

Does God Directly
CAUSE
*Sickness, Destruction,
and Death?*



— By Kevin J. Mullins —

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*Discovering the light of the character of God which
shines out of darkness through the face of Jesus Christ
(2 Corinthians 4:6)*

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The Hiphil Verb Tense and the Hebrew Idiom of Permission

In the book of Isaiah, we read a very strange statement:

“O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance.” (Isaiah 63:17, *King James Version*)

Why would God ever make anyone stray from His ways? What are we missing from this Hebrew phrase that isn't coming through in English? Here's how William Lowth explains it:

“The Words might better have been rendered, **Why hast thou suffered [permitted] us to err from thy ways? for the form called Hiphil in Hebrew often denotes only permission**, and is rendered elsewhere to that sense by our translators.”
(*A Commentary Upon the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 501, words in brackets added)

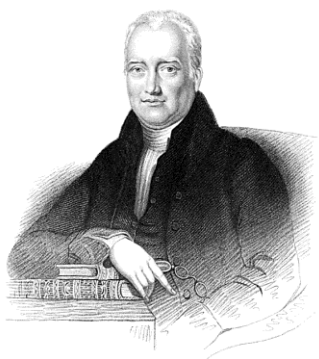


Here, Mr. Lowth introduces us to a Hebrew form of grammar called *Hiphil*. The Hebrew word translated as “hast thou made us to err” is the verb תַּעֲשֶׂה (ta`ah), which is in the *Hiphil* form thus, since it “often denotes only permission”, it could be understood that God is not literally causing the people to err. Rather, by honoring man's free will, God *permits* us to err from His ways and reap the natural consequences of such choices. In his *Companion Bible*, E.W. Bullinger translates it like this:

“Why hast Thou **suffered [permitted] us to err from Thy ways, and to **let** us harden our hearts ...”** (words in brackets added)

Although the *Hiphil* verb tense isn't always present, this important principle in interpreting Scripture (that God is permitting that

which He is often said to directly cause, do, or even command) helps us to understand those sample texts quoted on the back cover of this study. Notice what Adam Clarke writes about Exodus 4:21 where God is quoted as saying, “I will harden his [Pharaoh’s] heart”:



“All those who have read the Scriptures with care and attention, know well that God is frequently represented in them as doing what he only permits to be done. So because a man has grieved his Spirit and resisted his grace he withdraws that Spirit and grace from him, and thus he becomes bold and presumptuous in sin. Pharaoh made his own heart stubborn against God, Exodus 9:34; and God gave him up

to judicial blindness, so that he rushed on stubbornly to his own destruction.” (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Exodus 4:21)

We read a similar verse in Exodus 10:1: “for **I [God] have hardened his [Paraoh’s] heart**, and the hearts of his servants.” In her *Translation of the Old Testament Scriptures from the Original Hebrew*, Helen Spurrell translates it this way: “I have **allowed** his heart to be hardened.” We see the same in verse 27; most translations read: “But **the LORD hardened pharaoh’s heart**”, however, Spurrell again translates it as: “But JEHOVAH **permitted** Pharaoh’s heart to be hardened.” And in *The Emphasized Bible* it says, “And Yahweh **let** the heart of Pharaoh wax bold.” As Adam Clarke alluded to, this is also seen in other passages where it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15, 32; 9:34).

In the book of Jeremiah, we read:

“I [God] will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies.” (Jeremiah 19:7)

Again, this *Hiphil* verb tense suggests the permissive sense, as the *Unlocked Dynamic Bible* translates it:

“I will **allow** your enemies who want to kill you to kill many of you with their swords.”

Another passage from the book of Jeremiah that uses the *Hiphil* tense is found here:

“Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! **Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem**, saying, ‘You shall have peace,’ Whereas the sword reaches to the heart.” (Jeremiah 4:10)

Does God really deceive people? Here’s how John Gill explains it:

“**What the false prophets did, that God is said to do, because he suffered [permitted] them to deceive the people**; see 1 Kings 22:20. The Targum [Aramaic version] ascribes the deception to the false prophets, and not to God, ‘surely behold the false prophets deceive this people, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.’” (*Gill’s Exposition of the Bible*, Jeremiah 4:10, words in brackets added)



Echoing this understanding, we can read Jeremiah 4:10 from the *New English Translation*:

“In response to all this I said, ‘Ah, Lord GOD, you have surely **allowed** the people of Judah and Jerusalem to be deceived by those who say, ‘You will be safe!’ But in fact a sword is already at our throats.’”

