

A FRESH UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S
CHARACTER



**DOES GOD
DESTROY?**

TROY J. EDWARDS

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By Troy J. Edwards

Vindicating God Ministries

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

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Dedicated to the people at the
wonderful church that I am privileged
to pastor:

Christ's Victory Church

Preface

In 2015, I published a book called *“Does God Engage in DESTRUCTIVE Behavior? A study guide for understanding and vindicating God’s character.”* It was the first of what I would later learn would be a number of works intended to lay out the fundamentals of how to interpret the Bible so that students of the Bible might examine it in the context of a merciful God who only ever does good and never harmed His creatures. The main focus was on applying this interpretation to Scriptures that ascribed destruction to God.

With the passage of time, maturity, and the gift of additional illumination, I was no longer content with the book’s scant information or writing style. As a result, I decided to “re-write” the book in a different manner while also including the most recent information. A shorter title, in my opinion, would also be more useful.

However, the aim of the book is still to dispute the distortion of the God of the Bible that is prevalent in some parts of Christianity. In some Christian groups, too many people represent the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as a spiteful all-controlling temperamental destroyer and at the same time a loving Father, as I said in the introduction to the first edition of this book. The proponents of these theories try to convince us that God destroys people out of love as well as for some enigmatic, mysterious splendor in order to make sense of these two distinct tensions.

Numerous verses in the Bible mention God’s generosity, kindness, mercy, love, compassion, holiness, integrity, and other attributes. But other Scriptures also depict Him as a destroyer. Some may not see a conflict between the former and the latter until we come across scriptures that also portray God as a deceiver, tempter, ordainer of sin, maker of evil, and so on. Some could characterize these passages as “tough.” As a result, many

“liberal Christians” have contested the Bible’s supernatural inspiration.

What if one can have an alternative interpretation of these verses without ever compromising the fact that the Bible is God’s inspired Word? This book will show that it is not only possible, but also vital. Using the Bible itself, as well as insights from scholars from various theological backgrounds, you will be shown how one can interpret such texts and yet realize that God does not engage in destructive action. Our prayer is that you would be convinced that God is a loving and kind God, that He is not a destroyer, and that all Bible verses that indicate otherwise, despite being divinely inspired by God, have been misinterpreted.

Our life will be impacted by what we believe about God. It will dictate how we parent our kids, treat our wives, engage with strangers, work with other people, and serve the Lord and others in our ministry. This work is therefore of utmost significance. After finishing this study, we think you’ll love God and your Bible even more. We also think you’ll continue to appreciate and adore God, but you won’t be afraid of Him anymore because you’ll see that He’s a loving God who is just like Jesus. And you’ll yearn to resemble Him perfectly.

Chapter One

What is Destruction?

Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.
(Psalm 28:5)

All people utilize the words “destroy” and “destruction” in different contexts, but this is especially true within Christian communities. Both terms are frequently employed in Scripture, therefore it is important for us to have a firm understanding of what they mean in order to respond to the question, “Does God destroy?”

Destruction Versus Construction

The definition of “destroy” and “destruction” for certain Christians typically involves wiping something or someone out of existence. However, the definition offered by most English dictionaries and Scripture does not seem to support this view.

According to Stephen D. Renn’s *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, there are at least twelve Hebrew words in the Old Testament that are translated as “destroy” and “destruction.” At least nine Greek words are translated in this way in the New Testament.¹ All of these words have the idea of transforming an object or person into something that can no longer be utilized for the purpose for which it was previously used.

When Israel arrived in the Promised Land and encountered the Canaanites, God gave the following command: “*But ye shall **destroy their altars**, break their images, and cut down their groves*” (Ex. 34:13; see also Deut. 7:5).

Israel had the duty of putting the Canaanites' altars into a condition that prevented them from using them to worship their pagan gods. The Hebrew term used here is “*nâthat's*,” which appears again in the next Scripture:

*Now when all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and **threw down** the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly **destroyed** them all. Then all the children of Israel returned, every man to his possession, into their own cities. (2 Chron. 33:1)*

The translation of the Hebrew word “*nâthat's*” in this text is “*threw down*.” The word “destroyed” is derived from the Hebrew word “*kâlâh*” which is also rendered as *finished*, *done*, and *accomplished* in certain places. The phrase is used in reference to Israel's mission to render these altars ineffective. This is the inverse of what happened in other locations in Scripture when these same altars were “built up” (Num. 23:1, 14, 29; 2 Kings 21:3-5; 2 Chron. 33:4-5, 15).

In this context, *destruction* is used in contrast to *construction*. In Psalm 28:5, the word “destroy” is used in disparity with “build them up.” Building something for a certain use or purpose is referred to as *construction*. *Destruction* is meant to make something irreparable and useless.

Good and Evil

In some Scriptures the words “destruction” and “evil” are used synonymously (Esther 8:6; Job 31:29; Isa.

59:7; Jer. 4:6; 6:1; 17:18; also compare Job 2:3, 10; 42:11) as well as “destroy” and “curse” (Deut. 28:45). The word “destruction” is used in conjunction with poverty (Prov. 10:15), famine (1 Chron. 21:12; Eze. 5:16), sickness and disease (Ex. 12:13; Deut. 28:20-22, 59-61; 1 Sam. 5:9-11; 2 Sam. 24:15-16; 1 Chron. 21:12; 2 Chron. 26:16-21; Ps. 91:6; 103:2-4; 107:17-20; Luke 6:9-10; 1 Cor. 5:5), demonism (Mark 9:21-25), environmental disasters (Ex. 10:7), defeat in war (Josh. 11:20; 22:23; Judges 20:42; 2 Sam. 11:1; 1 Chron. 20:1; Jer. 50:22) and numerous other ills in life (Job 1:12-19; 2:3).

Whatever the Hebrew or Greek word used in each instance, a thorough study of the Bible will show us that the basic meaning is always the same: *destruction and construction* are used in the same ways in the Bible as *evil and good, darkness and light, curse and blessing, death and life, chaos and order, love and hate*.

These various words, along with their counterparts and nuances of meaning, all refer to the same subject. In essence, *destruction* is a metaphor for all that is wrong with this world. A study of this topic is warranted and required because our English Bibles have classified different Hebrew and Greek words under the terms “destruction” and “destroy,” making this a theme that is common throughout Scripture.

Understanding how Scripture uses the words “destroy” and “destruction” will help us apply its lessons to our daily lives (2 Tim. 3:16). A clearer knowledge of God’s character will also result from studying how the Bible employs these phrases in reference to His deeds. Do we view God as one who *brings about disaster* or one who *prevents it*? Is *creation* God’s primary goal, or is it *destruction*? Is God primarily involved in acts of *edification* or *devastation*?

To rephrase the topic, we can ask whether God is a source of darkness, evil, curses, chaos, hatred, and

death, or whether He is a source of light, goodness, blessing, order, love, and life. God either delivers or afflicts us. As we explore Scripture's teaching on destruction and how it connects to God, we gain a true knowledge of God's nature and ways.

The promise that God makes to His people who have fasted properly provides some insight into how He views destruction and construction:

Your people will rebuild the cities that were destroyed long ago. And you will build again on the old foundations. You will be called One Who Repairs Broken Walls. You will be called One Who Makes City Streets Like New Again. (Isa. 58:12; New International Reader's Version)

God's people are transforming into the image of the God they worship by becoming "*repairers of the breach*" (KJV). Despite the fact that wicked men are responsible for ruining and destroying the earth (Rev. 11:18), the Lord promises to establish a new heaven and new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Rev. 21:1). Some prefer to use the term "renewed earth" to suggest that God will rebuild the earth after it has been devastated by humans and evil spirits, making it appear to be a brand-new planet. God will rebuild what men have destroyed, which reveals His actual essence and character to us.

The same is true for the human race. We have done much to destroy our lives through sin and rebellion. But instead of God discarding us, He demonstrated His love by sending Jesus, who, by His shed blood, repairs us and makes us into new creations (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:17). God's nature is to repair, not destroy. We pray that the following chapters will present a convincing case to the reader that this is indeed the true character of God.

Chapter Two

Destruction and the Ministry of Jesus

*But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For **the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.** And they went to another village. (Luke 9:55-56)*

In this Scripture, Jesus gives us a thorough yet concise explanation of His reason for coming to earth. From this summary we learn the reasons for His actual intents as well as what was not His purpose for coming. Jesus did not come to destroy mankind, and He declined to wield God's authority for destructive purposes. On the contrary, Jesus would only display God's power in order to save men.

Jesus and the Father are Exactly Alike

In Luke 9:55–56, God explains His own position on the annihilation of His enemies. His goal has always been salvation rather than destruction. When we realize that Jesus is God and that He bears the Father's actual image and likeness, we can relate what the Lord says in Luke to the Father's own nature:

*In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, **who is the image of God,** should shine unto them (2 Cor. 4:4)*

Other translations say, "*Christ is the one who is **exactly like God***" (Easy to Read Version); "*They cannot*

see the light, which is the good news about our glorious Christ, who shows what God is like” (Contemporary English Version); “*They cannot see how bright and wonderful Christ is. He is just like God himself*” (World English New Testament). Similarly, the author of Hebrews explains:

In the past God spoke to our people through the prophets. He spoke to them many times and in many different ways. And now in these last days, God has spoken to us again through his Son. He made the whole world through his Son. And he has chosen his Son to have all things. The Son shows the glory of God. He is a perfect copy of God’s nature, and he holds everything together by his powerful command. The Son made people clean from their sins. Then he sat down at the right side[a] of God, the Great One in heaven (Heb. 1:1-3; Easy to Read Version)

When the apostle informs us that God has spoken to us via His Son, he is stating that everything we need to know about God’s nature and character can be seen through Jesus’ life, words, and deeds. He came to teach us the truth about God in a world where there are many lies about Him (1 John 1:5, 5:18-19). In every way, Jesus embodied the character of the Father. Consequently, to see Him is to precisely perceive the Father as He is:

Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father;

and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake (John 14:8-11)

Jesus reminds Phillip that the Father was at work through Him in all He did, including healing, deliverance, teaching, and providing for people in need. Jesus never tempts anybody to sin, causes starvation, causes natural calamities to punish His enemies, or condemns anyone in wrath and judgment. None of these things are found in the Bible. Instead, Jesus is depicted in the gospels as healing the sick, feeding the hungry, rescuing people from sin, preventing natural calamities, and rebuking His disciples when they used violent tactics to subdue their opponents. Jesus embodied complete love, the type that aims to serve rather than cause harm. Jesus is still our “harmless” High Priest today (Heb. 7:26). The Father and Holy Spirit resemble Jesus in every way.

Some mistakenly see Jesus as kind and gentle, but the Father as harsh and cruel. When Jesus declares, “*I and my Father are one,*” He dispels this way of thinking (John 10:30). He is fully one with the Father in intent and purpose:

*And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, **that they may be one, as we are**.... And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them;*

that they may be one, even as we are one
(John 17:11, 22)

Since the Father and the Son are one in everything, the Father's intention was also behind all of the healings, deliverances, and lovingkindnesses performed by Jesus. Since Jesus never perpetrated any destructive acts against anyone, the Father also never did. According to John 1:1, 2 and 14, Jesus is God and perfectly captures the essence of the Almighty. As a result, the nature of the Triune God is revealed in Luke 9:55–56.

The Authenticity of Luke 9:55-56

Jesus' primary goal is clearly stated in Luke 9:55–56, which is a representation of God's intentions and deeds for all men. Sadly, Luke's account of our Lord's speech confounds people who believe in a destructive God who craves anger, retribution, and punishment upon sinners.

Some have the boldness to doubt the veracity of Luke 9:55–56 because they are so eager to reject our Lord's contradiction of a destructive Heavenly Father. One strategy is to question whether a passage of Scripture that deviates from accepted "orthodoxy" was ever included in the original Bible manuscripts.¹ Many English Bible translations have left out Jesus' assertion regarding His purpose as a result of this uncertainty.

