allow them to suffer from bad meat. God did not personally or supernaturally do anything to poison the meat but He certainly withheld any blessing that He had previously given to it. R. A. Torrey says:

*“They despised the manna, calling it light or innutritive food. God gave them flesh as they desired, but no blessing accompanied it; and, in consequence, they did not fatten, but*



grew lean upon it; and many, surfeited by excess, died of disease.”<sup>35</sup>

In Exodus 23:25 the Lord said, “*And ye shall serve the Lord your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee.*” When God’s blessing is upon the food we eat then we can be confident that He will protect us from any bacteria within it that can cause us illness. If His blessing is not on the food, then we are at the mercy of any dangerous microbes that are resident within it.

### **God’s Promises for Protection from Illness**

One of the wonderful truths of Scripture is God’s promises of supernatural protection and healing. Psalm 91 lays out these protection promises very clearly:

*I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday (Psalm 91:2-6)*

Another translation of verse 3 says, “*God will ·save [protect] you from ·hidden traps [L the snare of the fowler] and from deadly ·diseases [pestilence]*” (Expanded Bible). The New Living Translation renders verse 3, “*For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease.*” God’s protection from sickness is real despite the fact that most Christians do not claim these promises.

If God is protecting us from sickness, then He certainly is not the One sending or inflicting it (in the “causative sense” of these words). If He were the literal “sender” of diseases then He is running

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<sup>35</sup> Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge by Canne, Browne, Blayney, Scott, and others about 1880, with introduction by R. A. Torrey.

a protection racket similar to the mafia. This certainly is not true of God. When God is said to send sickness as a judgment for disobedience He is actually “freeing” the judged from His protection:

*“Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.”* (Jeremiah 34:17; KJV)

Since the people want liberty apart from obedience to God then God told them the type of liberty they can have: liberty to be killed by enemy armies, by sickness and disease, and by starvation. Keeping with our common theme the Bible in Basic English says:

*And so the Lord has said, You have not given ear to me and undertaken publicly, every man to let loose his countryman and his neighbour: see, I undertake to **let loose** against you the sword and disease and need of food; and I will send you wandering among all the kingdoms of the earth.*

God will “let loose” the forces of foreign enemies, sickness, disease, and famine that He has been guarding the people against. Therefore, these things are not directly inflicted by God but merely the inevitable result of His moving His protection. Concerning this passage, James Burton Coffman in his Bible commentary writes:

“What a proclamation is this! God says, ‘Very well, I make a proclamation for you, freeing you from my love and protection, and giving you your liberty to be destroyed by the ravages of war, disease, and starvation.’”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Coffman, James Burton. “Commentary on Jeremiah 34”. “Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament”.

<<http://classic.studylight.org/com/bcc/view.cgi?book=jer&chapter=034>>. Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, Texas, USA. 1983-1999.

The famous puritan Bible expositor, Matthew Henry, interprets God as saying in this verse, “I will discharge you from my service, and put you out of my protection, which those forfeit that withdraw from their allegiance.”<sup>37</sup> The VOICE translation renders Psalm 34:17 in this manner:

*That is why I proclaim the following: Since you have disobeyed Me and not declared that your fellow countrymen are set free, I will now set you free from My protection. I declare that you will be “free” to die by war, disease, and famine. The destiny I set before You will terrify the watching world.*

The removal of God’s protection “frees up” the Israelites to die by disease and other means. Again, God is not the direct inflictor of sickness and disease. He protects people from it and lifts His protection when people rebel against Him. As Jack Blanco paraphrased Deut. 31:17

“When they do this, I will have to withdraw my protection from them and leave them at the mercy of their enemies. Many terrible things will happen to them and they’ll say to themselves, ‘All these disasters and sicknesses have come on us because we have turned against the Lord our God, so He’s not with us anymore’”<sup>38</sup>

Sicknesses and disasters come upon rebellious people, not by God’s creative miracle working power, but by the removal of His protective presence. People suffer such difficulties when God is no longer among them.

### **“Evil Angels” and Disease**

Further investigation into Scripture tells us that it is Satan and the other fallen angels and demons that follow Satan that are the responsible agents for bringing sickness and disease when God no longer protects a person. Concerning the firstborn among the Egyptians that died by a plague (see Exodus 12), Psalm 78:49-50 speaks about God “giving their life over” to the pestilence:

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<sup>37</sup> Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible

<sup>38</sup> Blanco, *The Clear Word*, p. 236

*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.***

The word “cast” is from the Hebrew word “shalach.” This word is usually translated as “send” in other parts of Scripture. We have already learned that it literally means to “let loose:”

*He let loose on them his fierce anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels. (New Revised Standard Version)*

*He sent on them the heat of his wrath, his bitter disgust, **letting loose evil angels among them.** He let his wrath have its way; he did not keep back their soul from death, **but gave their life to disease.** (Psalm 78:49-50; Bible in Basic English)*

There is some dispute among scholars and interpreters as to the identity of these “evil” or “destroying” angels. They are divided over whether these angels are beings that are loyal to God or those who are loyal to Satan. I opt for the latter. Many early Jewish students of Scripture also believed that it was Satan and his angels that killed the firstborn among the Egyptians:

For on this night -the beginning of the festival and the beginning of the joy- ye were eating the passover in Egypt, when **all the powers of Mastêmâ had been let loose to slay all the first-born** in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh to the first-born of the captive maid-servant in the mill, and to the cattle (Jubilees 49:2)

“Mastêmâ” is one of the titles for Satan in early Jewish literature. While we respect the scholarship of many of today’s scholars, I believe that early Jewish commentators on the Scripture may have more insight into understanding Psalm 78:49-50. According to their understanding, God did not personally inflict the Egyptian firstborn. He merely let “Mastêmâ” or Satan do it. Psalm 78

is describing how God “permits” Satan to afflict and kill as another commentator notes:

“Ch. ix. 11: ‘They have over them a king, the messenger of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he has the name Apollyon.’—Here, as in ver. 1, the abyss is a chaotic state of society. Its messenger is an evil agent. Such are spoken of in a few instances: as in ch. xii, ‘the dragon and his messengers;’ Ps. lxxviii. 49, ‘God sent evil messengers,’ **inflictors of punishment permitted to act**. Here the messenger of the abyss can be no other than Satan. ...as an exploding aerolith he burst upon the abyss, and forth issued the symbolic locusts led by a king, who is the messenger of the abyss, not sanctioned, **but permitted by Jehovah**.<sup>39</sup> (Emphasis are mine)

This author attributes the “sending” of the evil messengers to God’s “permission to act”. Other translations of Psalm 78:50 translate it in this sense:

*God found a way to show his anger. He did not let any of those people live. He let them die with a deadly disease.* (Easy to Read Version)

*He cleared a path for his anger. He did not spare them. He let the plague take their lives.* (God’s Word Translation)

*He found a way to show his anger. He did not keep them from dying. He let them die by a terrible disease.* (International Children’s Bible)

God “let” them die by the disease. He did not inflict it upon them. God permitted Satan and his evil angels to kill through sickness and disease. This is how we are to understand all passages in Scripture that says that God “sends” or “sent” sickness and disease.