In addition, John Goodge Foyster concludes:

“In the language of scripture, natural consequences are sometimes spoken of as though they were pre-ordained and irrevocable decrees. **What happens solely through the permission of the Almighty, in the ordinary course of his Providence, is described as though it had taken place through some special and irresistible intervention of his hand.** This is a mode of writing peculiar to the Hebrew idiom; an idiom which prevails everywhere throughout the New Testament, as well as the Old. **Thus, when the sacred writers represent God as ‘blinding the eyes of men that they should not see, and hardening their hearts that they should not understand;’ their meaning generally is that he does not powerfully interfere to prevent those evils which are the natural fruits of our own folly, perverseness, and impenitence.**” (*Sermons*; p. 90, 1826)

We see the *Hiphil* tense again in this next verse:

“But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and **the LORD struck the people with a very great plague.**”
(Numbers 11:33)



We are not to interpret this passage as God directly striking or causing the plague but permitting it. This is the incident when God’s people craved flesh food rather than the manna He was providing for them in the wilderness, so He gave them quail to eat. Recounting this story, the Psalmist wrote that God “... **let** them [the quail] fall in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings. So

they ate and were well filled, for **He gave them their own desire.** They were not deprived of their craving ...” (Psalm 78:28-30). Therefore, the plague did not come directly from God supernaturally infecting them but from the quail. Quail are known to be extremely poisonous during migration, especially while they are flying certain routes:

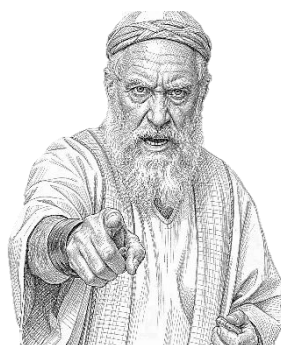
“One of the most widely known and studied poisonous birds is the European quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) in Eurasia and North Africa. Cases of quail poisoning have been reported since antiquity, although scientific evidence for the presence of poison in their tissue is still inconclusive to this day. **In the Old Testament, the Book of Numbers recounts that many Israelites died after the consumption of this poisonous bird during their exodus from Egypt.** In addition, human poisoning after eating European migratory quail, known as coturnism, was so common in the Roman Empire that quail consumption was prohibited during the 1st century AD.” (Guérin Nicolas, *When Poison Takes Flight: these birds might kill you – if you eat them*, Sciencenordic.com, Thursday, September 1, 2022)

There are even times when God seems to command things when in fact He is only permitting the person or people to carry out what they have already set their heart to do. In the book of Ezekiel, we read:

“Therefore speak to them, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, **I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart**, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols.’” (Ezekiel 14:4-5)

In *Brenton’s Septuagint*, it says it this way: “I the Lord will answer him according to the things in which his mind is entangled.” An example of this is found in 2 Samuel 16:10-11, which seems to suggest that God commanded Shimei to curse David.

“But the king said, ‘What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? **So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, ‘Curse David.’** Who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’ And David said to Abishai and all his servants, ‘See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and **let him curse; for so the Lord has ordered him.**” ¹



Adam Clarke explains:

“No 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.” (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2 Samuel 16:10-11)

In the September 24, 1896 issue of *The Present Truth UK*, E.J. Waggoner wrote:

“God did not design that the people should do any fighting. He led them through the wilderness, in order that they might not see war [Ex. 13:17-18] ... When we consider the circumstances of their deliverance from Egypt-how it was all accomplished by the direct power of God, without any human power, their part being only to follow and obey His word-we must be convinced that it was not according to the plan of God that they should do any fighting, even in self-defence.” (Words in brackets added)

Later, in the January 7, 1897 edition of the same magazine, Waggoner explains why, in many portions of the Hebrew Scriptures, God does indeed “command” the people to fight:



“But the children of Israel did fight throughout all their natural existence, and under God's direction, too,' it will be urged. That is very true, **but it does not at all prove that it was God's purpose that they should fight.** We must not forget that 'their minds were blinded' by unbelief, so that they could not perceive the purpose of God for them. [2 Corinthians 3:14] They did not

grasp the spiritual realities of the kingdom of God, but were content with shadows instead; and the same God who bore with their hardness of heart in the beginning, and strove to teach them by shadows, when they would not have the substance, still remained with them, compassionately considerate of their infirmities. **God Himself suffered [permitted] them, because of the hardness of their hearts, to have a plurality of wives, and even laid down rules regulating polygamy, in order to diminish as far as possible the resulting evils, but that does not prove that He designed it for them.** We well know that 'from the beginning it was not so.' [Matthew 19:7-8] So when Jesus forbade His followers to fight in any cause whatever, He introduced nothing new, any more than when He taught that a man should have but one wife, and should cleave to her as long as he lived He was simply enunciating first principles-preaching a thorough reformation.” (Words in brackets added) ²

Like others before and after him, Waggoner understood the biblical principle that when fallen humanity chooses to have their own way in opposition to God's *revealed will*, He often grants their desires in accordance with His *permissive will*, in order that, through the bitter experience that follows, they may be led to realize their folly and to repent of their sin.

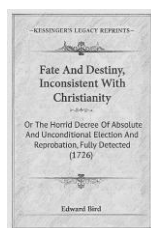
The Hebrew Word *Shalach*

What about those verbs saying God “sent fiery serpents” (Numbers 21:6) and will “send them strong delusion” (2 Thessalonians 2:11)? First of all, The Hebrew word for “sent” in Numbers 21:6 is *shalach*, and, although *shalach* is in the *Pi`el* verb form, it can still carry the meaning of permitting or “to give over to one’s own way.” Here’s how the same word is translated in Psalm 81:

“But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. So **I gave them over** [*shalach*] to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels.” (Psalm 81:11-12)

In 1726, Edward Bird wrote:

“For pray, take notice, God is said in scripture to send what He can but doth not hinder from being sent.” (*Fate and Destiny, Inconsistent with Christianity: or, The Horrid Decree of Absolute and Unconditional Election and Reprobation Fully Detected*)



This understanding is in harmony with Scripture. Moses reminded the people of God’s protection by saying, God “led you through that great and terrible wilderness, *in which were fiery serpents and scorpions*” (Deuteronomy 8:15). God had been protecting them from the serpents which were already in the land. God didn't go out and round up a bunch of serpents. Through their unbelief (distrust), they made a breach in God’s protective hedge/Law thus stepping out from underneath His protective hand which opened the way for the serpents to bite— “... whoever breaks through a hedge, a serpent shall bite him” (Ecclesiastes 10:8). ³

As to 2 Thessalonians 2:11, this is similar to what we read earlier from Jeremiah 4:10 where it seems to suggest that God had directly deceived the people. However, now knowing the Hebrew idiom of permission, we read it with new eyes. Here's a few alternative translations of the passage in Thessalonians:

- **New Life Version:** “God will **allow** them to follow false teaching.”
- **Worldwide English NT:** “God **lets** them be fooled.”
- **Daniel Mace NT:** “God will **suffer** [permit] a spirit of delusion.”

On page 401 in his book, *The Providence of God Viewed In The Light Of Holy Scripture*, Thomas Jackson quotes Thomas Pierce who summed things up nicely in 1658:

“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 that God is acting unrighteously – meaning He is acting against His character 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.**”

The Hebrew Verb Natan/Nâthan

In Ezekiel 20:25, God says:

“Moreover, **I gave them statutes that were not good** and rules by which they could not have life.” (Ezekiel 20:25, *English Standard Version*)

The Hebrew verb in question here is נָתַן (*natan/nâthan*) of which Thomas Coke writes, “The original word natan, is frequently used in the permissive sense” (*A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 282). And George Philips writes, “The verb [natan] signifies to permit” (*The Psalms in Hebrew*, p. 116).

The *New King James Version* translates it correctly by saying, “Therefore I also **gave them up to** statutes that were not good.” *Bullinger’s Companion Bible* explains that the words, “I gave them also statutes”, is a Hebrew idiom that means:



“**I suffered [permitted] others to give them statutes’** ... Active verbs in Hebrew were used to express not only the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do. **The [Hebrew] verb nâthan, to give, is therefore rendered to suffer [permit] in this sense.**” (Words in brackets added)

In 1 Kings 22:23, we read:

“Therefore look! **The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours**, and the Lord has declared disaster against you.”