Even those who contend that this section is not among the "best" Greek Bible manuscripts admit that it is among the "oldest."² In fact, several researchers point out that many *early copies* contain the quote from Jesus in Luke 9:55–56.³ More evidence for its genuineness can be found in the fact that "... Manuscripts, Versions, Fathers from the *second century* downwards, witness eloquently in its favour."⁴

Is the removal of our Lord's statements from the "best" but later manuscripts due to theological bias? Dr. John Tillotson, a scholar, argues that this is possible:

Grotius observes, that these two excellent sentences are left out in a manuscript that is in England. I cannot tell what manuscript he refers to; but if it were a copy written out in the height of popery, no wonder if some zealous transcriber, offended at this passage, struck it out of the gospel, being confident our Saviour would not say any thing that was so directly contrary to the current doctrine and practice of those times. But, thanks be to God, this admirable saying is still preserved, and can never be made use of upon a fitter occasion.⁵

It would undoubtedly be in opposition to Jesus' own purpose of salvation rather than annihilation to see how Roman Catholic dogma presented its church as the source of salvation and Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus, as the intermediary between people and an "impassive" Jesus. Many Protestants, nevertheless, would also prefer to avoid such a blatant condemnation of retaliation. This mindset, as Dr. Tillotson continued, is opposed to the message of Christ:

But here he speaks of the proper intention and design of his coming. He came not to kill and destroy, but "for the healing of the nations;" for the salvation and redemption of mankind, not only "from the wrath to come," but from a great part of the evils and miseries of this life: he came to discountenance all fierceness and rage and cruelty in men, one towards another; to restrain and subdue that furious and unpeaceable spirit, which is so troublesome to the world, and the cause of so many mischiefs and disorders in it; and to introduce a religion which consults not only the eternal salvation of men's souls, but their temporal peace and security, their comfort and happiness in this

world. The words thus explained contain this observation, “that a revengeful and cruel and destructive spirit is directly contrary to the design and temper of the gospel, and not to be excused upon any pretence of zeal for God and religion.”⁶

God cares not just about the spiritual well-being of man, but also about his bodily well-being. God is held responsible for a great deal of calamity, misfortune, and illness. Many argue that they are His direct judgments on sinful people, brought about by His supernatural power. But Jesus’ statements in Luke 9:55–56 negates this. George Fox, a well-known Quaker, once stated:

They that do good to all, do hurt to none; for that spirit that doth hurt to any, is not of God; but that spirit which doth good to all, and especially to the household of faith, is of God. Christ came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them: it is the devil that is the destroyer of men’s lives about religion, that corrupts men, and makes them deaf and blind to the things of God, and to halt out of God’s way.⁷

People who want to have Luke 9:55–56 taken out of their Bibles are also those who continue to believe that a wrathful, vindictive God is to blame for the problems in our world.

Affirmation in Scripture

Even if one were to vehemently argue against the veracity of Luke 9:55–56, one would still be forced to acknowledge that the principles it upholds are mentioned in other passages of Scripture. Let’s look at the most well-known Bible verse in the church, for instance:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not **perish**, but*

have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

The word “perish” is derived from the Greek word, “*apollumi*” which means, according to Strong’s Dictionary, “to destroy fully.” It is the exact same Greek word used by Jesus in Luke 9:56. Another translation is as follows:

*For God in this way gave allegiance to the world, that he gave his only born Son, that all who trust him should not be lost {or perish, **be destroyed**}, but have age-enduring life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be rescued through him. (John 3:16-17; Context Group Version)*

The latter portion of verse 17 is translated as follows in the VOICE translation: “*He is here to rescue a world headed toward certain destruction.*” Already, catastrophe of the earth is imminent. As we will discover in later chapters, *sin*—not God—has set it on this track towards disaster. Father God is not interested in punishing the world. He is interested in saving it. Jesus was sent on a *rescue mission* as a result.

If it was God’s desire to destroy the world then Jesus’ mission was to save us from the Father. Yet, that does not line up with the statement that says “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.*” In 1 John 4:8 we are told, “*God is love.*” In Rom. 13:10 Paul writes, “*Love worketh no ill to his neighbour.*” According to Thayer’s Greek Definitions, the word “ill” means

“destructive.” God cannot literally destroy another person since He is *love*, and as Peter argues, God does not desire anybody to endure destruction:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Again, the word “perish” is the Greek word, “*apollumi*,” which is the same word used in Luke 9:56 and John 3:16. The VOICE Translations says that God is “*patient and merciful to you, not wanting anyone to be destroyed.*” The self-destructive course that the world is headed towards is not of the Father (1 John 2:16).

After giving a parable explaining the difficulties that the Father is willing to go through in order to rescue any and all lost souls that have strayed from Him, Jesus concludes by saying, “*Even so it is **not the will of your Father** which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should **perish***” (Matt. 18:14). Once more, the Greek word, “*apollumi*” is used here. The Bible in Basic English says that God takes no pleasure that they “come to destruction.”

Even if one could successfully argue against Luke 9:55-56 as an authentic Biblical text, the message is still made clear in other passages of Scripture, providing adequate evidence that God is not a destroyer.

To Save Life or Destroy It?

Jesus came across a man with a withered hand one Sabbath when he was in the synagogue. At that time, religious authorities were exceedingly legalistic and viewed “healing” as a “work.” They objected to Jesus performing healing on the Sabbath. Jesus replied by

posing a crucial query regarding the issue of whether or not God is a destroyer:

*Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days **to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?** And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other. (Luke 6:9-10)*

Jesus equated “*doing good*” to “saving a life.” Additionally, He also likened “doing evil” to “destruction”. Since God is not evil then neither is He destructive. Luke 9:56 says that Jesus “*is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.*” Hence, Scripture informs us that Jesus only went about “doing good” and not doing things that are destructive:

*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)*

The word “oppressed,” according to Thayer’s Greek Definitions, means “to exercise harsh control over one, to use one’s power against one.” This oppression is attributed to Satan, who is described by Jesus as the thief who comes “*to steal, and to kill, and to destroy*” (John 10:10a). The word for “destroy” is again “*apollumi*,” which is the same word used in Luke 9:56.

In contrast, Jesus’ work was to give “*life, and that they might have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10b). Notably, the Father was with Jesus and was opposing the

evil deeds of Satan by means of Jesus. Link this to the following highly significant statement that Jesus made:

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise (John 5:19)

Jesus' life gave us a true understanding of the Father's character by displaying the Father in a tangible and active manner. Albert B. Simpson summarizes Christ's mission beautifully:

God had to be revealed to man in His true character and beneficence. Our sinful hearts and the lies of our adversary, the devil, had so distorted our conception of the Father that it was impossible for us to love and trust Him. To the natural man, God is an object of terror and not of love. This is because they do not know Him, for to know Him is to love Him. It was necessary, therefore, for God to reveal Himself as a Father, a Friend and a Restorer. He did this through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁸

Jesus only carried out the will of the Father. Jesus is not a destroyer, thus neither is God the Father, if that is the case. An entity that is antagonistic to both God and humans is the source of the destructive work.

Chapter Three

Destruction and the Idiom of Permission

When the great God permits persons or nations to run the dangerous road of a perverse and depraved choice, he is said in Scripture-phraseology “to harden their hearts,” as in the case of Pharaoh; judicially to blind and destroy them.¹

We learnt in the last chapter that Jesus acted as a consistent representative of the Father’s desire while on earth. He never set out to destroy anyone, but rather to save them from destruction. How can the many references to destruction in both Testaments be reconciled if God is not a destroyer? This chapter will explain how to understand such passages using the Hebrew “idiom of permission.”

God is Said to Do what He Permits

The following is just one of many scriptures in the Bible that link God’s action to destruction:

*And it cometh to pass, in his speaking unto him, that he saith to him, ‘For a counsellor to the king have we appointed thee? cease for thee; why do they smite thee?’ And the prophet ceaseth, and saith, ‘**I have known that God hath counselled to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened to my counsel.**’ (2 Chronicles 25:16; Young’s Literal Translation)*

The King James Version renders the emboldened portion, “*I know that God hath determined to destroy*

thee.” The word “determined” is from the Hebrew word “*yâ’ats*” and is used twice in 2 Chron. 15:16. In the KJV it is translated as both “counsel” and “determined.”

Most literal translations of the Bible, including *Young’s Literal Translation*, translate the word “determined” as “counselled.” Additionally, according to Dr. Robert Young, God’s “counsel to destroy” King Amaziah is to be read idiomatically rather than literally: “COUNSELLED,] that is, given counsel, agreeably to the well-known scripture idiom whereby what God allows he is said to do.”² The context itself demonstrates that the passage should be interpreted as indicative of God’s “permission,” or “non-interference:”

But Amaziah would not hear; for it came of God, that he might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought after the gods of Edom. (2 Chron. 25:20)

“Deliver” is a translation of the Hebrew word “nathan.” One old dictionary explains that, “.... the Hebrew word נתן *Nathan*, very often signifies to permit or suffer.”³ Another scholar adds, “Accordingly our translators in other places often render the verb נתן *nathan*, by suffer, or let, in the sense of *permitting*.”⁴

The Idiom of Permission

The Easy-to-Read Version appropriately renders 2 Chron. 25:20, “*God planned to let Israel defeat Judah, because the people of Judah followed the gods the people of Edom followed.*” As we can see, God did not directly destroy King Amaziah; rather, He allowed his foes to carry out their plans to ruin him and his kingdom without interfering with them.

Many academics agree that Scripture has a well-known “idiom of permission,” as Dr. Young pointed out. A word or phrase that is specific to a language, culture, or group of people is called an *idiom*. The Hebrew people, through whom God revealed the Scriptures, had many idioms and figures of speech that were exclusive to their language and the society in which they lived, just like any other civilization. The majority of our English translations have translated these idioms verbatim, which has placed unwarranted stigmas on God’s character. To truly understand a Bible passage, the student of Scripture must be able to identify and interpret these idioms.

It is especially important to become acquainted with the idiom of permission. One scholar explained, “We have often observed, that in the Hebrew idiom, Jehovah is said to do what he either permits to be done, or interferes not to prevent.”⁵ William Dalrymple, another scholar, encouraged young pupils to understand the “idiom of permission” in order to comprehend some of the Old Testament problems pertaining to God’s purported behavior:

One of the most necessary things for youth to regard, if they would understand the Old Testament, is the nature of the Hebrew idiom. For example, how God is said to do what he only permits. Even where there may, and ought to be an interchange of good offices, vice must be guarded against. Likewise error and superstition.⁶

The good news is that the Scripture itself may be used to interpret the majority of these idioms in their immediate or broad context. In Deut. 31:3, for example, God threatens to *destroy* the heathen nations in the Promised Land. However, the context clarifies the meaning and shows how God is utilizing the idiom of permission in this sentence:

Deuteronomy 31:3-5

3 The Lord thy God, he will go over before thee, and **he will destroy these nations** from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the Lord hath said.

4 And **the Lord shall do unto them** as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them, whom he destroyed.

5 And **the Lord shall give them up** before your face, **that ye may do unto them** according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you.

In verses 3 and 4, respectively, God declared that He “*will destroy these nations*” and “*shall do unto them.*” However, God declares in verse 5 that He will “*give them up.*” The Hebrew word “nathan,” which we have said above frequently denotes “permission” or God’s lack of intervention, is translated as “give them up.”

God “gives them up” in order that Israel “may do unto them.” When God said about Israel’s foes that He “*will destroy these nations*” and “*shall do unto them,*” He meant that He would *do* what He *allowed* Israel to do when He would no longer intervene to prevent it. Similarly, we find in Deuteronomy 7:

Deuteronomy 7:23-24

23 But the Lord thy God shall **deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them** with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed.

24 And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their

name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them.

In this verse God says that He will “deliver” Israel’s enemies to them and that *He* will destroy them with a mighty destruction. Once more, the word “deliver” is the Hebrew word “nathan” and it is clear from the Scripture that God’s method of bringing this mighty destruction is by permitting Israel to do it.

The Easy-to-Read Version says, “*But the Lord your God will let you defeat those nations.*” As a result, God’s principal role in the destruction of these nations is His lack of protection over them.

The Removal of God’s Protection

This same truth is taught redundantly in Scripture. For example, in the book of Joshua we read:

*and the Lord confounded them before the Israelites, and **destroyed them** with great vengeance in Gibeon. And Joshua pursued them by way of the ascent to Bethhoron, and struck them down unto Azekah and Makkedah And Joshua spoke to the Lord, on the day **in which he delivered** the Amorites into the hands of the Israelites (Joshua 10:10, 12a; Wycliffe Bible)*

The Amorites are reported to have been destroyed by the Lord. Yet, verse 12 reveals that God is only said to have done what He permitted Israel to do. The word “delivered” in verse 12 is “nathan” and the Easy-to-Read Version renders it, “*That day **the Lord allowed Israel to defeat the Amorite people.***”

In Isaiah the Lord says that He “utterly destroyed” the nations but also explains the mechanism in which He brought about their destruction:

*For the indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: **he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter** (Isa. 34:2)*

In this passage the word “*nathan*” is translated as “delivered” and describes the process in which God sets about “destroying.” Other translations use the phrases “gave them up” or “handed them over” to the slaughter. Isaiah uses similar language elsewhere in relation to God’s dealings with Israel’s persistent sins:

*Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and **have given Jacob to the curse**, and Israel to reproaches (Isa. 43:27-28)*

The New International Reader’s Version renders verse 28, “*So I put the high officials of your temple to shame. I let **Jacob’s family be totally destroyed**. And I let people make fun of Israel.*” Hence, we observe that God’s method of destroying is by “permission” as opposed to “causation.” He gives unrepentant rebels over to their adversaries.