### **Satan is the Sickness-Inflictor**

In our first lesson we quoted the well-known protestant reformer, Martin Luther, as one who advocated the idea that God

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<sup>39</sup> Glasgow, James **The Apocalypse: Translated and Expounded** (Endinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1872), p. 260

literally sends sickness. However, Luther was not totally consistent with this perspective. In another wonderfully surprising statement by Martin Luther we read:

“God sendeth no sicknesses into the world but by the devil; for all melancholy or sicknesses do come of the devil, not of God. The devil is our Lord God’s executioner.”<sup>40</sup>

Luther taught that God’s only method for sending any sickness into our world is by Satan’s power. This is consistent with Scripture:

*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him (Acts 10:38)*

*And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? (Luke 13:16)*

*So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. (Job 2:7)*

In these passages we are clearly told that Satan is the sickness-inflictor. It is God who does the healing of the individual from the works of Satan. Scripture must be interpreted in the light of other equally important passages of Scripture pertaining to the subject. God is not a schizophrenic nor does He and Satan work in the same manner. The simple truth is that Satan causes sickness and God heals sickness. When God is said to send sickness it is by permission rather than literal causation.

God Does not literally “send” sickness. Sin opens the door for Satan to inflict us with diseases. God actually, in His mercy, “sends” His Word to heal us from the sicknesses that come as a result of our sins.

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<sup>40</sup> Luther, Martin **Watchwords for the Warfare of Life** (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1869), p. 119

*Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. **He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.** Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!* (Psalm 107:17-21)

It is due to the transgressions and iniquities of fools that they are inflicted. Sin opens the door for Satan to inflict (1 Cor. 5:1-5). God, in His abundant goodness and mercy, heals men and delivers them from satanic attack. Therefore, we must stop blaming God for the sickness and disease that men, women, and children suffer. I believe that Charles Cuthbert Hall in his book, *Does God Send Trouble*, summarizes this well:

“...pain, calamity, sickness, and death are not to be attributed to God as causing them, and as sending them upon us, but that they and all other evils have entered into the world as the fruits and consequences of sin; that man’s perverted choices have related him adversely to the laws of God’s universe; laws which were framed for a holy race in a holy world, and which would forever have operated blessedly upon a holy race in a holy world, but which are brought violently into collision with the happiness and the life of man through man’s own perverted choices.”<sup>41</sup>

God never wanted sickness and disease in this world. Our choices have caused God’s wonderful laws to work against us. It is men and devils, rather than our benevolent God, who are responsible for sickness and disease.

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<sup>41</sup> Hall, Charles Cuthbert *Does God Send Trouble?* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1894), p. 80

## Lesson Six

### God “Sends” Evil Spirits

“For, pray take notice, God is said in Scripture to *send* what he *can* (but *doth not*) hinder from being *sent*.”<sup>42</sup>

– Edward Bird (1726)

Let us continue to look at Edward Bird’s statement in the light of some perplexing Bible passages that, without proper understanding, casts aspersions upon the otherwise loving character of our God.

#### God “Sent” an Evil Spirit

Out of all of the passages of Scripture we have examined so far dealing with the idea that God “sent” some negative circumstance to destroy individuals or nations, one of the most perplexing is the idea that God “sent” an evil spirit to deal with a self-made king of Israel:

*“Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech”* (Judges 9:23; KJV)

There are a number of ways in which commentators, scholars, and Bible expositors have explained this passage. What I believe is the most problematic one is the “hyper-sovereignty” explanation in which God is controlling all forces – good and demonic – and is able to utilize these forces in whatever way He chooses.

However, if this idea is true then the warfare between light and darkness that prevails throughout most of the Bible is a sham. According to this view, God is simply the divine puppet master who manipulates history and devils and humans are His play-things.

There are others who, like myself, reject the idea that God uses satanic forces to do His bidding. Yet, they explain away Judges 9:23 by claiming that it is not describing an actual demonic spirit. They claim that God only sent an “evil disposition” to these men.

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<sup>42</sup> Bird, *Fate and Destiny*, p. 141



However, this still makes God the author of evil. This “spirit” caused strife and division between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. James tells us that God is not the author of such evil:

*“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.”* (James 3:14-15)

Note that envying and strife does not originate in Heaven from where God dispenses His gifts (James 1:17; Eph. 1:3; Matt. 18:18-19). These actions find their origin in the demonic. James goes on to say that it is this “devilish wisdom” that causes people to destroy one another. It is only through submission to God and resisting the devil that we are able to overcome this “evil disposition”.

### **Understanding Judges 9:23 in the Permissive Sense**

Therefore, claiming that the “evil spirit” that was “sent” was not an actual spirit but a “disposition” neither vindicates God nor removes the fact that such a disposition is influenced by satanic spirits. The simpler way to resolve this issue in the light of God’s character and reputation is to once again remember the original translation of the word “sent” in Judges 9:23. This word, as is true of the majority of the passages we have studied in these lessons, is from the Hebrew word “shalach”. One Bible expositor says the following about this word in relation to Judges 9:23:

“The word *shalach*, which is rendered ‘he sent,’ diverges into a variety of applications, as the verb ‘sent’ does in English: as release, dismiss, discharge, &c.: and as applied to the evil intentions of the men of Shechem, the meaning evidently is, **that God permitted things so to work** in his universal providence, that the spirit of evil in these men, manifested itself against Abimelech; for so it is in the original. So that there is a very material difference between an evil spirit, and a spirit of evil.”<sup>43</sup>  
(Emphasis are mine)

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<sup>43</sup> Bellamy, John *The Anti-Deist: A Vindication of the Bible, in Answer to the Publication Called the Deist* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orm and Brown, 1819), p. 48

According to this author, the root understanding of the word “shalach” is basically “permission” rather than “casuation.” In his translation of the passage, J. B. Rotherham renders it:

*“Then God **let go** a spirit of mischief between Abimelech and the owners of Shechem, - and the owners of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech”* (Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible)

The idea presented by Rotherham is the same idea in our citation by Edward Bird that God only “sends” that which He merely did not prevent or hinder. A paraphrase of this passage by Dr. Jack Blanco strongly emphasizes the permissive understanding of Judges 9:23:

“God allowed Abimelech and the people of Shechem to become disenchanted with each other. The people rebelled against Abimelech and, in turn, he hated them”<sup>44</sup>

According to this rendering, God removed any protection or hedge that He previously had over Abimelech and the men of Shechem. God’s part was not to commission an evil spirit to do mischief. The evil spirit already had a right to attack these men because our sin opens the door to the enemy and gives him rights to destroy us (Eph. 4:26-27; 1 Cor. 5:5). At a certain point God has to allow people to reap what they have sown when they refuse to repent.