The word for “put” is *natan* and thus suggests that God is not directly putting lying spirits into people. Understanding what this word implies, Adam Clarke explains:

“He hath **permitted**, or suffered, a lying spirit to influence thy prophets. **It is requisite again to remind the reader, that the Scriptures repeatedly represent God as doing what, in the course of his providence, he only permits or suffers to be done.** Nothing can be done in heaven, in earth, or hell, but either by his immediate energy or permission.” (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1 Kings 22:23)

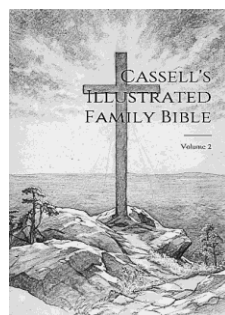
In *The Holy Bible, Authorized Version, with Emendations*, by J.T. Conquest, it says, “Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath **permitted** a lying spirit to enter into the mouth of all these prophets.” And in the *Unlocked Dynamic Bible*, it reads, “So now I tell you that Yahweh has **let** all of your prophets lie to you.”

We see the same verb in Leviticus 14:34-36:

“When you have come into the land of Canaan, which I [God] give you as a possession, and **I PUT the leprous plague in a house in the land of your possession** ... then the priest shall command that they empty the house, before the priest goes into it to examine the plague, that all that is in the house may not be made unclean ...”

The Hebrew word translated as “put” is *natan*, which means God is not the cause of the leprous plague (or mildew in this case).

“When it is said, ‘I put the plague of leprosy in a house,’ it sounds as if God himself were the author of the disease; but, **according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, God is often said to do what in the course of events he merely permits to be done.**” (*Cassell’s Illustrated Bible*, Vol. 1, Leviticus 14:34)



Understanding this idiom, John Bellamy translates this verse like this:

“When ye come to the land of Cannan which I give to you for a possession; and I **permit** a plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession ...” (*The Holy Bible: Newly Translated from the Original Hebrew: with Notes Critical and Explanatory*, Vol. 1-3)

Referring to this same passage, Troy J. Edwards writes:



“Other versions of the Bible, both ancient and modern, eliminate any suggestion that God had anything to do with the plague striking any of the homes: ‘... **yf** [**if**] there happen a plague of leprosy in any house of youre [your] possession’ (Miles Coverdale’s Translation); ‘... **if** the wound of leprosy is in the houses’ (John Wycliffe’s Translation); ‘... **if** there be the plague of leprosy in a house’ (Douary-Rheims 1899 American Edition); ‘... mildew **may** appear in a house’

(God’s Word). In these translations, God mentions that a plague **might** be discovered in a home but gives no details about its origins. This lays the groundwork for how we will read any and all passages in the Bible where it is implied that God created leprosy or any other illness or disease.” ([*The Hebrew Idiom of Permission*](#), p. 119, words in brackets added)

The Curses of Deuteronomy 28 and the Story of Job

In Deuteronomy chapter 28, God lists some blessings that come from obedience and some curses that will befall us if we choose not to stand within the hedge of His protective Law. As God speaks, it appears that God Himself will directly hand out (impose) these curses. Here’s some examples as rendered in the *New King James Version*:

- **Verse 20:** “**The Lord will send** on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me.”
- **Verse 21:** “**The Lord will make the plague** cling to you until He has consumed you from the land which you are going to possess.”
- **Verse 22:** “**The Lord will strike you** with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever, with the sword, with scorching, and with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish.”
- **Verse 24:** “**The Lord will change** the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed.”
- **Verse 25:** “**The Lord will cause** you to be defeated before your enemies...”
- **Verse 27:** “**The Lord will strike you** with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed.”
- **Verse 28:** “**The Lord will strike you** with madness and blindness and confusion of heart.”
- **Verse 35:** “**The Lord will strike you** in the knees and on the legs with severe boils which cannot be healed, and from the sole of your foot to the top of your head.”
- **Verses 36-37:** “**The Lord will bring you** and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods—wood and stone. And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the Lord will drive you.”
- **Verse 61:** “Also every sickness and every plague, which is not written in this Book of the Law, **will the Lord bring upon you** until you are destroyed.”
- **Verse 65:** “And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there **the LORD will give you** a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul.”