God was traditionally viewed by Israel as a defender and a protector.⁷ God is referred to be the perpetrator of whatever it is that He is no longer sheltering or shielding the people from when that defense is removed for any cause. In Num. 14:9, Joshua and Caleb said concerning Israel’s enemies, “.... *their defence is*

departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not,” or, as the Living Bible paraphrases it, “The Lord is with us and he has removed his protection from them!”

Egypt at the time of Moses is a prime example of a different country that God is alleged to have destroyed (Ex. 10:7). The same Hebrew word, “nathan,” is used in Exodus 12:23 translated as “allow” or “permit” in reference to God’s protection of Israel and His destruction of Egypt: “... *the Lord will pass over the door and will not **allow the destroyer** to come into your houses to slay you*” (The Amplified Bible).

God did not use his omnipotence to destroy Egypt, but He would not shield them from the one who does. Though He clarified the phrase, previously in this same chapter God accepted accountability for the destroyer’s task. After directing the Israelites to apply the blood of the Lamb upon their houses, God explains, “*I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt*” (Ex. 12:13).

In order to prevent the plague from destroying Israel in the same way as it destroys Egypt, God promises to strike Egypt with a plague while “passing over” the Israelites. In Isaiah, we find the same word for pass over used as follows:

As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it. (Isaiah 31:5)

Israel was “passed over” by God, but this simply meant that Israel was defended and spared from destruction. He did not, however, “pass over” Egypt and spare them from the calamity. God chose not to meddle in the work of the destroyer in order to strike Egypt. In essence, God does not use His power to destroy anything

since He is not a destructive God. God uses the absence of interference with their adversaries' will to destroy in order to bring about destruction.

God's Reluctance to Destroy

God never utilizes His power in a literal sense to bring about destruction, but He is also hesitant to do it in a figurative or idiomatic manner. Note the sorrow that God feels for His people, who deserved nothing more than to lose God's protection:

*How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, **I will not return to destroy Ephraim:** for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city (Hosea 11:8-9)*

As if He would personally deliver the disaster, God states in verse 9 that He “*will not return to destroy Ephraim.*” However, He will not use His almighty power to destroy Ephraim; rather, He will “give thee up” and “deliver thee.”

“Give thee up” is again the Hebrew word “*nathan*” which we know means “permit.” However, the Hebrew word “*mâgan*” translated as “deliver” is equally intriguing. According to Strong's dictionary this word means, “properly to shield; encompass with; figuratively to rescue, to hand safely over.”

The Charles Thomson Bible says, “*What shall I do with thee, Ephraim? Shall I shield thee, Israel?*” The Easy-to-Read Version really illuminates God's heart in its

rendering, “*Ephraim, I don’t want to give you up. Israel, I want to protect you.*” The only means by which God is said to destroy in this case is to withdraw His protection over the people and allow their enemies to have them, something He is very hesitant to do no matter how guilty they may be.

God’s heart is never to destroy, regardless of the technique (Lam. 3:33). Even when people deserve to be destroyed, God seems to look for a way out:

*And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, **that I should not destroy it:** but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: **their own way have I recompensed upon their heads,** saith the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 22:30-31)*

God searches for persons who will urge Him not to bring disaster since He is so adamantly opposed to it (Gen. 18:17-33; Psalm 106:23). To accomplish His purpose on earth, God must operate through a man (2 Chron. 16:9; Matt. 18:18-20). God does not want to judge men, but in order to prevent it from happening, He requires our prayers.

We ask God to intervene in our prayers so that He can shield us from harm and stop the destruction that our sins have invited. God is unable to assist us when we don’t pray. Isaiah lamented, “*No one worships you or even asks you to help us. That is because you have turned away from us and **have let our sins destroy us***” (Isa. 64:7; New Century Version).

As a result, our unwillingness to pray results in God’s “wrath,” which is emblematic of losing His

protection. In Ezekiel 22:31 God says, *“I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath.”* Additionally, God declares in Hosea 11:9, *“I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger.”* Furthermore, the Hebrew word translated as “recompense” in Eze. 22:31 is “*nathan*” which is the same word rendered in Hosea 11:8 as “give thee up.” Therefore, God *“consumed them with the fire of His wrath”* by “giving them up” or allowing their enemies to have their way with them. He told Israel that He *“will deliver thee for a spoil to the heathen I will destroy thee”* (Eze. 25:7; see also 21:31).

Likewise, the word “recompense” is mentioned in the Bible in connection to the “sowing and reaping” law. In fact, Paul wrote, *“Indeed, the one who sows for his own sinful flesh will reap destruction”* (Gal. 6:8a; Evangelical Heritage Version). And Paul, quoting David, also wrote, *“And David saith, **Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them.**”* God’s method of “recompensing” is to allow the sinner to destroy himself:

*Vengeance and **recompense** are mine: their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their destruction is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them, make haste* (Deut. 32:35; Good News Version)

In essence, “Recompense” is “self-destruction.” False prophets, according to Peter, *“bring upon themselves swift destruction”* (2 Pet. 2:1b). God, in His love and reluctance to see this happen says, *“O Israel, **thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help**”* (Hos. 13:9). God doesn’t use his omnipotence to destroy. He causes destruction by letting the “sowing and reaping” cycle run its course.

Hebrew Idioms and the New Testament

So far, we've mostly shown how to use this idiom from an Old Testament perspective. However, some passages in the New Testament are equally unsettling. Paul, for example, wrote:

*If any man defile the temple of God, **him shall God destroy**; for the temple of God is holy, **which temple ye are**. (1 Corinthians 3:17)*

Many Bible scholars think that learning the Greek language in its original form is all that is necessary to interpret and comprehend the New Testament. The New Testament was nonetheless written from a Hebraic worldview, although being written in Greek as opposed to Hebrew. As a result, all of the cultural idioms from the Old Testament are present in the New.

This fact has been overlooked, which has resulted in serious misconceptions about God's personality and deeds. One of several academics has highlighted that,

.... the idiom of the New Testament not unfrequently departs from classical Greek, and follows the Hebrew. An interpreter who neglects this will fall into great difficulties, and commit many surprising and almost ridiculous mistakes.⁷

As a result, this “idiom of permission” appears frequently in both the Old and New Testaments. For instance, our Lord Jesus taught us to pray, “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*” (Matt. 6:13). In contrast, James tells us, “.... *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*” (James 1:13b). Since God's Word **never** contradicts itself, the only explanation is that our Lord taught using the idiomatic expressions of the Jews. As one scholar stated, “Lead us

not, in the Hebrew idiom, signifies ‘Suffer or abandon us not.’”⁸ Another commentator writes, “A Hebraism, according to which God is said to do that which he permits to be done. The meaning is, preserve us from temptation; permit us not to fall into temptation.”⁹ This provides ample evidence that understanding the Greek New Testament requires familiarity with Hebrew idioms.

“Him God Shall Destroy”

Since the Hebrew idioms, including the permissive idiom, carries over into the New Testament, then when we read in 1 Corinthians 3:17, “*If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy,*” we can understand this as *permissive* rather than *causative*.

In the Old Testament God said concerning His house, or temple, “.... *and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight*” (2 Chron. 7:20b). The **Contemporary English Version** renders it, “*I will desert this temple where I said I would be worshiped*” and the **Good News Translation** reads, “*I will abandon this Temple that I have consecrated as the place where I am to be worshiped.*” When God forsakes or abandons His temple then that is the removal of His protection, to which He permits those enemies already poised to destroy to have their way:

I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies. (Jeremiah 12:7)

The Unlocked Dynamic Bible translates the latter part of Jer. 12:7, “*I have **allowed their enemies** to conquer the people whom I love.*” It is in this manner that God is said to destroy in relation to His temple:

*The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, **he hath given up into the hand of the enemy** the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as in the day of a solemn feast. **The LORD hath purposed to destroy** the wall of the daughter of Zion: he hath stretched out a line, he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying: therefore he made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together. (Lamentations 2:7-8)*

Other translations read: “*The Lord rejected his altar and deserted his holy Temple; He **allowed** the enemy to tear down its walls*” (Good News Translation “*He has **allowed** our enemies to tear down the walls of our temple and our palaces*” (Unlocked Dynamic Version).

The New Testament follows the same trend. The physical bodies of individuals who serve and follow Christ are God's temple, not the exterior temple that the Old Testament Jews constructed (see 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 2 Corinthians 6:14–16; Ephesians 2:21–22; John 2:19–22). We see how church dissidents are dealt with in the same epistle where we are told that God would punish those who destroy His temple:

*To deliver such an one unto Satan for the **destruction of the flesh**, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Cor. 5:5)*

The same idea applies to the New Testament temple defilers, as we see in the Old Testament, when God does not physically slay the offender but rather stops protecting them and permits their enemies to kill them.

The results of their own harmful actions will no longer be shielded from them by God (see Rom. 1:24–28). This is shown via the “Unlocked Dynamic Bible” interpretation of 1 Corinthians 3:17:

*Yahweh promises that he will destroy anyone who attempts to destroy his temple. This is because his temple belongs to him alone. And **HE PROTECTS YOU** by the same promise because you are now his temple and you belong to him alone!*

In the book of Revelation, the twenty-four elders make a similar proclamation, saying that it is time for God to, “*destroy them which destroy the earth*” (Rev. 11:18b). Paul said, “*If you follow your selfish desires, **you will harvest destruction***” (Gal. 6:8a; Contemporary English Version). Hence, the book of Revelation alludes primarily to God allowing a sowing and reaping process to take place:

He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. (Rev. 13:10)

As a result, in reading such texts, always remember that God’s primary means of annihilation is “permissive” and not “causative” in the sense that He will cease to be a person’s protector and will permit them to experience the unavoidable effects of their sin.

Chapter Four

Destruction and the Idiom of Prophecy

God is often said, in Scripture, to do those things which He determines to permit, and which He foresees will be in fact the consequence of those circumstances in which his creatures are placed, though their wills are laid under no constraint.¹

(William Jenks)

In addition to the “idiom of permission” we discussed in the last chapter, the Hebrew language also has what I have dubbed an “idiom of prophecy” or “prediction” that operates in a similar way. One author noted, “God is said in Scripture to do what He permits to be done; even the prophets are said to do what they prophesy shall be done.”²

The idiom of prediction refers to doing something that one was only foreseeing and prophesying would be the outcome of an event. This includes both God and His prophets. In contrast, in the idiom of permission, one is said to do something that they did not intervene to prevent.

God’s Action or His Accurate Prediction?

A notable example of God being said to commence something that He only predicts would occur is Jesus’ prophecy that His coming will cause family strife:

*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.
(Matthew 10:34-35; see also Luke 12:51)

For those who are unfamiliar with Hebrew idioms, this would appear to contradict other things we are told about Jesus and the reason He entered the world. As we know, Jesus was referred to by Isaiah as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). The angels who attended Christ's birth proclaimed, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men*" (Luke 2:14).

But, our Lord did not claim that He would use supernatural force to cause these family disputes. The late theologian Richard Watson claimed that Jesus was only making "a prophetic declaration."³ Watson elaborates further:

.... to foretel this, as the consequence of the introduction of a religion of pure benevolence and charity, could only result from a certain prescience of the future. As to the mode of expression used, it is to be observed that in the Hebrew idiom one is said to do that which he is the occasion of being done, however undesigned by him.⁴

Jesus uses the idiomatic expression of His people to claim responsibility for what will occur as a result of His loyal followers prioritizing His cause over the opposition of their immediate family members. Jesus is merely foretelling what will happen (Matt. 10:36-37; Luke 14:26).

In a similar sense, God spoke via the prophet Zechariah, "*.... for I set all men every one against his neighbour*" (Zechariah 8:10b). The Bible makes it quite clear that conflict and discord have satanic roots rather than divine ones (James 3:13-18). God never contradicts Himself, so we should read this passage metaphorically or

in an idiomatic way. In the Hebrew language, God regularly states that He would carry out what He had simply declared will occur as a result of His non-intervention.

A preferable translation is, “*and I let loose all men, every one against his neighbor*” (Leeser Old Testament). Another theologian put it this way: “God (lit.) let them loose, each against his neighbor, in that He left them to their own ways and withheld them not.”⁵

Does God Literally Destroy Nations?

Jesus would not have really sparked domestic strife. Instead, He would have just foretold what would occur if people dedicated their lives to following Him (Luke 9:55-56). As we saw in the first chapter, Jesus properly represented what God is like (John 14:7-9; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:1-3).