### **Scholars and the Permissive Sense**

A number of other scholars I have sought believe that this passage must be understood from the perspective of *permission* rather than *causation*. For example in a well-known publication we read, “That is, God permitted the evil spirit of jealousy, treachery, and discord, to break out between Abimelech and the Shechemites.”<sup>45</sup>

A number of other scholars agree with the fact that this was only permitted by God. Let me cite a few of them below:

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<sup>44</sup> Blanco, *The Clear Word*, p. 283

<sup>45</sup> Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge

“23. God sent an evil spirit,] He permitted an evil spirit of discord to arise between Abimelech and the Shechemites. Or perhaps, he permitted an evil spirit, or demon, to sow dissension between them; 1 Sam. xvi. 14. xviii. 10; ha. xxxiii. 1.; 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.”<sup>46</sup>

“*God sent an evil spirit.*—That is, permitted the evil spirit of discord and treachery to break out. Under the direction of Providence, but not in consequence of any positive agency, jealousies & to arise, which produced factions, and these factions in their turn produced insurrections, civil contentions, and bloodshed. Comp. 1 Kings xxii. 23. Ps. lxxviii. 49. The throne of violence never stands secure. The blood upon which it has been established seldom fails to undermine it at last.”<sup>47</sup>

“This was from God. He permitted the Devil, that great mischief maker, to sow discord between them, and he is an evil spirit, whom God not only keeps under his check, but sometimes, serve his own purposes by. Their own lusts were evil spirits, they are devils in men's own hearts, from them come wars and fightings. These God gave them up to, and so might be said to send the evil spirits between them. When men's sin is made their punishment, though God is not the Author of the sin, yet the punishment is from him.”<sup>48</sup>

The meaning is, as it is explained in the following words, God permitted Abimelech to be deceived and dealt treacherously with by the men of Shechem, that his cruelty, and the blood which he had shed, might come upon him. It is nothing more than an acknowledgment of the justice and wisdom of Providence, in suffering wicked men to be judicially blinded, that they may fall according to their own deserts. *Dr. S. Clarke*. This is an usual form of speech in Scripture, and denotes, not any positive action, but a permission only, or at most a direction from God. *Stackhouse*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Holden, George **The Christian Expositor; or, Practical Guide to the Study of the Holy Scriptures** (London: J, G, & F Rivington, 1834), p. 235

<sup>47</sup> Bush, George **Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Books of Joshua and Judges** (London: Thomas Ward & Co., 1838), p. 183

<sup>48</sup> Henry, Matthew **Exposition of the Old and New Testament, Volume 1** (London: Joseph Ogle Robinson, 1828), p. 621

<sup>49</sup> D'oyley, George **Notes: Explanatory and Practical: Genesis to Job** (Cambridge: University Press, 1823), p. 37

While some would dispute the understanding of Judges 9:23 as cited above, we can see that the majority interpret the passage as God permitting this evil spirit to bring the strife, discord and subsequent bloodshed that it did rather than believing that God would personally commission an agent of Satan to bring about an event that later revelation tells us does not find its origins in Heaven.

### **The Evil Spirit from the Lord**

There is a similar incident found in the story of King Saul that has troubled many people:

*“But the Spirit of the Lord **departed** from Saul, and **an evil spirit from the Lord** troubled him. And Saul’s servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well”* (1 Sam. 16:14-16; see also v.23; 18:10-12; 19:9; 28:15-18).

Some modern translations surprisingly interpret the passage in a way that says that the evil spirit was “sent” by God. The Easy to Read Version provides us with one of several examples: *“The Lord’s Spirit left Saul. Then the Lord **sent** an evil spirit to Saul that caused him much trouble.”* (1 Samuel 16:14; Easy to Read Version).

Rather than allowing this translation to discourage us, we find that in many ways it is helpful. If we believe that the evil spirit “from the Lord” that tormented Saul was “sent” then we should understand it in the sense that we have discovered in these lessons, which is that “sent” means that God did not hinder or prevent this spirit from tormenting Saul.

Note the first that God *departed* from Saul. It is no different than what happened to Samson in Judges 16:19-21. Samson had supernatural strength to defeat his enemies until he allowed the Nazrite law to be violated by having his hair shaved off. When the Philistines, who he easily defeated in the past, attacked him again Judges 16:20 says, *“And he wist not that the Lord was **departed** from*

him.” There was nothing hindering his enemies from overtaking him after this.

God usually does not depart from any person unless He is pushed away by our refusal to submit to Him (Job 21:14; 22:17). Yet, God often takes the responsibility for what happens when He departs. Hosea said, “*Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left: yea, woe also to them when I depart from them!*” (Hosea 9:12)

God says that He will bereave them of their children. Here we are told that God will kill their children but we are also told the *method* by which He will do it. He will do it by *departing from them*, thus removing His protective presence. Another translation of Hosea 9:12 says:

*But even if they did bring up children, I would take them away and not leave one alive. When I abandon these people, terrible things will happen to them.”*  
(Good News Translation)

This is similar to God’s words in Deuteronomy 31:17b in which He says, “... *so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?*” Whenever God “departs” or “forsakes” an individual or a nation and they begin to receive the consequences of their rebellion, the Hebrews stated it in terms in which God is said to have actively brought upon the person the circumstances.

In all actuality, when God departs it means that He has withdrawn His protection over the person and then Satan is given full access (Matt. 18:34; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; Eph. 4:26-27; 1 Tim. 1:20). One minister stated it best over a century ago concerning this incident with King Saul:

“It is enough to know, that when the spirit of the Lord departs from a man, he is left to himself—harrowed by his own evil thoughts, stung by remorse, scourged by unsanctified passions, which are often fiercer than the lacerating fiends which exhausted their malignity upon the poor wretch ‘possessed among the tombs.’ A man deserted of God becomes possessed of the devil. The evil spirit enters the heart when the good Spirit

leaves it; and enters it because no barrier is left to shut out its baneful approach. Its presence is soon manifest.”<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, the language in 1 Samuel 16 should be understood in a permissive sense. When God departed this gave access to an evil spirit from Satan to torment him.

### **The Evil Spirit was by Permission**

Therefore, the statement, “evil spirit from the Lord” must be understood in the permissive rather than in the causative sense. Some modern translations are helpful in this regard. 1 Samuel 16:23 in the KJV talks that “*the evil spirit from God was upon Saul*”. The VOICE translation presents this passage more permissively:

*Whenever God **allowed** the evil spirit to afflict Saul, David would play the harp, Saul would be relieved of his torment, and the evil spirit would depart.*

We believe that this fits the circumstances much more accurately. Saul lost God’s protection so God’s part in Saul’s mental torment by the evil spirit was permissive only. In 1 Samuel 18:10 we have another example in which King Saul is said to have received the evil spirit directly from God:

*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.*

The Contemporary English Version understands this passage in a more permissive sense:

*“The next day **the Lord let an evil spirit take control of Saul**, and he began acting like a crazy man inside his house. David came to play the harp for Saul as usual, but this time Saul had a spear in his hand.”*

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<sup>50</sup>Mead, Darius **The Christian Parlor Magazine, Volume 11** (New York: James H. Pratt & Co., 1855), p. 259

Again we can see that when rendered these passages in a permissive sense that God is vindicated from having utilized an evil spirit to do His bidding. God's only part was to leave Saul. When God removed His protective presence then whatever He prevented from happening to Saul before was given free liberty to torment him. Dr. Jack Blanco's paraphrase of 1 Samuel 18:10 is appropriate here:

"The day after the women praised David, Saul became very depressed and God did not prevent the evil spirits from troubling him. So he called David to come and play for him, which David did. But it wasn't long until Saul flew into a rage and began pacing the floor with a spear in his hand, shouting like a mad man."<sup>51</sup>

Those who look to God as their protector are promised in Psalm 91:5-6, "*Thou shalt not be afraid of terror by night; nor of the arrow flying by day; nor of the evil thing that walks in darkness; nor of calamity, and **the evil spirit** at noon-day*" (Brenton Septuagint Translation). God is the protector from evil spirits, not the inflictor of them. However, when we rebel against God as Saul did, decide to do things the way that we want them done then we can no longer expect God to protect us from these evil spirits.