The Hebrew word for “send” in verse 20 is שָׁלַח (*shalach*). As in the case of the word “sent” (*shalach*) in Numbers 21:6 we looked at previously, it can carry the meaning of permitting or “to give over to one’s own way.” Therefore, the meaning is quite clear: The Lord will **give us over** to all that our hand (selfish work) is set to do thus we will reap the negative inherent consequences of forsaking the Lord and not submitting to His Law.



In verses 21, 22, 27, 28, 35, 37 and 61, the words “make”, “strike”, “cause”, and “bring” are all in the *Hiphil* verb form, which can reveal “permission”. Likewise, in verses 24, 25 and 65, the words “change”, “cause”, and “give” are translated from the Hebrew verb *natan*, which we have previously learned is most-often in the permissive sense. In fact, the *New English Translation* renders the word “cause” in verse 25 this way:

“The Lord will **allow** you to be struck down before your enemies ...”

God defines this concept by explaining how all these curses would come by saying, “... many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, **‘Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?’**” (Deuteronomy 31:17).

Is there a way we can prove this without a shadow of a doubt? Yes; and we can do it by looking at the story of Job.

We know from reading the book of Job that, although Satan tells God, “stretch out **Your hand** and touch all that he [Job] has” (Job 1:11), it would ultimately be Satan causing all the calamities that come upon Job and his family— “And the Lord said to **Satan**, ‘Behold, all that he has is in **your power**; only do not lay a hand on his person. So **Satan** went out from the presence of the Lord” (Verse 12). So, when Satan told God “stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has”, we can be confident that, although it appears that God is “doing” this, He is actually “permitting” it.

Interestingly, this is where Deuteronomy chapter 28 comes in. After God warned His people that curses will arise if they refused to listen to Him and obey (submit to) all His Commandments and Statutes (Vs. 15), we read one of those curses in verse 31:

“Your **OX** shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it; your **DONKEY** shall be violently taken away from before you, and shall not be restored to you; your **SHEEP** shall be given to your **ENEMIES**, and you shall have no one to rescue them.”
(Deuteronomy 28:31, *New Living Translation, NLT*)

Pay particular attention to the words in bold underlined caps and compare this to what happened to Job:

“A messenger arrived at Job’s home with this news: ‘Your **OXEN** were plowing, with the **DONKEYS** feeding beside them, when the **SABEANS** raided us. They stole all the animals and killed all the farmhands ...’ While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: ‘The fire of God has fallen from heaven and burned up your **SHEEP** and all the shepherds ...’” (Job 1:14-16, *NLT*)



Although throughout Deuteronomy 28 it reads as if God will be the one directly causing all of this, by reading the book of Job we know for sure it is actually Satan. Even the messenger wrongly thought it was “the fire of God”, just as our modern insurance policies wrongly claim that natural disasters are “acts of God.”

Back in Deuteronomy, we also read the following curse:

“Your **CHILDREN** and your crops will be cursed. The offspring of your herds and flocks will be cursed.” (Deuteronomy 28:18, *NLT*)

Again, this is exactly what happened to Job:

“Suddenly, a powerful wind swept in from the wilderness and hit the house on all sides. The house collapsed, and all your **CHILDREN** are dead ...” (Job. 1:19, *NLT*)

Who is doing this—God or Satan? Yet we are still not done. Again in Deuteronomy we read:

“THE LORD will cover your knees and legs with incurable **BOILS**. In fact, you will be covered **FROM HEAD TO FOOT.**” (Deuteronomy 28:35, *NLT*)

Now Job:

“So **SATAN** left the LORD’s presence, and **HE** struck Job with terrible **BOILS FROM HEAD TO FOOT.**” (Job 2:7, *NLT*)

Pay careful attention here that, even though in Deuteronomy it plainly states that “the LORD” would cover them with boils, in the book of Job we learn that it is actually caused by “Satan.” These examples from Deuteronomy and Job make it abundantly clear that, throughout the Bible, God is said to “do” that which He reluctantly and tearfully “permits”.