As a result, the parameters governing the “idiom of prophecy” apply to both prophetic pronouncements of destruction and predictions of human conflict and discord:

*At what instant I shall **speak** concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to **destroy it**; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. (Jer. 18:7-8)*

Throughout the Bible, the terms “speak” and “prophesy” are used interchangeably (Jer. 27:14; 1 Cor. 14:3). It is apparent that God employs the word “speak” in reference to Jeremiah’s prophetic pronouncements (2 Chron. 36:12). According to one scholar, “His word is His instrument whereby he doeth all things (Genesis, 1. 3;

Psalm, 33. 6, 9.) Word and deed are one thing with Him.”⁶

In other words, God frequently uses language as though He will personally bring about the destruction when He “prophesies” or “foretells” it. However, when we allow the Bible to interpret itself, we see that God’s role is actually to carry out His “non-interference” policy, according to which He will no longer stop the fallout from the populace’s rebellion:

For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. (Jer. 21:10)

The “hiding” or “setting against” of God’s face results in the loss of His favor, blessing, support, and protection (Deut. 31:17-18; 32:20; Psalm 27:9; Isa. 59:1-2; Eze. 39:23-24). God told Moses, “*I will leave them alone and hide My face from them and they will be destroyed*” (Deut. 31:17b; New Life Version). Furthermore, the word “given” is from the Hebrew word “nathan” which we learned in the last chapter “very often signifies to permit or suffer.” The Contemporary English Version renders it, “*I am going to let the king of Babylonia burn it to the ground.*”

This statement about God’s technique of bringing destruction merely by not interfering with what others do is repeated multiple times in the book of Jeremiah (Jer. 32:28; 34:2; 38:3, 18). Jer. 18:7-8 must be understood in light of this context. Thomas Neely Ralston said in his remarks on this passage:

This whole parable was designed to express God’s sovereign right to deal with the Jews as seemed good in his sight. Not to prosper or destroy them

according to an arbitrary will; but to govern them according to the fixed principles of his righteous administration. To permit them to be carried into captivity when they became wicked and rebellious, and to restore them to their own land and to their former prosperity when they repented.⁷

Here, God was only warning of what might happen due to Israel's actions: "*And I announce that it will be torn down and destroyed*" (Jer. 18:7b; New International Reader's Version).

Prophets Commissioned to Destroy

More evidence for this statement may be found in the book of Jeremiah, when God commands the prophet to carry out the same action that He threatened to take against the people in Jeremiah 18:7:

See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant. (Jer. 1:10)

God promised to carry out these actions in Jer. 18:7, but in Jer. 1:10, He commissions the prophet to do them. Even if their sole contribution was to declare the unavoidable repercussions of rebellion, the simple notion is that the one who prophesies or foretells the occurrence is believed to have brought it about.

One scholar explained that Jeremiah would not personally bring about this destruction, "... but he was ordered to predict or to declare that these things should be done. In these instances then, the agent is said to do what he simply declares shall be done."⁸ Thomas Jackson wrote in reference to Jer. 1:10 that concerning those events that prophets merely foretold that they were said,

“... according to a Hebrew idiom, to produce the events, though he was often nothing more than a sorrowful spectator of the calamities which he announced.”⁹

This idiom is applicable when God Himself personally predicts an occurrence as though He will be its cause, as well as when it refers to the prophetic words of God’s servants. God’s statements should therefore be interpreted in a *permissive* rather than a *causal* sense:

In Scripture a person is sometimes said to “do” a thing, when the meaning is that he only declares that the thing will be done. And in this passage it is evident that this was not literally the work that the Prophet had to do, but only to foretell and declare, that it would certainly come to pass Hence, according to the peculiar idiom of the language, a thing is often said to be done by a person, who only permits or grants that it should be done.¹⁰

Now, in translating a language, the idioms of which are different from those of that in which we wish them to be understood -the idioms ought not to be retained, for if they are, the meaning of the words is not given. Isaiah, for instance, is told to go and make the heart of Israel fat, and to make their ears heavy, and to shut their eyes; when the meaning is simply, that he should foretel that they themselves would close their ears, and shut their eyes, and harden their hearts.' Isa. vi. 9, 10. Matth. xiii. 15. Acts xxviii. 26, 27. Thus, too, Jeremiah is said to have been set to overthrow and to establish nations, because he was to predict their overthrow and establishment; and Ezekiel tells us, that he came destroy the city, when he means that he only came to foretel its destruction. Ezek. xliii. 3. In a word, when God is said to harden men, the meaning is, that he permits them to abuse his long-suffering, to the hardening of their own hearts. Rom. ii. 4, 5; ix. 22. Neh. ix. 16, 28, 29.¹¹

.... because Jeremiah (1. 10,) was commissioned to foretell the desolation of nations, he is said to do it himself; and God, because he foretold (Ex 3. 19,) the obstinacy of Pharaoh, is said (in 4. 21,) to have produced it. The Hiphil (or causative) form of the Hebrew verb found here is often only *permissive*.¹²

We will see that God is not a literal destroyer when we view God's threats of destruction in the same way that Jer. 1:10 should be interpreted.

God's Prophet Destroying a City

Other prophets besides Jeremiah are also given orders to bring about events that they were with the intention of merely prophesying about them. This demonstrates how common this prophecy idiom is in the Bible. Ezekiel claimed to have personally carried out the destruction of persons and places, which God had only before foretold or predicted would result from degenerative behavior:

*And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw **when I came to destroy the city**: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. (Ezekiel 43:3)*

According to Ezekiel, he arrived to destroy the city. Are we to think that Ezekiel entered the city with a fleet of warships or that he was armed with nuclear weapons? Are we even supposed to accept that God gave Ezekiel access to divine destroying power in order to effect a miraculous destruction?

The context shows that Ezekiel was just *warning* the residents of this city about what would happen if they did not turn to God for forgiveness (Ezekiel 43:9-10).

Therefore, Ezekiel's statement that he "*came to destroy the city,*" according to one scholar "... means, when I came to announce its destruction, as (e. g.,) in chaps. 8–11. The prophets are often said to do what they only predict as to be done."¹³ Again, in biblical prophecy, this idiom is frequently used:

.... it is as certain as anything possibly can be in Scripture interpretation that in Scripture idiom a person is said to do a thing, not only when he actually himself personally does it, but also he *permits* or *allows* it, (having at the same time the power of prohibition or hindrance), or when he *foretells* it as certainly about to take place thus Ezekiel is said to 'destroy' the city of Jerusalem, when he came to foretell or announce it (Ezek. 43.3).¹⁴

As a result, Ezekiel provides more evidence that the one who heralds the destruction that comes as a result of sin and abandoning God is said to be the cause of it in Biblical idiom. This is true for both God and His prophets. God outlines His method for eliminating a city or nation through His prophet Hosea:

Hosea 11:8-9

8 How shall I **give thee up**, Ephraim? how shall I **deliver thee**, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

9 I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, **I will not return to destroy Ephraim**: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and **I will not enter into the city**.

As we discovered in the last chapter, this verse alludes to God's safeguarding and intervention. When He does neither, He is said to destroy. Some contend that the Bible's descriptions of God's direct involvement in destruction should be taken literally. However, these same people would properly object to taking the prophets so literally. Yet, we would be required to do so by the laws of consistency. Consequently, in order to maintain the consistency of our biblical hermeneutic, we must idiomatically read the prophetic Scriptures referring to both God and His prophets in reference to destruction.

God Destroys Through His Prophets

Modern Bible readers can understand this fact since the prophets explained the "idiom of prophecy" and had an understanding of it. God once more used Hosea to speak when He declared, "*Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth*" (Hosea 6:5). God, according to the VOICE Translation, "*destroyed them with the words of My mouth.*"

Samuel A. Lee says that the proper understanding of the passage is "I have declared that they are, or shall be hewn."¹⁵ Regarding this verse, Thomas Pyle wrote, "God is said to destroy wicked persons and nations by pronouncing threats against them by the mouth of his prophets and ministers."¹⁶

Citing Jer. 1:10; Eze. 43:3 and Hosea 6:5, one scholar provides us with the following observation:

Now it is a common observation, of which every book in the Old Testament affords many instances, that verbs active in the Hebrew, in many cases, import no more than a declaration or notification of what is said to be done. Thus a prophet is said to effect what God by his mouth did only make known

or foretell. Ezek. xliii. 3; the prophet says of himself, "When I came to destroy the city;" upon which the margin observes, (taking it from Jonathan's Chaldee paraphrase,) "when I came to prophesy that the city should be destroyed;" and referring to the time expressed, Ezek. ix. 2—7; x. 2. And when God commissions the prophet Jeremiah (i. 10) to be "over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy-to build and to plant"-he gives him no more authority, than to pronounce what God spoke concerning kingdoms and nations, to pluck up and to plant, (xviii. 7—10.) For it was God that hewed them by his prophets, and slew them by the words of his mouth. (Hos. vi. 5.)¹⁷

Jeremiah was given the task of destroying nations by the Lord. According to Ezekiel, he personally came to destroy the city. Are we taking these literally? If not, why not? Most people don't take this literally because they are aware that no prophet ever caused something like this to happen. As a result, we must apply the principles of biblical interpretation consistently. If the prophets were said to bring about what they merely foretold then the same is true of God. Hosea 6:5, as Joseph Benson so eloquently put it, "... that is, I have denounced against them great destruction. The prophets, and God by the prophets, are said to do those things which they foretel, or denounce."¹⁸

Chapter Five

Destruction and God's Protective Presence

Then My anger will burn against them. I will leave them alone and hide My face from them and they will be destroyed. Many hard things and big troubles will come upon them. So they will say in that day, 'Have not these troubles come upon us because our God is not with us?' (Deut. 31:17; New Life Version)

God's command to the high priest to declare a blessing over Israel reveals His unwavering commitment to bless and defend His people: "*The Lord bless you and protect you; The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you*" (Num. 6:24; New English Translation). God's face *shining* is a constant representation of His favor, blessing, protection, and assurance of responses to prayer.

Men Pushing God Away

Yet, all of this is lost if God *hides His face* or *sets His face* against them. The term "hide my face" is explained in the excellent resource, *Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge*:

Though this may allude to the withdrawing of the Shechinah, or visible appearance of Jehovah, yet the general meaning of the expression in Scripture is, the withdrawing of his approbation and protection, of which his visible appearance was formerly the sign and pledge.¹

God's face being hidden from us means that we are without His benevolent protection and are destitute of

His help. This naturally allows for destruction to occur in our lives. The Unlocked Dynamic Bible renders Deut. 31:17, “*I will abandon them and refuse to help them any longer. Many bad things will happen to them, and they will be destroyed.*” It is in sync with Isaiah’s complaint in Isa. 64:7, “*.... for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities*” or, as the New Century Version reads, “*.... have let our sins destroy us.*”

We are vulnerable to attack from our enemies when God’s shielding presence, represented by His hidden face or having His face turned against us, is absent. Yet unless one is made to believe that God is the one who initiates this departure, one need merely read Isaiah to discover the contrary:

*Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened,
that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy,
that it cannot hear: But your iniquities
have separated between you and your God,
and your sins have hid his face from you,
that he will not hear. (Isa. 59:1-2)*

Because of their continual hostility, men distance themselves from God, who is able and eager to assist. The VOICE Translation renders verse 2, “*.... since you constantly **reject and push God away**, He had to turn aside and ignore your cries.*” God’s reticence to step in is a result of His people’s desire to break away from Him (Psalm 81:8-16). Due to their rejection of God, the Antediluvians experienced destruction:

*Therefore they say unto God, **Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.** What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him? Lo, their good*

is not in their hand: the counsel of the wicked is far from me. How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! and how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger (Job 21:14-17)

God is not spiteful and does not willfully withdraw His presence. Many errant sinners demand God leave them and have no desire to interact with Him. They get no satisfaction from serving Him, and they have no desire to learn His methods. This mindset invites destruction with open arms:

When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD. (Prov. 1:27-29)

The New Century Version renders v. 29, “It is because you **rejected knowledge** and did not choose to respect the Lord.” In Hosea we read, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: **because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee**” (Hosea 4:6a). God will permit us to reject His assistance and bring about our own demise.

How God is Said to Destroy

God shields His people from destruction by hiding them under His protective wings (Psalm 17:8; 57:1, 61:4; Deut. 32:11; Ruth 2:12). Psalm 91 states:

*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**. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. (Psalm 91:4-7)*

When individuals step out from under the wing of God's protection, all destruction results:

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who have killed the prophets and stoned those God sent to you. Yet often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks **under her wings to protect them**; but you would not allow me to do so. Look now, you have inherited a house that has become desolate. (Matt. 23:37-38; Truth New Testament by Colin Urquhart)*

The word *desolate* means, “deprived of the aid and protection of others” (Thayer’s Greek Definitions). Jesus was prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by Roman soldiers. Another translation reads, “*See! Your house is left to you laid waste*” (The Scriptures 2009). In Hebrew idiom, the destruction that results from the loss of God’s protection is often attributed to Him:

*For, lo, **they that are far from thee shall perish**: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for*

me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works (Psalm 73:27-28)

When a person decides to turn away from God, they are ruined. While God is *said* to destroy them, this destruction is not the result of His direct hand, but rather of His refusal to violate the freedom He has given people to reject His protection. God never intends for us to do this. He sends prophets to implore and entreat people to stop sinning (Jer. 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:9; 35:15; 44:4).