### **Many Theologians Agree**

Numerous theologians and scholars agree that God's part in Saul being tormented by an evil spirit was permission rather than causation. I'll cite a few of them below:

"And, as it came upon him in consequence of the withdrawal of the Divine Spirit, and by the permission of the Divine Being, and also as a judgment, it may, with the greatest propriety, and especially in the Hebrew idiom, according to which God is often said to do that which he permits to be done, and renders subservient to his purposes, be represented as from God. This is the natural interpretation of the passage, and that which best agrees with the general doctrine of the Bible respecting evil spirits."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Blanco, *The Clear Word*, p. 331

<sup>52</sup> Scott, Walter **The Existence of Evil Spirits Proved: and their Agency, Particularly in Relation to the Human Race, Explained and Illustrated** (Jackson and Walford, 1843), pp. 94, 95

“It only remains to say that there is need of no other agency from God than the permissive.\* Satan never needs to be sent on such a mission; it is only requisite that the Lord suffer him to go. Such permission is one feature in that awful retribution which God must send upon apostate souls. They having chosen sin and rebellion rather than obedience, and, consequently, evil rather than good, God leaves them to their own guilty choice, to ‘eat the fruit of their own way, and to be filled with their own devices.’”<sup>53</sup>

“The ‘evil spirit from God,’ or rather, ‘evil spirit of God,’ is to be taken in the Oriental sense which regards God as the ruler and originator of all things, and is not careful to distinguish between the active and the enduring (or suffering or permissive) providence of God. It is not at all likely that the Oriental writer of this narrative looked upon God as tempting Saul with evil. To be short, the meaning is, as most of the old interpreters have taken it, Saul was afflicted with a passion that bordered on, if it did not quite reach, insanity. It was the result of his giving way to his passion—and that is all there is of it, in the Oriental view. The expression, rightly understood, ought by no means to lead any one into discussing the moral government of God, and questioning the righteousness or holiness which rules all, any more than in the case of any sin. There is nothing more in the text than that Saul was so angry that he talked and acted like a crazy man. He was drawn away of his own passions, and thus enticed. That was all the insanity sent from God.”<sup>54</sup>

More could be cited on this but I believe that this is enough to prove that more than a few learned men from earlier periods understood this truth more than many of our present day Bible expositors. God simply does not need to use evil to accomplish His ends. God does not “send” evil spirits in the literal sense to torment people, even those that He has abandoned.

However, when a person refuses to cooperate with God, at some point God must depart. His departure is the loss of His protection. The loss of His protection gives access to Satan and demons to have their way with the forsaken.

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<sup>53</sup> Cowles, Henry **Hebrew History from the Death of Moses to the Close of the Scripture Narrative** (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1875), p. 139

<sup>54</sup> Professor Isaac M. Hall, “*Orientalism of the Lessons*” in **Sunday School Times, Volumes 24-26** (1882), p. 1883



## **Satan's Kingdom is not Divided**

One final thing we need to point out concerning God's relationship to evil spirits is that there are actually two kingdoms in the spirit realm and they are at war with each other. There is God's kingdom of light, love and liberty and Satan's kingdom of darkness, death and destruction.

The fact that Satan has his own kingdom does not make him equal to God in any way. Satan is an angel who was created by God but later fell. He was able to persuade numerous angels to join him in his rebellion. He is much inferior to God in every respect. However, since fallen angels and demons choose to follow Satan then God recognizes his kingdom, though we can be sure that Satan's reign is only temporary.

Nonetheless, Satan has a kingdom and it is united. The realm of devils and demons are under Satan's direction:

*And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. (Matthew 12:25-28)*

God does not rule, in the practical sense, over Satan's kingdom. God often *overrules* many of Satan's actions but God is not involved in meeting with demons and handing them assignments. This is Satan's doing and all of his own initiative. If God were working through Satan or if Satan was doing God's will then Satan's kingdom would be divided and would have fallen long ago.

However, God still maintains His right as sovereign of the universe and Satan is not always able to do as he wishes. In some cases, Satan must gain permission from God to perform certain actions:

*“Simon, Simon (Peter), listen! Satan has demanded permission to sift [all of] you like grain; but I have prayed [especially] for you [Peter], that your faith [and confidence in Me] may not fail; and you, once you have turned back again [to Me], strengthen and support your brothers [in the faith].”* (Luke 22:31-32; Amplified Bible)

Note that Satan does not merely *request* permission to destroy people – he *demand*s it. Another translation says, “*Simon, Simon! Pay attention! · Satan has demanded permission to have all of you for himself, to sift you like · wheat*” (Mounce Reverse-Interlinear New Testament).

Again we see that Satan *demand*s permission. One cannot demand something unless they believe that they have a right to it in the first place. If God were “sending” Satan and demons to torment men then Satan would not have to even *ask* politely, much less *demand*, permission to torture.

We must recognize the fact that God does not dangle anyone in front of Satan as someone would dangle a carrot in front of a rabbit. God does not initiate any of Satan’s actions against any man. It is Satan, of his own initiative who often demands as his right the permission to torment those who have given him legal access. This is how we are to understand the situation with Abimelech and Saul.

We can conclude from this that when God grants Satan permission then it is only that and not Him “sending” Satan in the literal sense. God has given us authority over Satan and all evil spirits. We must walk in that authority and stop giving Satan access into our lives via sin (Luke 10:17-20; Eph. 4:26-27; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-10).

## Appendix A

### Edward Bird and the Character of God

*Therefore hearken unto me ye men of understanding:  
far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and  
from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity.*  
(Job 34:10)

Edward Bird opens his book, *Fate and Destiny Inconsistent with Christianity or the Horrid Decree of Absolute and Unconditional Election and Reprobation Fully Detected*, with several Bible quotes, our opening passage being among them.

Since we have used a statement by Edward Bird to open each chapter I thought that the reader might find it interesting what he taught on God's character, especially in relation to what we like to refer to as "the permissive sense" of Scripture.

#### The Character of God

Bird wrote his book primarily to defend the truth about God's benevolent love against many unloving ideas that were being spread about Him in the religious circles of his day. Bird believed that the understanding of God's infinite love was very important to Him:

The Subject-Matter I have treated on, is built upon a Large and Noble Foundation, no less than that most Amiable and Comfortable Attribute of God, his Infinite Love and Beneficence; an Attribute which he seems most Delighted in, and for the Honour of which, to have a more Tender Regard, than for any other.<sup>55</sup>

The apostle John wrote, "*He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love*" (1 John 4:8; see also v. 16). Bird rightly believed that this is the most important attribute because God is indeed love. Love infuses God and every other attribute is governed by His holy love. Bird felt that those who taught things about God that were inconsistent with love robbed Him of value:

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<sup>55</sup> Edward Bird, *Fate and Destiny Inconsistent with Christianity*, Introduction

Therefore, those Persons who shall presume to detract from this Attribute, are guilty of the greatest Sacrilege they can commit; because they rob God of the brightest Pearl of his Divine Majesty. For God is LOVE: His tender Mercies are over all his Works.<sup>56</sup>

Bird taught that those who distort the truth of God's love were being sacrilegious, thus desecrating the truth of God's love. Bird further states that such people, "... form base and narrow Conceptions of Almighty GOD; representing him a Being, full of Partiality, Cruelty, and Injustice; Contriving and Resolving on the Ruin of his Creature."<sup>57</sup> Sadly, it is this type of theology that causes men to hate God and deny His existence.