Destruction and the Wrath of God



This important principle has greatly changed the way I understand Scripture. It sheds so much light upon the true character of God (1 John 4:8), brings it into harmony with how His Son Jesus taught and demonstrated it (Luke 6:35; John 14:9; 17:4), and helps to make sense of multiple events found in the Bible. Consider the following verse:

“So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, ‘Get up, get out of this place; for **the LORD will destroy this city!**’ But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking.” (Genesis 19:14)

How should we understand this? The phrase, “the LORD will destroy”, is in the *Hiphil* tense, and since it is in the future tense, it could be understood as, “The LORD will **permit** this city to be destroyed.” ⁴

Here's one from another well-known event:

"And it came to pass at midnight that **the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt**, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock." (Exodus 12:29)

The word "struck" is also in the *Hiphil* tense— "The LORD **permitted** all the firstborn in the land of Egypt to be struck." This rendering fits the narrative when we consider verse 23:

"... when He [God] sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and **not allow THE DESTROYER to come into your houses to strike you.**"



Clearly, God is not the one who directly struck all the firstborn. Paul also speaks of "the destroyer" during the exodus by using the Greek word, *olothreutés*, meaning "venomous serpent" (1 Corinthians 10:10). When compared to Revelation 12:9, we know exactly who he's referring to.⁵ In Exodus 15:26, most translations quote God saying, "**I will put** none of these diseases on you which **I have brought** on the Egyptians." However, on pages 5 and 6 in his book, *The Key to Scriptural Healing*, Kenneth Hagin writes: "... the literal Hebrew reads, '**I will permit** to be put upon thee none of the diseases which **I have permitted** to be brought upon the Egyptians.'" In Deuteronomy 7:15, we read:

"And the Lord will take away from you all sickness, and will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known, **but will lay them on all those who hate you.**"

The Hebrew word for “lay” here is *natan*, which means to allow or permit. This is confirmed by reading Psalm 78:50-51 where it states that God “gave their life over to the plague.” The *Easy-to-Read Version* says, “He did not **let** any of those people live. He **let** them die with a deadly disease.” ⁶

The *Hiphil* tense appears again when describing the Flood:

“And God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, **I will destroy them** with the earth.’” (Genesis 6:13)

Since the statement, “I will destroy them” is in the *Hiphil* verb tense it could be understood as permissive rather than causative. Confirmation of this is found in Isaiah 54:9, which presents the Flood in the permissive:

“Just as in the time of Noah I swore that I would never again **PERMIT** the waters of a flood to cover the earth and destroy its life, so now I swear that I will never again pour out My anger on you.” (Isaiah 54:9, *The Living Bible*)



When commenting on the Flood, Jesus never said His Father caused or sent it. Instead of saying something like, “My Father sent a flood and destroyed them all”, He simply said, “The flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:27; see also Matthew 24:39).

And please don’t get confused at phrases such as, “the wrath of the LORD was aroused”, or, “I will never again pour out My anger on you”, because God’s wrath (anger) isn’t about Him using power to “lash out” to cause harm but God reluctantly stopping/removing His protective power/presence at the persistent sinner’s request thus permitting the calamity to strike. For example, when Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses, we read:

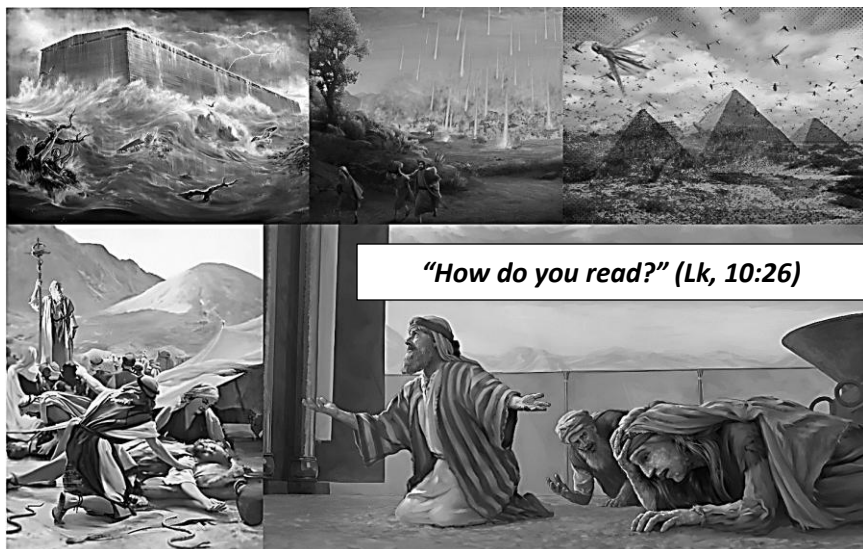
“So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He **departed**. And when the cloud **departed** from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow ...” (Numbers 12:9-10)