God must eventually, nonetheless, respect the people's choice. As a result, the Wycliffe Bible's translation of Psalm 73:27 is more accurate, "*For lo! they that draw away far themselves from thee shall perish; **thou hast lost all men that do fornication from thee.***" When Scripture attributes destruction to God, He is usually understood to have refrained from intervening:

*When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (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. 4:30-31)*

Nehemiah exclaimed, "*your mercy is great, you did not forsake or destroy them*" (Neh. 9:31; God News Translation). For God, the words "forsaking" and "destruction" are interchangeable. When God has abandoned the individual, He accepts full accountability for the outcomes. Hence, The Bible in Basic English rendering of Deut. 4:31 says that God will not "*let destruction overtake you.*" Neh. 9:31 in the

Contemporary English Version says that God never “*let them be destroyed.*” Similarly, in Leviticus 26:44, God, in His loving covenant mercy, promised that despite Israel’s sin, He would not completely “cast them away” which is equivalent to His destroying them:

*And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, **I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God.***

The word “abhor” also means “to cast away” (2 Sam. 1:21). Hence, God’s method of “destroying” is to “cast away, abandon,” or “give up” those He usually protects. The Good News Translation makes this point, “*I will not completely abandon them or destroy them.*” The Bible in Basic English says, “*I will not let them go, or be turned away from them, or give them up completely.*” By permitting Syria to oppress Israel as a result of their rebellion, God has revealed his destructive strategy:

*But Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and **would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet** (2 Kings 13:22-23)*

God compares the destruction of Israel to the expulsion of them from His presence. Connecting 2 Kings 13:23 with the truth that God’s hidden face or the loss of His protection over the people is how He is figuratively

said to destroy, the VOICE Translation reads, “*The Eternal, true to His promise, had protected them and remained near them until now.*” In our Western vernacular, which is different from the ancient Hebrews, we would simply say that God didn’t “let” or “permit” them to suffer destruction. Hence, the Contemporary English Version renders 2 Kings 13:23, “*In fact, he has never turned his back on them or let them be completely destroyed.*” The Good News Translation says, “*but the Lord was kind and merciful to them. He would not let them be destroyed, but helped them.*”

We discover that God does not advocate using divine power to eliminate anyone when we allow Scripture to interpret itself. Biblical idiom refers to God as having destroyed His people if their sin, rebellion, and rejection prevent Him from stepping in and protecting them from destructive powers.

Only in the Permissive Sense

We deduce from the Biblical evidence that God destroys through “permission” rather than “causation.” He *leaves* rebellious people in the hands of their adversaries:

*Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the Lord, **Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak.** Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The Lord is righteous. And when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; **therefore I will not destroy***

them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak (2 Chron. 12:5-7)

The word “left” is “*aw-zab*’.” Strong’s Hebrew dictionary defines it as, “A primitive root; to *loosen*, that is, *relinquish*, *permit*, etc.” We may observe once more that God uses “permissive” means to bring about destruction in the lives of people and nations. After several attempts at reaching them, God just “leaves” people in the enemy’s hands when they reject Him and refuse to turn from their sin.

When God allows Shishak to get his way, it is stated in the Bible that He destroys His people. When He allows them some freedom from Shishak, He is also said to refrain from destroying them. In essence, when God forsakes the sinner and removes His protecting presence, He does not personally destroy but rather permits the adversaries of the persistent sinner to have their way:

*.... so the Lord rejected all the people of Israel. He punished them and **let** others destroy them; he threw them out of his presence. (2 Kings 17:20; New century Version)*

The Easy-to-Read Version says, “*He brought them many troubles. He **let** people destroy them.*” We do not suggest that God gave His consent when we say that He “allowed” or “permitted” something of this type. It simply implies that He won’t trample on our right to decline His involvement in our lives. As we continue this study, we will discover that those who choose to sin automatically suffer the repercussions of their actions.

Chapter Six

Destruction and Destructive Curses

*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* (Deut. 28:20)

Deuteronomy 28 repeats this caution twice more regarding the destructive character of the punishment for disobedience (see verses 24 and 45). God provides a list of numerous blessings His people would receive for their obedience to Him in the first fourteen verses of Deut. 28. The following succinctly expresses these blessings: *fruitfulness, abundance, protection, direction, victory, success, holiness, honor, riches, and dominion.*

There are around three times as many verses dedicated to the list of curses for disobedience as there are to the blessings. Among the curses, there is *unfruitfulness, insufficiency, frustration, failure, defeat, bondage, poverty, fear, and all kinds of sickness and disease.*

Does God “Curse” People?

This list of “curses that destroy” demonstrates that the Bible’s use of the word “destruction” does not refer to being eliminated from existence; rather, it refers to the needless, horrifying suffering that results from disobedience. Deut. 28 describes how exactly curses cause destruction as a result.

Whether or not God personally inflicts these curses by His power, thereby personally bringing about the catastrophe portrayed in this chapter, is the question

that we attempt to answer in this book. The interpretation of Deuteronomy 28 in the majority of translations seems to corroborate the belief, that God directly inflicts these destructive curses. We read several times that the curses will persist “.... *until he have destroyed thee*” (Deut. 28:48, 51, 61) and “.... *the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you*” (Deut. 28:63).

God appears to be vindictive if He personally uses the destructive mechanisms described in Deut. 28 in response to His children’s disobedience. Additionally, it would give the impression that He is a God of contradictions and a God of double standards, since this is the same God who issues the following command:

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

Christ commands us to bless those who curse us, and by doing so, we shall imitate our heavenly Father’s actions. God does all within His power to bless evil people rather than directly cursing them.

Scripture is filled with this instruction to bless those who persecute us (Luke 6:28; 1 Thess. 5:15; James 3:10; 1 Pet. 3:9). Paul instructs us to, “*Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not*” (Romans 12:14). Jesus’ own example of this is his life. Christ forgave those who had wronged Him rather than cursing them, setting an example for us to follow (1 Pet. 2:21-23; Luke 23:34). The second chapter of this book taught us that Jesus was

the ideal representation of what God is like. He serves as a role model for how we should perceive God's treatment of the disobedient.

What is a “Curse”

Considering this, how can we reconcile the harsh language of Deuteronomy 28 with the knowledge of God's character that has been made known to us through Christ? Let's begin by defining what a curse actually is.

The word “curse” in Deut. 28:20 is from the Hebrew word, “*me'êrâh*.” Our Hebrew dictionaries do not provide much help. The most useful tidbit comes from the *Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew Definitions* which informs us that *me'êrâh* is derived from “‘*ârar*,” the same word used in several other sections of Deuteronomy 28 that is translated as curse (vv. 16-19, etc.) Throughout the chapter, *me'êrâh* and ‘*ârar* are interchangeable.

Jeremiah 17:5 uses the Hebrew word ‘*ârar*, and it says, “*Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.*” Dr. Chaim Bentorah, who teaches the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek original languages of Scripture, elucidated this verse by explaining that the term “‘*ârar*,” utilized here “.... means ‘to be without God's protection.’ In this context it means to be without the protection of God.”¹ Dr. Bentorah provides additional explanation in a different study on this verse:

Curse in Hebrew is ‘*Arur*, which comes from the idea of a situation where God is not present. To curse someone is to demand that God removes His protective covering, His Succoth, or arm of protection, from that person. In Jeremiah 17:5, the word ‘*Arur* is passive. Hence, this is not an act of God, but a result of what will happen if we trust in the arm of flesh.²

We are grateful to Dr. Bentorah for his insightful analysis of the original language and for this extremely useful definition. Nonetheless, a study of Scripture in light of Scripture will lead us to the same conclusion even without familiarity with the original Hebrew.

The moment Ai overpowered Joshua and the other leaders, they dropped on their knees and cried out to God, asking Him why He had brought them across the Jordan just to “*deliver us into the hand of the Amorites*” (Joshua 7:7b). Or, as the Unlocked Dynamic Version puts it, “*So why are you now **allowing** the Amorites to destroy us?*” The Lord graciously informed them that Israel had committed transgression by taking what He considered to be cursed (v. 11). Then he issued this warning to them:

*Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, **because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you** (Joshua 7:11-12)*

Being “accursed” by God means that He is “no longer with” the one experiencing the curse. The absence of God’s shielding presence is the curse. Israel caused this to happen to themselves, not anything that God did to them. In a previous warning, God said, “... *in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye **make yourselves accursed***” (Josh. 6:18). It should be noted that people, not God, make themselves cursed or put themselves in a situation where they are devoid of God’s assistance.

The word for “accursed” is from the Hebrew word *châram* and one of its meanings is to “make accursed.” It is the same word used in Isaiah 34:2 where we read, “*he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the*

slaughter.” God destroyed the people, not by an active exertion of His power, but by not permitting or not interfering when their enemies came to slaughter them. Another translation renders Isa. 34:2:

*For the Lord is angry with all the nations, and his wrath is burning against all their armies: he has put them to **the curse**, he has given them to **destruction**.* (Bible in Basic English)

As a result, when God is said to curse or destroy, it is because He has been pushed away by His people’s sin and will not prevent the consequences of their rebellion from occurring.

The Law of Reciprocity

The passage we read at the beginning of this chapter, which is worth repeating, illustrates this “pushing away” of God quite clearly:

*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*** (Deut. 28:20)

Forsaking God or ejecting Him from our lives leads to devastation and curses. God will respect our decision. But, when we make the decision to reject God, we are forced to abide by the established *law of reciprocity*, according to which God is required to react to our decisions.

When we make certain decision towards God then He will reciprocate. For example, James tells us, “*Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you*” (James 4:8a). God can only be near to those who desire to be near Him. On the other hand, those who forsake God leave Him with no choice but to eventually reciprocate: “*if ye forsake him, he will forsake you*” (2 Chron. 15:2); “*because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you*” (2 Chron. 24:20); “*if you abandon him, he will abandon you forever*” (1 Chron. 28:9; International Standard Version).

Deuteronomy 28:20, which states that abandoning God results in a curse and destruction, should not be interpreted to mean that God is being vengeful. He is only complying with the request to be left alone since he was pushed away. Three chapters later, God further explains this concept to Moses:

Deuteronomy 31:16-18

16 And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, **and will forsake me**, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

17 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?**

18 And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have

wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.

The New International Reader's Version translates verse 17, "*In that day I will become angry with them. I will desert them. I will turn my face away from them. **And they will be destroyed.***" The destructions brought on by the curse are a result of individuals rejecting, deserting, and forsaking God. And God has no choice but to return the favor. He has to "step back" and observe what transpires (Deut. 32:20, 24-25).

It is clear that God is not the sole player in the universe because of how He created this world and the freedom He granted to human agency. God and men both make decisions about how the world functions. God will not force His will on any of His creatures, either. God responds to our actions, and vice versa. When God chastises the people in Malachi for failing to pay their tithes and offerings, He makes reference to the same truth:

*Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. **Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.** But ye said, Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. **Ye are cursed with a curse:** for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation (Malachi 3:7-9)*

God tells His people to return to Him here. Following this, he informs them that they are "cursed with a curse." Because His people must *return to Him*, it follows that they must have *turned away from Him*,

thereby removing themselves from His protective presence. According to one author, this is never initiated by God, but by His people:

One of the ancient prophets, speaking as for God, put the whole truth well when he said—“Return unto me and I will return unto you;” for, when men forsake God, it is the same as though God had forsaken them, though, in reality, God never forsakes any one; only, when we are disobedient, and forgetful, and wayward, and wicked, God seems to have left us, though, in reality, it is we who have left Him. But if we return to Him—that is to say, if we begin again to do our duty, to strive against evil, and to obey God’s blessed laws—we shall find healing, light, and life; and God will seem to have returned.³

God describes this absence of His protective presence as being “cursed with a curse.” When we are not *under God’s protection* then we are *under a curse*. As another writer has stated concerning God’s exhortation through Malachi to return to Him, “.... he not only exhorts them to amend their lives, but to return to his protection.”⁴

Furthermore, God promises that if they return to Him, “*And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground*” (Malachi 3:11a). The people of God are surrounded by destructive powers. Our continued presence in God’s protective presence is our sole defense against them. God most definitely doesn’t initiate the break from us. We disengage from Him. Any destruction that comes from it is entirely our fault.

Chapter Seven

Destruction and the Power of Sin

Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee. (Psalm 5:10)

This book addresses the topic, “Does God Destroy?,” and provides a response. It turns out that the answer is more complicated than a simple “yes” or “no.” Unnecessary complexities have resulted from years of tradition combined with ignorance of the whole teaching of Scripture, a misperception of God’s genuine character, and a neglect to research Jewish cultural heritage and idioms.

Imprecatory or Prophetic?

The solution is not complicated in and of itself, but our ignorance and carelessness have made it such. The conclusion that results from a careful investigation and study of this subject could lead to either a “yes” or a “no” response to the question. If we assert that God does not actively bring about destruction via the power of His divine nature, the response is “no.”