Furthermore, the Bible tells us that we become like the object of our worship (2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Kings 17:15; Psalm 115:8). This is another reason why a right perspective of God is important in our teaching. Edward Bird reluctantly wrote his book against fatalistic theology because of the impact that its teachings on God would have on the character of those who embrace it:

It hath often grieved me, to see so many young Persons just entering upon a' Religious Conversation, so unwarily to suck in such Dangerous Principles, which cannot in the least be pretended, to make them better Men, or better Christians, but may tend to make them worse: Therefore, a Concern for their Welfare, was the Motive that set me on Writing.<sup>58</sup>

Note that Bird felt that teachings that denigrate God's character make men worse and not better. John Calvin's Geneva is a perfect example of how a man becomes a horrible dictator when he presents God in such a manner. Calvin persecuted and murdered many people based on an ideological view of God that he held. The murdering Jewish leaders killed our Lord based on erroneous views that they held about God's character. What we believe about God determines our own character because we become what we worship.

Here is why Bird taught against the idea that God so sovereignly controlled men that even their sin was decreed by Him. This is to make God the instigator of evil:

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. iii

I dare not impute to God what is unworthy of Him to own nor assume to myself what is peculiar to Him only. For I believe that nothing Evil is to be imputed to God, and that all that Evil' of Sin which dwelleth in me, or proceedeth from me, is not His, but entirely my on:<sup>59</sup>

Edward Bird taught that God should not be blamed for any evil actions of men. Sin was not God's doing. Evil is inconsistent with God's character.

### **Understanding the “Permissive Sense”**

While we fully agree with Edward Bird's frustration with some fatalistic theologies that denigrate God's character, we also realize that a number of places in Scripture seemingly teach that God does commit or moves men, animals, and devils to commit evil. In his book Bird explains to his opponents that these passages must be understood in the *permissive sense*.

Bird wrote this book as a conversation between two characters debating a theology. One (Eutyclus) represents God as One who is a sovereign micro-controller from which good and bad derive. He challenges his opponent (Epenetus) with some of the Scripture passages that make God appear to be the author of evil. Epenetus answers many of these by referring to the permissive sense of the Hebrew language. But before we look at some of Bird's statements on this, we need to allow Bird to explain what *is* and what *is not* meant by the permissive sense interpretation:

I believe God does not permit Sin, as Permission signifies Connivance or Consent; but that he permits it so, as that signifies, [not to hinder by main Force.] To make it plain, by a Comparison: If I see a Man Robbing my Neighbour, and lay nothing to him; I so permit, as to be guilty: but if I warn and exhort, if I promise and threaten, and do all I can to hinder him (without killing him,) I so permit, as to be innocent. And is not the Case the same in Gods Permission? Does not he warn, exhort, beseech, invite, yea and threaten too? yet he suffers us to live, and have that Nature of the Will with which he made us? Whereas, to destroy us for the prevention of Sin, and to take away our Option of Good or Evil, and so make us to become like Stocks or Stones, or wooden Engines which are moved only by

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. iv

Wires, at the mere discretion or pleasure of the Engineer were, by inevitable Consequence, to unmake his Creature.<sup>60</sup>

This statement is important to understand what we call the “permissive sense” of Scripture. There are some even among proponents of fatalistic theologies who use the word “permission” when it comes to God. However, their understanding of what it means for God to permit something is quite different from ours. There is only a way to soften the idea of their predestination theology.

Many people today believe that every single event in life, small or large, has been predestined by God and is under His meticulous control. Every rape, murder, abortion, and child molestation is preordained by Him according to this theology. In order to prevent some from coming to the horrid conclusions about this deity that are inevitable, these advocates will claim that God “permits” these things to happen. However, their idea of permission is, as Bird stated, more along the lines of *consent*.

But as Edward Bird well states, this is not the Biblical teaching on the permissive sense. The Biblical teaching on the subject means that God honors the free-will of the creature (an attribute of man denied by most fatalistic theologians). God will attempt to hinder and prevent many evils from happening but because He honors the will of men, He often allows them to have what they want even if He did not want it for them. Therefore, the Biblical teaching of permission, in contrast to the fatalistic idea of soft deterministic permission, simply means that God does not restrain evil if men persist in wanting it.

Bird, using the characters of Eutychus and Epenetus, exposes the erroneous ideas of “permission” held by some fatalistic theologians. Eutychus (the Calvinist) attempts to challenge Epenetus’ anti-Calvinist views by appealing to some teachings from Jesus. Epenetus soundly destroys this ideology in his rebuttal:

**Eutychus.** But does not this Doctrine plainly contradict the Scripture? I'm sure our Saviour intimateth as much, when he told his Apostles, that the very Hairs of their Head were all numbered, and that ev'n a poor contemptible Sparrow falls not to the Ground without his heavenly Father-, which evidently shews,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, pp. 13-14

that the pettiest Matters in the World are determined by God Himself.

**Epenetus.** I do grant, that ev'n a Sparrow cannot fall to the Ground, without God's Permission or Knowledge; but I don't think, from thence, that God hath made any special Decree concerning Sparrows. And the Scope and Meaning of our Saviour, in this Place, I take to be this, namely, the Comforting and Encouraging his Disciples, whom he was-now fending-abroad into the World *as sheep among Wolves*; and that if such Trifles as a Hair, and a Sparrow could not fall, without his Permission, how much reason they had to place their Confidence in God, who was their special Observer, and most loving Father; who, they might be sure, would never suffer any thing to befall them, but for his Glory, and their Good: so that you may see the Ground of your Mistake, by confounding Permission with Preordination.<sup>61</sup>

The fact that many of the fatalistic idealists “confuse permission with preordination” sums up the problem well. As we present the truth about the permissive sense in in our attempts to vindicate God's character from the denigration and misunderstanding that it has suffered due to wrong Bible interpretation, never confuse it with the deterministic idea of “permission” which is nothing more than the softening of predestination concepts.

### **Permission applied to Scripture**

One of the many troublesome statements found in Scripture is that God hardens people's hearts. Using the character of Eutyclus and Epenetus, Edward Bird disputes the idea that this is something actively done on God's part:

**Eutyclus.** But it is said, Joshua 11. 20. That it was of the Lord to harden the Hearts of the Canaanites, that they should come against Israel in Battle that he might destroy them utterly.