As in the case of all the calamities arriving when “our God is not among us” (Deuteronomy 31:17), Miriam became leprous after God “departed.” God’s wrath is explained by Paul as *letting go* or giving the persistent sinner over to their own self-destructive ways (Romans 1:18,24,26,28). ⁷

At the time of the Flood, God said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever” (Genesis 6:3). As God pleaded with the people, the book of Job tells us the people’s response:

“Have you marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflowed with a flood: Which said unto God, ‘**Depart from us!**’ and ‘what can the Almighty do for us?’” (Job 22:15-17)

As in the case with Miriam, by honoring their free choice, God’s Spirit (His protective presence) **departed**, and “the flood came and destroyed them all.” It’s the same concept God describes in Hosea 9:12— “woe to them when I depart from them!” (See also, Jeremiah 6:8). ⁸



How Do You Read?

Jesus is saying to each of us, “What is written in the Law? How do you read?” (Luke 10:26). Why is it that fallen man has the propensity to view God as a revengeful dictator? God Himself explains, “You thought that I was altogether like you” (Psalm 50:21). When we fallen beings read Scripture, we often project our own evil thoughts and desires onto God; as the Psalmist wrote: “to the pure, you [God] show yourself pure, and to the morally corrupt, you [God] appear to be perverse” (Psalm 18:26, *International Standard Version*, words in brackets added)

God often speaks through our preconceived ideas and opinions, holding up a mirror wherein we might see ourselves in our true relationship to Him. This isn’t to condemn us but to bring our sin to the surface so that we might confess it and receive His grace.

“God’s law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God’s wonderful grace became more abundant.” (Romans 5:20, *NLT*)

“For if you listen to the word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.” (James 1:23-25, *NLT*)

The Bible is written in such a way that (rightly understood) it helps us to see our own hearts. This is sometimes referred to as the mirror principle. Adrian Ebens explains:



“This is how the mirror works. **Any view of God that suggests something different to what Christ revealed on earth can only be a reflection of our evil natures projected back onto Him.** It comes from our sinful mind and its faulty interpretation of the law, rather than the mind of Christ and His perfect living out of the law. Once this inconsistency is discerned, we are invited to dig deeper into Scripture to find the pieces which allow all the verses to harmonise.” ([*Mirror Principle*](#), p. 112)

When we realize the mirror principle at work, we are brought to our knees in confession, knowing that all sickness, destruction, and death are the natural result of man's desire to crucify Christ afresh (Hebrews 6:6) and thus cut the cord from the only Source of life (Psalm 2:2-3).

"Whenever we find portraits of God in the OT that fall below the character of God revealed in Christ — all portraits that have God commanding or engaging in violence — we should see a reflection of the cross in them.

That is, we should view these portraits as an example of God



humbly stooping to enter the limited and fallen worldview of the authors ... **Since Jesus reveals what God is always like, we should read the Bible with the understanding that God may appear to do what he merely allows.**" (Greg Boyd, [*Would God Kill a Baby To Teach Parents a Lesson?*](#) [2 Samuel 12:14-23], reknew.org)

When we read and teach Scripture, we must follow the example of Ezra and the other priests in Nehemiah's day who "read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they **gave the sense**, and helped them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:7-8). The "sense" we are dealing with in this study is the Hebraic *permissive* sense. Ezra also taught the people concerning this sense. For example, in the book of Samuel we read:

"Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and **He [God] moved David** against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" (2 Samuel 24:1)

Here we read a plain statement that, in His anger against Israel, God motivated David to take a census of the people. However, when writing the two books of First and Second Chronicles, Ezra chose to give the sense in which we are to understand this.

"Now **Satan** stood up against Israel, and **moved David** to number Israel." (1 Chronicles 21:1)

According to Ezra, it was Satan who moved David to number the people. No wonder David felt guilty and referred to his actions as sin.

“And David’s heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, ‘I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.’” (2 Samuel 24:10)



Is Ezra guilty of changing the Word of God to fit his own preconceived ideas? No, he simply understood the idiom of permission. David already had submitted to the enticement of Satan, and because God never interferes with our free choice, God’s anger was executed by reluctantly giving David over to his wrong choices.