On the other hand, if we go by how early Jews utilized their words, phrases, and idioms, the answer is “yes.” For instance, the psalmist writes, “Destroy thou them, O God,” in the verse that opens this chapter. Such psalms have been dubbed “imprecatory” by some (prayers of vengeance against enemies). Nonetheless, we are aware that this would be at odds with other passages of Scripture that preach against pursuing retribution (Prov. 25:21; Matt. 5:44-45; Luke 6:27-36; Rom. 12:14, 19-21; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9). Others have correctly asserted

that Psalm 5:10 and comparable verses are predictions rather than petitions based on the original Hebrew:

Concerning passages of this imprecatory kind in the Book of Psalms, it is to be observed, that they are not spoken of private and personal enemies, but of the opposers of God and His anointed; nor of any among these, but the irreclaimable and finally impenitent: and by way of *prediction*, rather than imprecation; which would appear, if the original verbs were translated uniformly in the future tense, as they might be, and indeed to cut off all occasion from them who desire it, should be, translated.¹

In addition, the Wesleyan scholar, Adam Clarke, writes, “All these apparently imprecatory declarations should be translated in the future tense, to which they belong; and which shows them to be prophetic.”² This has nothing to do with forgiveness; rather, it has to do with people who will not turn from their sin and accept the forgiveness that God freely extends. The prophetic declaration states that God will so destroy such rebels.

We can affirm that God does destroy since Psalm 5:10 is the inspired and prophetic Word of God. Therefore, understanding *how* God destroys is crucial in this situation. This question is answered in the very next sentence, which states, “*Let them fall by their own counsels.*” God finally gives people what they want by allowing them to follow their own counsels when they fail to turn from their sin and actually listen to Him:

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, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued

their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. (Psalm 81:11-14)

God wanted to bless them, so He preferred that they walked in His ways. God respected their decision by allowing them to follow their own counsels when they refused. The Unlocked Dynamic Bible renders verse 12, “*So because they were very stubborn, I allowed them to do whatever they wanted to do.*” God’s mechanism for destroying the ungodly is by no longer interfering.

God the Defender

According to the Bible, King Ahaziah adopted his evil father’s household’s practices: “... *for they were his counsellors after the death of his father to his destruction*” (2 Chron. 22:4b). God will allow men to go their *own way*, which always ends in destruction, if they reject His counsel:

They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. (Prov. 1:30-33)

God’s protection is withdrawn from us when we reject His ways and His counsel (Hosea 5:6). We will then be forced to suffer the consequences of our own actions, and our own ignorance will ultimately lead to our demise. William Arnot went on to elaborate on Solomon’s assertion:

It is true that God destroys his enemies: but it is also true that they destroy themselves. They throw themselves into the fire, and by his laws they are burned. He has laws that are everlasting and unchangeable. He has not hidden them from men. He has plainly declared them. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Those who cast themselves on revealed wrath are their own destroyers. These outstretched hands of his are clear of a sinner's blood.³

Hence, sin has a destructive force that is inherent in it rather than coming from God. Sin brings forth its own destruction. As a result, people who would listen to God are guaranteed His protection as they "*shall dwell safely,*" as Solomon also divinely wrote. Psalm 5 illustrates this as well:

But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield. (Psalm 5:11-12)

God pledges to defend His righteous ones and shield them with His favor in contrast to the ungodly.

Letting Our Sins Destroy Us

Only when we decide to cut ourselves off from God is this protection withdrawn from our lives, and this is when God is said to destroy us by an Eastern idiom. Isaiah lamented the following:

And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us,

and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. (Isa. 64:7)

God “*hast consumed us,*” according to Isaiah, suggesting that what happened to Israel was done by God’s own direct hand. Joe Blair, a Baptist minister, noted that, “To read that the Lord did such judgment and destruction Was characteristic of the Jewish way of thinking.”⁴ Jews, in their own idiomatic manner, always interpreted God as carrying out actions that He did not step in to prevent. Blair clarifies once more:

They did not bother sometimes to differentiate between God’s causing and God’s allowing. It was not God’s wish that destruction even come upon Israel, or anyone else, but His will to make people truly free means that He had to allow people the consequences of their choices Inherent in the consequences of sin is disaster—on the collective level and the individual level. God warns against evil; He works against the consequences of evil; and so often His grace and mercy win without our cooperation. But God ultimately does permit the consequences of our choices. He is involved in the consequences insofar as He permits us the right to our bad judgment and the negative consequences which that brings.⁵

By hiding His face from them—a metaphor for losing His favor and protection—God consumed them, but not by physically bringing catastrophe upon them. The Amplified Bible says, “*For You have hidden Your face from us And have handed us over to the [consuming and destructive] power of our wickedness.*” The International Children’s Bible reads, “*So you have turned away from us. And we are destroyed because of our sins.*” The New Century Version, renders Isaiah 64:6, “*That is because you have turned away from us and have let our*

sins destroy us.” As the context makes clear, God’s method of destroying rebels is to let them experience the natural consequences of their own wrongdoing.

According to the Bible, those who are severed off from God are “dead in sin” (Eph. 2:1-5). They are cut off from God, who is our life, in this way (Deut. 30:19-20; Isa. 59:1-2; Job 21:14-17; Jer. 2:13; 17:13). We are not shielded from the effects of sin when we are separated from God. You will be found out and destroyed by the sin itself (Pro 5:22-23; Num. 32:23).

According to another psalm, God will allow someone to perish by letting them fall into the identical “trap” that they had created for the psalmist:

*For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul. **Let destruction come upon him at unawares; and let his net that he hath hid catch himself:** into that very destruction let him fall (Psalm 35:7-8)*

Throughout history men have invented torture methods that are horrifyingly slow and agonizing in an effort to placate a harsh ruler or monarch. According to several of these reports, the creators of these devices either served as test subjects to discover how the cruel gadget operated or eventually were forced to experience the pain of the exact device they created to be utilized. These are striking examples of the truism that men frequently perish when they “fall into their own net.”

Destruction Within the Seed of Sin

God made a distinction between what He does for us and what sin does to us: “*O Israel, **thou hast destroyed thyself**; but in me is thine help*” (Hos. 13:9). Sin has its

own negative effects on the individual. There is a kernel of destruction in every sin (Prov. 8:35-36; Matt. 26:51-52; James 1:15; Rom. 6:21). Every sin possesses the capacity to destroy (Psalm 7:15; 109:16-17; Hos. 14:1; Isa. 3:9-11; Jer. 2:17, 19; 4:18; Rom. 6:23). What's worse is that the crop always produces more than was planted in the first place (Hosea 8:7).

God established the sowing and reaping laws (Gen. 1:11-12). His intentions were solely for our benefit (Prov. 3:9-10; Luke 6:38; 2 Cor. 9:6-12). God's good laws were perverted and used destructively by Satan, demons, and men (Gen. 2:15-17; Rom. 5:12; 1 John 3:8-10). Regrettably, the law that was intended to benefit us is now working to our detriment and destruction:

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. (Gal. 6:7-8)

The VOICE Translation says, "*What you sow, you harvest. Those who sow seeds into their flesh **will only harvest destruction** from their sinful nature.*" God is not to blame for the destruction we bring upon ourselves via our misdeeds any more than He is to blame for a farmer's decision to plant a tomato seed or a carrot seed and reap the benefits of either one or the other (Luke 6:43-45).

God established the principles of "sowing and reaping" and "seedtime and harvest," but He left it up to each person to choose how they will implement these principles both physically and spiritually (Matt. 7:17-19; 13:24-28, 36-39). God isn't to blame for the terrible seed we plant and the consequences any more than He is for the temptation that causes it:

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

Paul wrote, “*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin*” (Rom. 5:12a). Death and sin were not introduced into the earth by God. This was entirely a human endeavor. The same holds true when we sin and allow death and destruction to overtake our lives. God does neither tempt or bring about death. Once fully developed and extracted, the seed itself delivers death and unavoidable disaster.

By talking about the various fruit trees He created in the beginning, God made the principle clear. He stated: “*.... whose seed was in itself, after his kind*” (Gen. 1:11-12). Each sin, like every piece of fruit, contains its own seed of destruction. Everything reproduces after its own kind. Consider the following passages that illustrate this truth:

But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. (Prov. 6:32)

The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. (Prov. 10:29)

The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them. (Prov. 11:3)

The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment. (Prov. 21:7)

And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth. (1 Kings 13:34)

Regarding those sleeping with temple prostitutes, God declared, “*So, those foolish people are destroying themselves*” (Hosea 4:14; Easy-to-Read Version). S. D. Gordon said, “Sin has bound up in itself all the terrific consequences that ever come.”⁶ Asa Shinn adds:

Sin of its own nature, has brought abundant misery into the world, not because God gave sin its destructive qualities, (a most horrible thought!) but because it is destructive in its own nature, and cannot be otherwise. The only way in which infinite love can save us from the consequences, is by prevailing on us to consent for him to save us from the sin; and in case of obstinate and final refusal, he must bind the sinner, to keep the poison from spreading through his creation.⁷

Another minister explained, “That as sin is a hurtful and destructive thing, so the destruction it makes is very extensive. Sin destroys and abuses every thing”⁸

Predestined to Destruction?

When we sin, we sow the seeds of our own demise. When sin produces a harvest of ruin, it is spiritual

suicide and eventually results in bodily suicide. Some refuse to acknowledge this reality and assert that God *predestines* sinners to perdition. Romans 9:22, which states that God, “*endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction,*” is one of the many verses they quote to support this.

Unless you read the passage very carefully, it nearly seems as if God did the fitting. However Greek scholar, Marvin Vincent, wrote, “Not fitted by God for destruction, but in an adjectival sense, ready, ripe for destruction, the participle denoting a present state previously formed.”⁹ W. E. Vine wrote, “here the Middle Voice signifies that those referred to ‘fitted’ themselves for destruction.”¹⁰

Another translation says, “*vessels of wrath [the Jews]. having fitted themselves for destruction.* (Lavender’s New Testament). The Daniel Mace New Testament says that these people, “*had been working out their own destruction.*” Therefore, men, through sin, destroy themselves. In Ezekiel 18:30 we read:

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

The New Life Version says, “*Be sorry for all your sins and turn away from them, so sin will not destroy you.*” The 1599 Geneva Bible renders the last part, “*....so iniquity shall not be your destruction.*” No man is destined for destruction by God. Men’s sin causes them to bring destruction upon themselves: “*.... denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction*” (2 Pet. 2:1b).

Chapter Eight

Destruction and Satanic Activity

*Always be alert and pay attention, because the devil, who is your enemy, is going around, **looking for people to destroy**. He is like a lion that roars as it prowls around, seeking someone to kill and devour. (1 Pet. 5:8; Unlocked Dynamic Bible)*

The KJV says, “*Be sober, be vigilant.*” Thayer’s Greek Definitions defines the word “vigilant” as “to take heed lest through remission and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one.” Charlotte Elizabeth well wrote, “Man’s destruction is indeed the regular employment of Satan he prowls about, hoping to find some one forsaken of God, and left as a prey to his teeth.”¹

God Taking Responsibility

Remember that Satan needs to *find* someone to destroy. He cannot just devour anyone. Only those who lack God’s protection are vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. God genuinely cares about men and works to safeguard and take care of us (1 Pet. 5:7). Satan, on the other hand, has a fierce hatred for men and searches for opportunities to devour up and destroy us. Regrettably, men frequently leave God’s shelter and succumb to Satan’s attacks (Ps. 18:2, 10; 61:3-4; 91:1-3; Luke 10:17-20; 1 John 5:18-19; Eph. 4:26-27; 2 Cor. 2:11).

This fact should be kept in mind whenever we read a passage of Scripture that attributes destruction to God. It’s crucial to remember this when reading the Old Testament. Due to the paucity of information about Satan

and his activities in early parts of Scripture, God frequently assumed responsibility for Satan's actions using the idiom of permission. In the book of Job, for instance, we read:

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)

Everybody who has read and understood the book of Job is aware that Satan is to blame for the destruction Job experienced.² Why then does God claim accountability for it? It all comes back to the Hebrew idiom we discussed in chapter three, where God is said to do what He merely permits.

In Job 1:12 we read, "*And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power.*" Satan destroyed Job's family, servants, and cattle by using natural disasters and evil people because God had allowed Satan control over everything Job owned. Nothing was done by God. But since God did not step in to stop Satan from destroying Job's life, He bears complete culpability as if He had actually done it. Therefore, a better way to render Job 2:3 is, "*He still holds to his good ways, even **when I allowed you** to go against him, and to destroy him for no reason*" (New Life Version).