**Epenetus.** The hardening of their Hearts, here ascribed to God, is, their coming to sight against Israel; if so, then they had hardend their own Hearts, ver. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Which because they could not have done, if God had not suffer'd them, it is therefore said, it was of the Lord. For had he endued them with Irresistible Grace, or destroyed their Human Nature, their hardening their Hearts would have been an impossible Thing. **And for God not to hinder, or not to soften their Hearts, which the Text saith,**

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, pp. 18, 19

**they had harden'd against Israel, was no more than to permit, what they committed by their Option and Choice;** and this to serve the Ends of his Providence, that his People Israel might destroy those wicked Canaanites for their Sins, the measure whereof, they had filled up. .... all he did, was not softening what he found obdurate; and not to soften, is far from having any the least hand in the Obduration.<sup>62</sup> (Emphasis are mine)

According to Bird, God did not actively harden the hearts of the Canaanites. He merely permitted them to have what they had already determined to have. The Charles Thomson Translation says, "*For the Lord permitted them to assume courage to come to battle with Israel, that they might be utterly destroyed.*"

Bird then addresses Pharaoh's heart becoming hard:

And how did God do it sore, riot in the Way either that Pharaoh or Satan did it; for Satan harden'd Pharaoh's Heart, as well as Pharaoh himself; both being Active and Effective in its Obduration. But God hardening his Heart, was by a Total and Final withdrawing his Grace, leaving him in a State of Irrecoverable Wickedness; by such a kind of forsaking, by which the Damned are left in Hell. Nay, ev'n this very Dereliction and Leaving Pharaoh to himself, (the certain Consequence of which, was his Final Obduration,) was conferred on him as a Punishment for his having harden'd his Heart so often, when God by his Messengers, and their Miracles and Wonders, had often call'd him to Repentance.<sup>63</sup>

Bird, contrary to the doctrines of so many other men, rightfully taught against the idea that God used divine power to hardened Pharaoh's heart. Bird taught that the real understanding of the passage is that God withdrew His grace and left Pharaoh to himself. Daniel Mace provides us an insightful translation of Romans 9:18: "*.... thus some he pursues with his favours, and **abandons others to their obduracy, according as he thinks fit.***"

Hence this is *permission* rather than *causation*. In *A Translation of the Old Testament Scriptures from the Original Hebrew* by Helen Spurrell we find this translation of Exodus 9:12: "*But JEHOVAH allowed the heart of Pharaoh to be hardened, that he attended not unto them; as JEHOVAH had spoken unto Moses*".

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pp. 134-135

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 133



Again, God's loving character is vindicated when He is not seen as the One who removed Pharaoh's freedom of choice.

Bird also tackles Pharaoh's oppression of the Israelites which some mistakenly believe was all a part of God's plan:

**Eutyclus.** Pray, Sir, had God no hand in Pharaoh's Oppression of the Children of Israel, when he had determined it, and foretold it many Years before?

**Epenetus.** God hates all Sin, and therefore he can have no hand in either Willing or Effecting of it. Sir, will you, or any Man have any hand in doing what you hate? Now, if you mean, that God determined Pharaoh's Will to his Oppression, it is Blasphemy; if to the Permission of the Oppression, then it is nothing but Impertinence, because all must agree in that. Then as to foretelling, that is far from having any hand in the Event. The Physician foretells when his Patient shall have a Paroxysm in a Chronical Disease, ev'n whilst he is prescribing the usual Means of Prevention. Beside, is there no difference between the End of an Intention, the Event of a Prophecy, and the Effect of a Cause? Or had Isaiah any hand in the Birth of" Cyrus, because he foretold it an hundred Years before Cyrus Was born?<sup>64</sup>

Many fatalists unreasonably confuse God's prophesying and prediction of an event as His ordination of it. But as Bird points out, predicting an event does not make God the cause of it any more than a doctor who predicts or diagnoses a disease. In the case of Israel, God knew that they would fall into this oppression and permitted it but He certainly did not cause it.

But even worse is how, apart from a true understanding of the permissive sense, some can actually accuse God of having ordained a "rape" that He merely prophesied would be the results of sin:

**Eutyclus.** What do you think then, of that Place in 2Sam.12.11, 12. in which God told David, that He would take his Wives, and give them to his Neighbour, Etc. Nay, further, It is not said, God sufferd Absalom to defile his Fathers Concubines; but he tells David, what thou hast done secretly, I will do in the fight of ibis Sun; which seems to infer, that God had a hand in those Transactions or an Efficiency in the Work.

**Epenetus.** Here I am more surprised, than at all those Texts you have hitherto urg'd in Behalf of your Cause: For if it be literally meant, (as you contend for,) that God did the same in public,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 135

which David did in Private, the Blasphemy is such as cannot with Modesty be named; tor What was that which David did in Secret, but his Adultery with Bathsheba? And can it be possibly imagined, that God could do the same Thing Openly? **Yet so run the Words, What thou hast done, I will do; which Words, tho' active in Sound, are Permissive in Sense only,** and therefore spoken Figuratively. For God could not do Actively in the Sight of the Sun, what David had done in Secret; and had you but read to the end of the Story, 2 Sam. 16. 22. you wou'd have seen the Completion of God's Prophecy, and have found it was Absalom who did what you apply to God. A Tent was spread (saith the Text) upon the top of the House, and Absalom went in unto his father's Concubines in the sight of all Israel. This is the Sin which you urge as an Instance, to shew how the Manner of God s Working is held forth to us by way of Action. But to pals by the Impiety, I must take Notice of the Foolishness of your Objection, I will do this Thing (saith God to David:) And what was this Thing? Why, it is express'd, ver. 1 r. I will raise up Evil against thee, that is, the Evil of Punishment. I will take thy Wives and give them, **that is, permit Absalom to enjoy them.** And indeed, there was not the least Occasion of any more from God, because Absalom was ready enough of himself to do it, his own Flesh was sufficient to draw him on, Jam. 1.14. And besides his own Flesh, he had Ahithophel to prompt him forward, chap. 16. ver. 21. Nay, both himself, and Ahithophel had the Devil at their Elbow, to urge and tempt them.<sup>65</sup>

Other men have also absolved God from being a party to rape by appealing to the “permissive sense.” Adam Clarke interprets 2 Sam. 12:11, “That is, In the course of my providence I will permit all this to be done.”<sup>66</sup> Another commentary says, “The prophet speaks of God threatening to do what He only permitted to be done.”<sup>67</sup> We could cite others here. It is important that we do not see God as one who manipulates men to rape innocent women. But He will remove His protection when justice demands that the “sowing and reaping” process takes place.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, pp. 135-137

<sup>66</sup> The Adam Clarke Commentary

<sup>67</sup> Jamieson, Robert, D.D. "Commentary on 2 Samuel 12". "Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible". <<http://classic.studydrive.org/com/jfb/view.cgi?book=2sa&chapter=012>>. 1871.

The same holds true for yet another passage in which David credits God for someone committing a blatant sin against God's appointed king. Edward Bird is challenged with and answers the case of Shimei cursing David:

**Eutyclus.** Since you have given me so much Satisfaction in this Particular, pray give me your Opinion of that Place, 2 Sam. 16. 10. where God, is said, to have bid Shimei curse David: From whence, I have been told, that the Devil and Wicked Men cannot conceive, nor contrive, nor execute any Mischief, no, nor so much as endeavour its execution, any further than God himself doth command them; and that they are compelled to perform Obedience to such Commands.