We see the same when reading about the death of King Saul. God said, “I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath” (Hosea 13:11). Ezra confirms this by saying God “killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David” (1 Chronicles 10:14). However, a few verses earlier, Ezra also confirms that Saul took his own life when he “took a sword and fell on it” (Verse 4). So, as we compare Scripture with Scripture, we get the sense in which these puzzling phrases are meant to be understood. God did not directly kill King Saul. God “took him away” in the sense that He did not interfere with Saul’s choice to commit suicide.

¹ See the article, [*Did God Kill Children as a Result of Elisha’s Curse?*](#)

² See the booklet, [*Why Did God Command the Israelites to Slaughter Men, Women and Children with the Sword?*](#)

³ See the article, [*Didn’t God Send Fiery Serpents To Kill the People When They Complained At His Leadership?*](#)

⁴ See the article, [*Did God Send Angels to Kill the Inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah?*](#)

⁵ See the article, [*Who Really Killed the Firstborn in Egypt?*](#)

⁶ See the article, [*Did God “Pass Over” the Israelites or Stand Guard and “Protect” Them?*](#)

⁷ See the booklet, [*What is God’s Wrath?*](#)

⁸ See the booklet, [*Did God Really Drown Millions of People in the Flood?*](#)

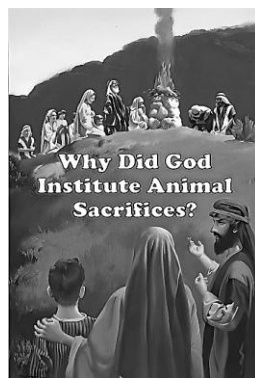
Other sample questions on our website concerning the character of God

- [\(Exodus 4:11\) Does God Make People Mute, Deaf, and Blind etc.?](#)
- [\(Deuteronomy 32:39\) Why Does God Say, "I Kill, and I Make Alive"?](#)
- [\(Numbers 16:28-34\) Did God Kill Korah, Dathan, and Abiram?](#)
- [\(Numbers 15:32-36\) Why Did God Command the Horrific Death Sentence of Stoning?](#)
- [\(Numbers 11:1\) Did God Consume the Complainers with Fire?](#)
- [\(Exodus 21:24\) What About the Retributive Justice of "An Eye For An Eye"?](#)
- [\(Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:5\) Doesn't Jesus Tell Us to Fear God Who Can Destroy Both Body and Soul in Hell?](#)
- [\(Acts 5:1-11\) Did God Kill Ananias and Sapphira?](#)
- [\(Acts 12:23\) Did the Angel of the LORD Kill Herod?](#)
- [\(Revelation 14:10-11\) Doesn't the Bible Say That God Will Burn and Torture People "Forever and Ever"?](#)
- [\(Isaiah 28:21\) What is God's "Strange Act"?](#)
- [\(Isaiah 45:7\) Did God Create Evil?](#)



Why Did God Institute Animal Sacrifices?

Many believe that God needed to see blood in order for His justice to be satisfied; therefore, He instituted animal sacrifices as a placeholder until He finally punished and killed Jesus in our place. But does His love and justice really demand the blood of a victim like the pagan gods of the other nations? Who really was propitiated at the cross? Find out in this important booklet as we discuss the true nature of the atonement. Download for free [HERE](#).



This booklet is an adapted copy of one of our online articles that deals with the subject of God's character

As one begins to read the Bible, especially The Old Testament, we come across some very strange statements regarding God's character. Here are a few to consider:

Exodus 4:21: *"And the Lord said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.'"*

Numbers 21:6: *"So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died."*

1 Kings 22:23: *"Therefore look! The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against you."*

1 Chronicles 21:14: *"So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men."*

Even the New Testament is not immune to such descriptions. Quoting Isaiah 29:10, Paul wrote:

Romans 11:18: *"(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day."*

In another place, he wrote:

2 Thessalonians 2:11: *"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."*

How are we to understand these statements? It is 100% true that we are to take the Bible just as it reads, however, even if non-inspired translators translate the words and phrases correctly, just as they appear in the inspired Hebrew or Greek, we do not always comprehend the original intent behind those words and phrases thus we most-often come to a wrong conclusion about God's character. In this study, we will look at such phrases and discover a widely forgotten Hebrew idiom which will, not only change the way you read and understand Scripture, but will bring peace and harmony regarding God, His Law, Justice, and selfless Love.

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