God is said by a Hebrew idiom to have done it because God has the physical ability to stop Satan but chooses not to do so for a variety of reasons (the majority of which being man placing themselves in situations that allow Satan legal access to consume them). The strongest

illustration of this is seen in 2 Samuel 24:1, when it is stated that God is angry with Israel so, “*he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.*”

Centuries later, Ezra, clarifies the language in 2 Samuel 24:1 when he writes, “*And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel*” (1 Chron. 21:1). Both passages are divinely inspired. The narrative in Samuel, on the other hand, was written before Israel received a complete revelation of a spirit known as “Satan” or “the devil,” and 1 Chronicles was composed when the Lord judged that His people were prepared for greater information on the matter. According to one theologian who analyzed these texts, “Hence it is clear beyond a doubt that God is sometimes said to do what he permits to be done by another.”³ These verses serve as the ideal illustration of *progressive revelation*:

The earlier portions of the Old Testament Scripture undoubtedly ascribed to God what later writers ascribed to evil spirits; and spirits are sent forth by God and for Him as lying spirits to deceive, and spirits of destruction to execute, the divine judgments. Exactness of differentiation comes only later, in accordance with the proper character of a progressive revelation. The Satan of Job and Zechariah, however, is just the same sort of spirit as that which appears in the earlier literature, in both cases closely related to God, but in the latter more clearly defined in regard to his hostility to God.⁴

It seems that idolatry was a tendency among God’s people. Hence, it would have been counterproductive to expose the whole truth about Satan so early in their history. Because He did not stop Satan, evil angels, or wicked men from carrying out harmful deeds, God assumed accountability for their actions until the time was opportune to reveal more about satanic activity.

The Destroyer of Egypt's Firstborn

In spite of the fact that God undoubtedly accepted responsibility for satanic activity in the early history of Israel, He always provided signals that a more evil entity was actually behind the destruction.

*For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, **I will pass over you**, and the plague shall not be upon you **to destroy you**, when **I smite the land of Egypt**. (Ex. 12:12a-13)*

In this verse, God is said to smite the Egyptians, bringing devastation upon them. On the other hand, the Israelites are told that by using the lamb's blood, God would *pass over* them and spare them from this terrible calamity. The Hebrew word for pass over is "*pâsach*." Some believe that translating this word as "passover" is inaccurate.⁵ One writer explains, "It is said that *pasach* sometimes means not so much to pass over, as to hover over and so protect."⁶ The identical phrase can be found in Isaiah, where God assures Jerusalem that He will defend it against the Assyrians:

*As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and **passing over** he will preserve it. (Isaiah 31:5)*

The Wycliffe Bible renders it, "*he defending it, shall rescue it, and hovering over it, he shall save it.*" Adam Clarke, a renowned Wesleyan scholar, elaborates

further as he links God's declaration in Isaiah to that in Exodus:

This difficulty is, I think, well solved by Vitranga, whose remark is the more worthy of observation, as it leads to the true meaning of an important word, which hitherto seems greatly to have been misunderstood, though Vitranga himself, as it appears to me, has not exactly enough defined the precise meaning of it. He says, “ $\pi\sigma\psi$ pasach signifies to cover, to protect by covering: $\sigma\kappa\epsilon\pi\alpha\sigma\omega$ ὕμας, Septuagint. Jehovah obteget ostium; ‘The Lord will cover or protect the door:’” whereas it means that particular action or motion by which God at that time placed himself in such a situation as to protect the house of the Israelite against the destroying angel; to spring forward, to throw one's self in the way, in order to cover and protect.⁷

Hence, God's “pass over” does not imply that He will avoid the home covered in lamb's blood. He'll instead keep watch over the residence to keep it safe. The Septuagint gives us a more accurate interpretation of Exodus 12:13, “.... *I will protect you and there shall be no destroying plague among you, when I smite in the land of Egypt*” (Charles Thomson Bible).

When we read Scripture in light of Scripture, we find that God only smites in the permissive sense, which is when one permits one's enemies to do as they like (1 Kings 14:15-16; 2 Chron. 13:15-16; Isa. 57:17). In light of this, God must be defending Israel from a different, more hostile force if He is hanging over the Israelites while not doing the same for the Egyptians. The following verses make this truth clear:

For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side

posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you. (Ex. 12:23)

The Easy-to-Read Version says, “*Then the Lord will protect that house. The Lord will not let the Destroyer come into your houses and hurt you.*” Once more, God declares that He will smite, but He then mentions another creature that He promises to save the Jews from. “The destroyer” is the name of this entity. Again, Adam Clarke clarifies:

The common notion of God’s passage over the houses of the Israelites is, that in going through the land of Egypt to smite the first-born, seeing the blood on the door of the houses of the Israelites, he passed over, or skipped, those houses, and forbore to smite them. But that this is not the true notion of the thing Here are manifestly two distinct agents, with which the notion of passing over is not consistent, for that supposes but one agent. The two agents are the destroying angel passing through to smite every house, and Jehovah the Protector keeping pace with him; and who, seeing the door of the Israelite marked with the blood, the token prescribed, leaps forward, throws himself with a sudden motion in the way, opposes the destroying angel, and covers and protects that house against the destroying angel, nor suffers him to smite it. In this way of considering the action, the beautiful similitude of the bird protecting her young answers exactly to the application by the allusion to the deliverance in Egypt. As the mother bird spreads her wings to cover her young, throws herself before them, and opposes the rapacious bird that assaults them, so shall Jehovah protect, as with a shield, Jerusalem from the enemy, protecting and delivering, springing forward and rescuing her.⁸

The Scripture makes it clear that the destroyer is a different person from God. Many academics think it alludes to Satan and demonic forces: “Satan, as the inflicter of physical malady, is apparently identified with the destroyer, Ex 1223.”⁹ One can be certain that “the destroyer” and Satan are one and the same after carefully studying this verse.¹⁰ Later, the Psalmist would inform us that Egypt’s troubles were brought on by “evil angels” (angels who rebelled alongside Satan):

He let loose on them his fierce anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels. He made a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death, but gave their lives over to the plague. He smote all the first-born in Egypt, the first issue of their strength in the tents of Ham (Psalm 78:49-51; Revised Standard Version)

The phrase “let loose” in verse 49 is from the Hebrew word “*shalach*” or “*shalah.*” Concerning this word Stephen Renn says, “... the meaning ‘let (someone or something) go’ in the sense of ‘allowing’ them to go is indicated.”¹¹ “Permission” rather than “causation” is seen in verse 50 where we read, “... *but gave their lives over to the plague.*” God “smote” the firstborn of Egypt by letting loose the demonic forces of Satan.

The Destroyer in the Wilderness

The Sinai desert, which Israel endured for forty years because of their disbelief and ingratitude, is another Old Testament narrative where we see this truth. Israel murmured, grumbled, and threatened to kill God’s servants, Moses and Aaron. God allegedly sent flaming serpents to destroy the ungrateful people in response:

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 (Num. 21:5-6)

Shalach, the Hebrew word for sent, also means *allow* or *permit*. God had to release the restraints He had over nature because of the incessant murmuring, allowing the snakes (and the demonic spirits that govern animal cruelty) to kill. 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.*” According to the New Testament, the *destroyer* was the one who sent the serpents upon Israel when the protective hedge was removed:

*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)*

Concerning this passage Albert Barnes writes, “...to presume on the grace of Christ to keep them in all circumstances, would be to tempt him, and provoke him to leave them.”¹² Christ was compelled to abandon the Israelites by their actions. The Israelites were left at the

mercy of the powers of evil after God withdrew His benevolent protection.

The Good News Translation of verse 10 says, “*We must not complain, as some of them did—and they were destroyed by the Angel of Death.*” There is no question that Satan is the destroyer in the wilderness since he formerly held the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Cotton Mather was a Puritan pastor, author, and scientist who was born on February 12, 1663, and lived until February 13, 1728. Cotton Mather is arguably most known for his role in the Salem witch trials, which took place in his time. Mather delivered a sermon titled, “*A Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible World*”. In this sermon, Mather asserted that Satan is the “destroyer” alluded to in 1 Corinthians 10:10 and that he is also to blame for sickness and disease:

Indeed, as the Devil does begrutch us all manner of *Good*, so he does annoy us with all manner of *Wo*, as often as he finds himself capable of doing it. But shall we mention some of the special woes with which the Devil does usually infest the World! Briefly then; *Plagues* are some of those woes with which the Devil troubles us. It is said of the *Israelites*, in 1 Cor. 10.10. *They were destroyed of the destroyer.* That is, they had *the Plague* among them. ‘Tis the *Destroyer*, or *the Devil*, that scatters *Plagues* about the World. Pestilential and Contagious Diseases, ‘tis the Devil who does oftentimes invade us with them.¹³

In his subsequent explanation of how Satan was the cause of the diseases in his time, Mather wrote, “Hence come such *Plagues*, as that *Beesom of Destruction*, which within our memory swept away such a Throng of People from one *English City* in one Visitation.”¹⁴ Nothing that causes destruction comes from God, only from those who oppose him and humanity. We

should never consider that God wants us to experience destruction or that it is His intention for us to do so.

Satan is the Destroyer

Many Bible readers miss the fact that much of the disaster that will befall people in the end times will not be directly from God's hand but rather from the wicked powers that will be let loose upon the earth as a result of mankind's continued worship of these evil forces. Demons released from the bottomless pit will cause the destruction (Rev. 9:2-6). The Bible continues by informing us that these are being ruled over by "the Destroyer," not by God:

And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon (Rev. 9:10-11)

Alternative English translations provide the meanings of the names in Hebrew and Greek:

The king of the locusts is the angel of the big hole that has no bottom. His name is Abaddon in the Jew's language and Apollyon in the Greek language. (This means, the one who destroys.) (Worldwide English New Testament)

The Amplified Bible says, "... in Greek he is called Apollyon (destroyer-king)." Thus, we find that the ruler of these demons has a name associated with

destruction in both Hebrew and Greek. This is a clear allusion to Satan since the Bible makes it very plain that he is the prince of the demons (Matt. 12:23-29; Luke 13:10-16). One scholar has noted, “So that it is evident this name *Apollo* answereth exactly to the Devil’s name ... *a destroyer*.”¹⁵ Another writes:

The word [Devil] signifies a calumniator, or false accuser, as doth [Satan] an adversary; [Apollyon] a destroyer; [Beel-zebub] the lord of flies. It is the business of our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion to walk about seeking whom he may destroy, 1 Pet. v. 8.¹⁶

Once God has imprisoned Satan for a millennium in a pit, He will then demonstrate to mankind the differences between His and Satan’s kingdoms on the earth (Rev. 20:1-3). Because the earth will be covered in the knowledge of God (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14), which is the knowledge of His actual character, there won’t be anything to harm or destroy throughout Christ’s millennial reign:

*And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. **They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain:** for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:8-9)*

*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent’s meat. **They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain,** saith the Lord (Isa. 65:25)*

The only reason there is suffering and destruction in the world today is because humanity enabled Satan and his reign of death to accomplish this (Rom. 5:12, 14; Heb. 2:14-15). God has never brought disaster upon people, nor is He currently doing so. Jesus provided the following contrast between Satan's agenda and His own:

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

Jesus wants to give us abundant life, but Satan wants to destroy us. While God loves us and wants to bless us, Satan wants to consume us. Hence, Jesus' purpose was to *"to destroy the plague of destruction inflicted on the world by the diabolical one"* (1 John 3:8; The VOICE Translation). Oddly, Satan's role is frequently overlooked but God is nonetheless held accountable for his actions. The Scripture, however, gives us the information we need to defend ourselves against the lies of this false accuser (Gen. 3:1-7; Rev. 12:9-11).

As Satan fell, he brought with him a tendency toward murder, violence, and destruction (Isa. 14:12-17; Eze. 28:12-18; John 8:44). It is Satan, formerly known as Lucifer, *"That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof."* As a result, it is critical to understand that Satan is the first to ever instigate destructive behavior. The original destroyer is Satan. While God has occasionally assumed responsibility for Satan's actions, destruction has always been the devil's work.

Chapter Nine

Destruction and Sickness and Disease

Our Saviour was manifested that he might destroy the works of the Devil, the Destroyer, and he taught us that sickness, and sorrow, and sin are alike violations of the will of our Father who is in Heaven.¹
(Percy Dearmer)

Several times in the Bible, God is either alleged to have threatened or actually destroyed individuals through sickness or disease. Does God create disease and sickness? Does He miraculously afflict people with illness using His power? If this is the case, wouldn't He be a destructive God?

Sickness is for Destruction

In earlier centuries, Christians were taught that illness was a “gift” from God that would help people develop patience and piety. Christians were taught to accept illness and patiently bear it as a visitation from God to aid in one's purification from sin, and many religious communities still teach this today.

However, the Bible has a completely different perspective regarding the supposed “value” of sickness. God told Jeremiah, “*And I will destroy them with terrible diseases*” (Jer. 14:12; Easy to Read Version) and “*I will set you free to be destroyed by war, plague and hunger*” (Jer. 34:17; New International Reader's Version). He tells Ezekiel, “*There will be war, hunger, wild animals and plague. They will destroy the people and their animals*” (Eze. 14:21; New International Reader's Version).