**Epenetus.** A sine Doctrine indeed! How contrary is this to the Word of God? which faith, that God hath no pleasure in wickedness, Psal. 5.4. that he is of purer Eyes than to behold Evil, and cannot look on Iniquity, Hab. 1. 13. that he hateth all abomination, and hath not caused any Man to Err, that he hath commanded no Man to do wickedly, neither hath he given any Man license to Sin. And as to Shimei's cursing David, **I take the Words to be only permissive in Signification, tho' active in Sound** because, if they must be taken in the literal Sense, one of these two things must follow; either Shimei did not Sin in Cursing David who was God's Anointed, but rather discharged his Duty, in doing just as God had bid him, or else that he Sinned by God's express Precept and Command. If you assert the first, then you will incur these two Evils, the one, by contradicting those Texts of Scripture; wherein the Cursing of Shimei is affirmed to be a Sin, confessed by himself, 2 Sam. 19. 18, 19, 20. and punished by Solomon with Death itself, 1 King. 2. 44, 46.<sup>68</sup>

Adam Clarke also agreed with this perspective:

No soul of man can suppose that ever God bade one man to curse another, much less that he commanded such a wretch as Shimei to curse such a man as David; but this is a peculiarity of the Hebrew language, which does not always distinguish between permission and commandment. **Often the Scripture attributes to God what he only permits to be done; or what in the course of his providence he does not hinder.** David, however, considers all this as being permitted of God for his chastisement and humiliation.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Bird, *Fate and Destiny*, pp. 137, 138

<sup>69</sup> The Adam Clarke Commentary

This understanding vindicates God from the idea that He would violate His own Word and move people to sin as a punishment to those who sinned against Him. The same is true where God is said to have put lying spirits in the mouths of false prophets. Edward Bird again answers this challenge by appealing to the permissive sense of Scripture:

**Eutybus.** But is it not said expressly, 1 King. 22. 22. that the Lord did put a lying spirit in the mouth of all his Prophets? And in Job 1. we find Satan could do nothing that was Evil to Job, 'till he had obtained Power from God to do so. And it is said, Psal. 105. 25. that God turned the hearts of the Egyptians to hate his People.

**Epenetus,** In answer to these Passages of Holy Scripture, I think what I have said in the Answers immediately preceding this Objection, are more than sufficient; yet because in this last Text Psal. 105. 25. concerning God's turning the hearts of the Egyptians to hate his People, a blind Man may Humble; I answer, God did nothing to the Egyptians, but that which provoked them to Jealousy and Fear: which was the first thing wrought in them, and from that they naturally turned to hatred. But what was that which God did, which provoked them to that Jealousy, tear and Hatred? Ev'n that which was very good, ver. 24. increased his People greatly, and made them stronger than their Enemies. He blessed and multiplied his People Israel, for which the Envious Egyptians did Fear and Hate, and Conspire against them, Exod. 1. 9,10.<sup>70</sup>

The Awful Scroll Bible translates 1 Kings 22:23, "*Jehovah is to have **allowed** a deceptive breath, to be in the mouth of the prophets, that Jehovah is to have spoken to your disadvantage!*" Concerning Psalm 105:24-25, Rotherham's Emphasized Bible says:

*And he made his people exceeding fruitful, - And caused them to become stronger than their adversaries. **He let them turn their heart** - To hate his people, To deal treacherously with his servants (Rotherham)*

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<sup>70</sup> Bird, *Fate and Destiny*, pp. 138, 139

As Bird points out, there is no reason to believe that God moved efficaciously upon the Egyptians or that the God of truth needs to use lying demon spirits to do His will. However, when men persist in wanting to believe lies and to become jealous of others, God allows them their sin and its consequences.

Nonetheless, the same people who make the sovereignty of God into a dispenser of lying demonic spirits also literally believe that the God of truth deceives false prophets:

**Eutybus** Sir, There is one Text, Ezek. 14. 9. which I think can't well be evaded, as to the Point in hand; the Words are these, If the Prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that Prophet.

**Epenetus.** These words must needs be figuratively spoken; because it is downright Blasphemy, to say, that God is a "Deceiver. For as he who Loves, Teaches, Reads, or Hears in a Literal Sense, without a Figure, must needs be a Lover, Teacher, Reader or Hearer; so he who doth Deceive with a Figure, must without a Figure be a Deceiver. And in the Judgment of the most learned Expositors, and by the allowed Interpretation of other Places of Scripture, the Meaning of this Place must undeniably be one of these two: Either Deceiving is nothing else, but God's permitting the False Prophet, for his Wickedness, to be Deceived by the Deceiver, that is, the Devil: Or else it must mean, the delivering him up to his own corrupt Heart, which is willing of it self to be deceived and accordingly it follows in the very next words, I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him. Or it may be more fitly render'd, according to the Interpretation of Grotius, (who is styl'd as a Prodigy of Learning,) not, I have deceived, but, I will deceive him, viz. By giving him such an End as he expects not.<sup>71</sup>

Rotherham renders this verse, "*Yea the prophet himself when he suffereth himself to be deceived, and speaketh a word, Yahweh have suffered that prophet to be deceived.*" We know that God is not a deceiver so when we read such passages, we must heed Bird's advice to understand them as God permitting Satan to deceive them or allowing them to engage in self-deception.

Next, Bird takes on his opponents who derive from Scripture that God literally gives men a "spirit of slumber" and blinds them to the truth so that they will be lost forever. This contradicts a number of passages that tell us that God's will is for men to be saved and not

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, pp. 139, 140

condemned (John 3:16-17; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; 2 Pet. 3:8-9). This contradicts the invalid interpretation of Romans. 11 that some hold to. Bird explains God's actual method for doing what He is said to have done in His Word:

**Eutychnus.** It is said, Rom. 11. 8, 9. that God gave the Jews the spirit of slumber; Eyes that they should not see, and Ears that they should not hear, unto this day. And David saith, Let their Table be made a Snare, and a Trap, and a Stumblingblock, and a Recompence unto them.

**Epenetus.** I have enquired into this particular Place of Scripture, and I do not find it so meant by St. Paul's own words; tho' our English Bibles read, God gave them Eyes that they should not see: yet it is allow'd to be in the Original, Eyes of not seeing, not to see, or Eyes which see not. So that the Sense is evidently this, That the major part of the People, who made not use of that Grace which God had offered, but resisted Christ when he was preached in their Streets, did grow so obstinately Blind, (God withdrawing the Means so long Resisted, and so much Abused) as to fulfil the Prediction of the Prophet Isaiah, chap. 29.10. or at least a Parallel to the Case of which the Prophet there speaks. And this doth further appear, from St. Paul's Citation of the Psalmist, Psal. 69. 23. Let their Eyes be darkened that they may not see, &c. Rom. 11. 10. Words spoken by David, not as a Curse, but a Prophecy, that the Things intended for their Welfare, ver. 12. would become their Trap. Their very Table, whose proper End was to Refresh and Feed them, would, by their Wickedness, be made their Snare. And ev'n the preaching of the Gospel Resisted by them, would accidentally advance their Obduration.<sup>72</sup>

The Daniel Mace New Testament offers us a better rendering of Romans 11:8, “... *as it is written, ‘God hath given them up to a state of insensibility, so that their eyes could not see, and their ears could not hear.’*” The Williams New Testament also says, “... *as the Scripture Says, ‘God has given them over to an attitude of insensibility, so that their eyes cannot see and their ears cannot hear, down to this very day.’*”

God “gives them up” or “gives them over” to such a spirit when He no longer restrains them and allows them to have what they have wanted all along. It is only by this understanding that God's character is vindicated and that He is not charged with doing Satan's

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, pp. 140, 141

work (2 Cor. 4:4). Therefore, Edward Bird is correct to explain these passages in the manner that he did.

Finally, let me leave you with one more nugget of truth from Edward Bird. Here is a statement he made in reference to Job:

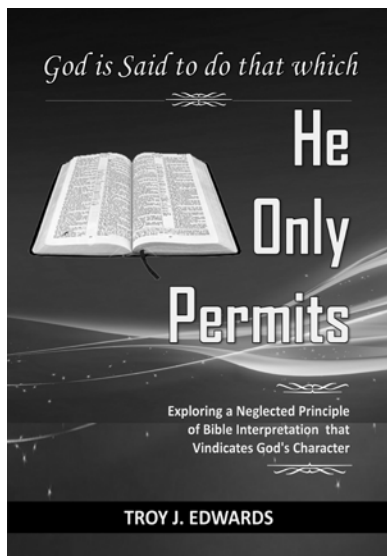
You know, in the Case of Job, Job 1. and chap. 2. 5. that Satan intreated God, in the Imperative Mood, Put forth thy Hand now, and touch all that be hath. Who cannot, for all this, be-thought to have commanded God Almighty, because God cannot be thought to have obeyed him; God only said, Behold, he is in thine Hand; from whence it is plain, **he spake of a Permission only**; where, by the way, it is observable, ( and I pray God it may be usefully observed by them who take delight to do Mischief) That tho' God should grant our Petition, when we beg of him the Power of doing Evil, (as the Devil did,) yet when he shall grant our Petition, as he did Satan's, **by permitting us to do, or not hindring us from doing all the Evil which we desire**, it is by no Means an Argument of his Kindness and Approbation, but only an Argument of his Wrath, as it was to Satan. Job 1. 11,12. Mat. 8. 31, 32.<sup>73</sup>

God exercises His wrath by permitting us to have the thing that we want that will destroy us in the end. The book of Job is the perfect illustration of this truth. These were lessons that Bird attempted to teach his readers several centuries ago. Sadly, because so many in our day have embraced erroneous views about God while claiming to have Bible support for such views, Bird's teachings are still needed in this present generation.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, pp. 112, 113

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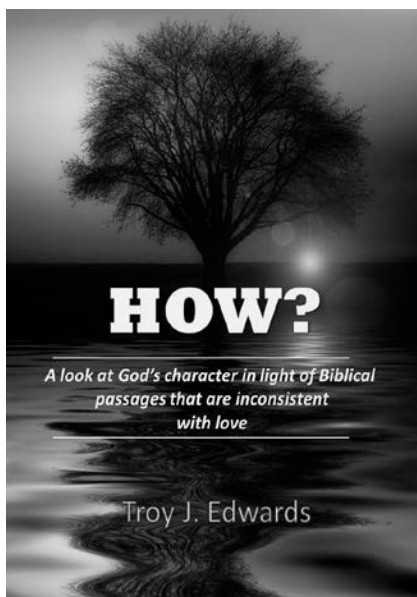
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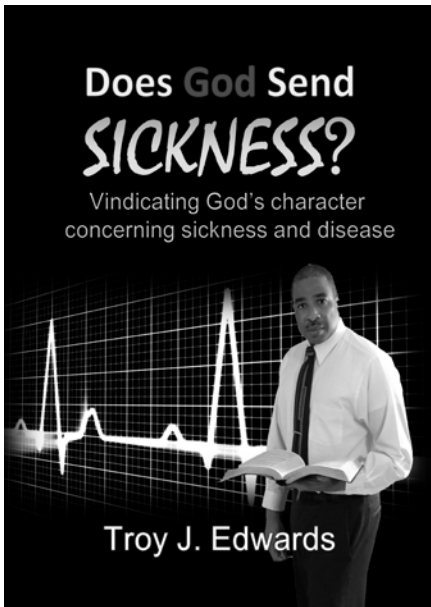


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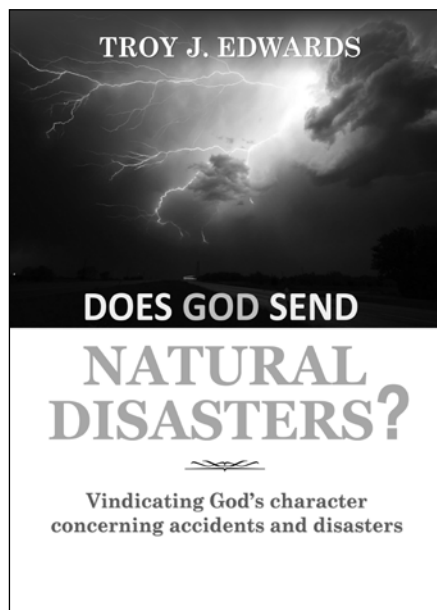
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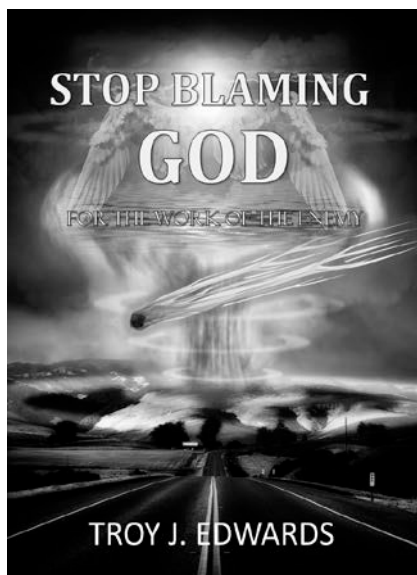
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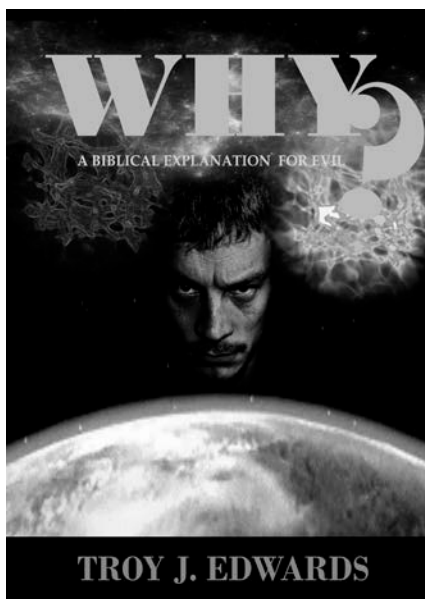
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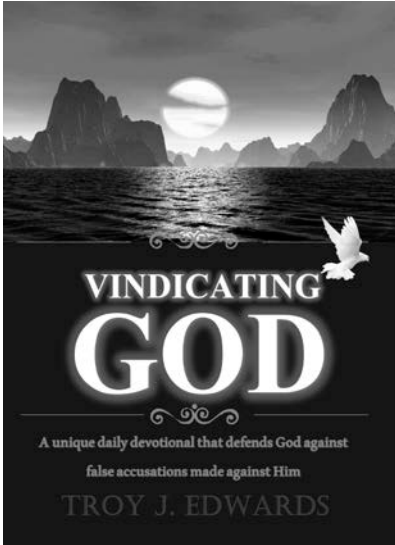
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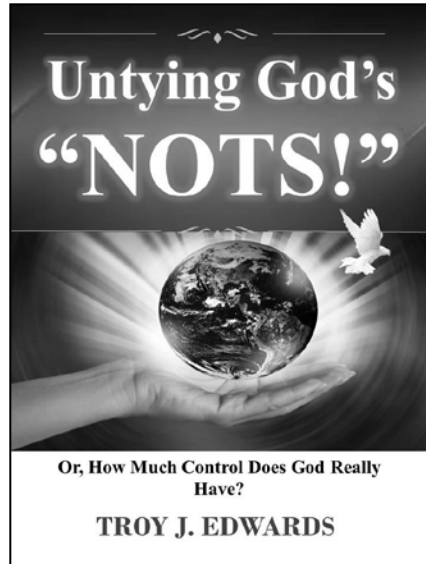
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