When the Philistines stole the ark of the covenant, they unleashed a torrent of misery on themselves:

But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof. (1 Sam. 5:6)

Some describe these *emerods* as a severe case of *hemorrhoids* or *tumors*. The Bible in Basic English says, “*he sent disease on them through all the country of Ashdod.*” Adam Clarke writes that this, “probably means the disease called the bleeding piles, which appears to have been accompanied with dysentery, bloody flux, and ulcerated anus.”²

Scripture describes the disease as “*a very great destruction*” and “*a deadly destruction*” (1 Sam. 5:9, 11). Many people were killed as a result of it. The goal of this disease was to destroy rather than to help in any way. This lesson can also be learned from King Uzziah’s life:

But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense. (2 Chron. 26:16)

As a result of Uzziah’s sin, we are told, “*the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar*” (2 Chron. 26:19). Uzziah’s destruction came in the form of leprosy and he suffered it the rest of his life (v. 21).

God sent a prophet to David after he conducted an improper census to present him with three options for contrition, one of which was “*the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the*

coasts of Israel” (1 Chron. 21:12). David opted for the pestilence. According to the account given in 2 Samuel:

So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men. And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite. (2 Sam. 24:15-16)

Sickness is portrayed as destructive and punitive in these accounts. It is never mentioned as having been deployed to assist in any way. Its goal is to destroy.

Sickness is a Destructive Curse

Some still refer to illness as “a blessing in disguise,” even though Scripture explicitly portrays it as punitive and destructive. But, not once does Scripture refer to illness or disease as a benefit to help or strengthen the believer. The precise opposite is taught, in fact. In Deut. 28:15, God warned that if the Israelites disobeyed Him that, “*all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.*” Sickness is listed among these curses:

*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. The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. (Deut. 28:20-21)

The Easy-to-Read Version renders verse 21, “*The Lord will cause you to have terrible diseases until you are finished—destroyed from the land you are going to take.*” In verse 22, the Lord continues:

The Lord will punish you with diseases, fever, and swelling. The Lord will send you terrible heat and you will have no rain. Your crops will die from the heat and disease. All these bad things will happen until you are destroyed! (Easy-to-Read Version)

A few sentences later, the Lord reiterates that one of the main purposes of the curse is to cause sickness and disease:

Deuteronomy 28:59-61

59 Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance.

60 Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee.

61 Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon thee, **until thou be destroyed.**

There is no question that sickness is referred to in Scripture as a destructive curse rather than a “blessing in disguise,” as some believe.

Sickness Comes from Satan

In the Bible, sickness is never referred to be a blessing but rather as the outcome of the curse. Because of sin, there is a curse. One author noted, “sin is but the aberration from the fixed principle of order, with all its train of mischief, destruction, sickness, and death.”³ As a result, we must avoid referring to illness as a “blessing in disguise.” As Percy Dearmer explained:

We must, then, treat sickness exactly as we treat sin. This will give us the answer to our questions. ‘Is disease a visitation from God?’ Only in the sense that sin can be called a visitation. But does not a good man often use sickness to make himself better, and is not sickness often a blessing in disguise?’ Only as temptation is often a blessing in disguise, and a good man often uses a fall into sin as a stepping-stone to better things. But ought we not to be still thankful, and still believe ourselves within the sphere of God’s love, when sickness smites our home? Must we lose this comfort?’ Yes, we ought to be thankful always; just as we are still in God’s love if sin smites our home, or one falls greatly whom we have treasured: the comfort is to know that God did not will the evil.⁴

Although the Lord took all responsibility for disease and its devastation, these passages must be read *permissively*. The people will acknowledge, in reference to the curses in Deuteronomy 28, “*Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?*” (Deut. 31:17b). In his interesting Bible paraphrase, *The Clear Word*, Dr. Jack Blanco gives us the following rendition 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.

It is a frequent assertion of Scripture that God is said to do things that He did not prevent adversarial forces from accomplishing. Exodus 12 describes the slaughter of the firstborn in Egypt in regard to the following:

*And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will **pass over** you, and **the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you**, when I smite the land of Egypt. (Exodus 12:13)*

As we read further into the chapter, we are told that "*Jehovah will **pass over** the door, and will not suffer **the destroying plague** to come into your houses to smite you*" (Ex. 12:23; The Holy Bible, by B. Boothroyd, D.D.), or, as the KJV renders it, "*.... the LORD will **pass over** the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you*" (v. 23).

The Good News Translation says that God, "*will not let the Angel of Death enter your houses and kill you.*" This is consistent with Hebrews 2:14 which says that the purpose of Jesus' redemptive work is that He "*might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil*" (Heb. 2:14). All sickness and disease are merely symptoms of *death* (Deut. 30:15, 19; Job 18:13; Psalm 78:49-50; Jer. 21:8-9; Rev. 6:8).

Satan is the cause of all illness and disease (Job 2:7; Matt. 12:22-26; Luke 13:16; Acts 10:38). God is said

to bring sickness only by removing His restraint over demonic forces. (Matt. 4:24; 12:22; Mark 9:25; Luke 7:21-22; 9:1, 2, 42; 13:11; Acts 19:11-12). In Ex. 12, the homes of the Israelites would be shielded from these demonic forces by following God's instructions and administering the blood of the lamb. As one scholar noted in relation to Ex. 12:23, "The object of the rite is to protect the inmates of the house from the destroyer"; that is, in primitive conception, from the demons of disease and death."⁵ God "passed over" the house with the applied blood, as we discovered in the previous chapter, which implied that God was guarding that house like a bird guards its young (Isa. 31:5). Moses also penned Psalm 91, which includes the following verses:

He will rescue you from all hidden traps and save you from deadly diseases. He will shield you as a bird protects her young under her wings. You will be safe in his care. His faithfully doing what he has promised is like a shield that will protect you. (Psalm 91:3-4; Unlocked Dynamic Bible)

This psalm was undoubtedly inspired by God, and Moses wrote it to remind Israel of both the protection God had provided them that night and the fact that He would do so in the future. In verse 6 he continues, "*You won't have to be afraid of the sickness that attacks in the darkness. You won't have to fear **the plague that destroys at noon***" (New International Reader's Version). Some of the earliest Jewish interpretations of this verse ascribed demons as the cause of the destruction of disease. One academic made the following observation:

The Alexandrian translators in their Greek Targum, in the third century before Christ, instead of the Hebrew of Ps. xci. 5, 6, which is faithfully represented in our English Bible, “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 noon-day,” write, “Thou shalt not be afraid of the nocturnal terror, of the arrow that flieth by day, of the thing that walketh about in darkness, of the sudden sickness and the noon-day demon.” The Chaldee Targum, of a later age, goes to a greater length: “Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the (mazikin) violent demons that go about at night, nor of the arrow of the angel of death which destroyeth by day, nor of the death that walketh in darkness, nor of the shidin (destroying demons) that smite in clear day.”⁶

One more author wrote, “There is an implied reference to the belief of the Semites that every disease was due to the action of some evil spirit—a demon; and that the way to cure the malady was to expel the demon.”⁷ Another rendering of Psalm 91:6 brings this to light:

You will not be afraid of things that happen during the night that could terrorize you or of arrows that your enemies will shoot at you during the day. You will not be afraid of plagues that demons cause when they attack people at night or of other evil forces that kill people at midday. (Psalm 91:5-6; Unlocked Dynamic Bible)

As a result, the psalm describes sickness as a “destructive work” that Satan and demons are liable for generating and from which God is attempting to shield us.

Our Redeemer from Destruction

The New Testament makes this truth quite clear. In relation to a fornicator the Corinthian church was instructed, “*To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh*” (1 Cor. 5:5a). Only by handing over a person to Satan and letting him ruin the disobedient one does God “inflict” destructive curses.

Because it provides Satan with an open door and a foothold into our life, sin is a problem and one of the reasons it is destructive (Gen. 4:7; 1 John 3:8-12; Eph. 4:26-27). God, however, is not interested in our annihilation (Eze. 18:23). He does not want to punish us for our transgressions. He wants to save us from the harm we inflict on ourselves:

*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** (Psalm 107:17-20)*

Remember that the destruction was not caused by God. This was caused by sin. Sin causes destruction, and God heals the damage sin causes. But if we turn back to God and accept His pardoning mercy, He cheerfully saves our life from oblivion:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;

*who crowneth thee with lovingkindness
and tender mercies (Psalm 103:2-4)*

Jesus is the forgiver of sin, healer of disease, and the rescuer from destruction. In contrast, demons are used by Satan to transmit harmful disease. A young person in Mark 9 suffered from both mental and bodily illness as a result of a demon. It aimed to “destroy” the youngster:

*And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oftentimes **it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him:** but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. (Mark 9:21-22)*

Several verses later we read that Jesus, “.... rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, *Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him*” (v. 25). A demon under the authority of Satan was behind the mental sickness that was attempting to kill this young man (Matt. 12:24-29).

Concerning the man with the withered hand, Jesus asked the religious leaders, “*Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?*” Even on the Sabbath Day, leaving the guy withered amounted to destroying him. He was being saved by healing him. Our Lord chose to heal rather than to destroy. God is the healer, not the sickness-bringer. Christ is the redeemer, not the destroyer. Sin is the destructor. Sin makes it possible for Satan to annihilate us. Let us remain free from demonic destructive traps and walk in the freedom from sin that Jesus has granted to us through His redemptive work.

Chapter Ten

Destruction and Christ's Redemptive Work

What gratitude should we feel to the Son of God who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, and so to rescue us from eternal destruction. And especially when we reflect that we were not only in danger of destruction, but that it was deserved destruction. We had voluntarily sided with Satan our most cruel enemy, and were engaged in opposition to the Son of God, and yet he became our Saviour. Let praise for ever flow from our grateful hearts.¹ (John Ryland)

Some have the strange idea that Jesus came to rescue us from Father-God. There is not an inkling of truth in this claim. Scripture, in all of its familiarity, tells us, “This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed” (John 3:16; The Message). Far from teaching that the Father wished to harm us, Scripture reveals His infinite love for us and His willingness to send His only Son to rescue us from destruction.

Rescue from Satanic Destruction

As we noted in chapter two, the word for “destroy” (or “perish” in the KJV) is the Greek word, “*apollumi*” which means, according to Strong’s Dictionary, “to destroy fully.” This is not the work of God but the work of Satan, the thief:

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they

might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

The word for “destroy” here is again “*apollumi*.” We are given a contrast between what Satan does and what God does through Jesus Christ. God did not come to destroy but to provide us with abundant life, a supernatural life from God that delivers us from destruction. As Jesus so aptly put it, “*For The Son of Man has not come to destroy lives but to give life*” (Luke 9:56; Original Aramaic New Testament).

In contrast, it has always been Satan’s intent to destroy. This is his *modus operandi*. It is his very nature. Consider one of Satan’s numerous titles in the book of Revelation:

And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon. (Rev. 9:11)

The name “Apollyon,” according to Strong’s dictionary, is the “Active participle of *apollumi*; a destroyer (that is, Satan).” As one author has noted in his commentary on the book of Revelation, “He is the Abaddon, the Apollyon, the Destroyer of all that is good and divine. Satan has many names in the Bible, and they all have a bad significance.”²

Another writer explains how recognizing Satan as Apollyon provides greater illumination regarding the ongoing warfare in the spirit realm:

There is, then, a great war, mostly unseen, going on: Satan as Apollyon, or the destroyer, on one side; and Christ, the Saviour, on the other; and with them hosts of angels on either side. Since, then, we

cannot remain indifferent, or on neither side, but must choose one, we ought, as we naturally abhor destruction, and always seek for salvation, to renounce with our own mind and will the destroyer, as has already been promised for us. Moreover, as Satan is still ever seeking to tempt, seduce, and destroy us, we must ever afterwards resist him, lest we return to his dominion: which we may well dread to do, since it is a fearful bondage, or slavery, and he will, if we remain in his power, destroy us for ever.³

As we discovered in earlier chapters, there is no difference between Jesus and the Father. We must keep in mind that even though Jesus came to redeem mankind from satanic annihilation via His death, burial, and resurrection, “*God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:9). Jesus did not come to deliver us from a vindictive, angry God (1 John 4:14-19; Rev. 1:5). God the Son, acting in the stead of God the Father, came to deliver us from Satan, the destroyer.

Jesus Destroyed Satan

Hence, we are informed that Jesus did not suffer in order to placate a vengeful God, but rather that, “*God rescued us from the dark power of Satan and brought us into the kingdom of his dear Son*” (Col. 1:13; Contemporary English Version). How did Jesus rescue us from dark oppression? According to Scripture, He did this by destroying the devil:

*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)

The Greek word for “destroy” is *katargeo* which means “to nullify,’ and so to render something inoperative or ineffectual.”⁴ Obviously, this does not imply that Satan has been extinguished. It does, however, imply that Satan’s ability to use death as a weapon against people has been neutralized.

Scripture equates death to *destruction* (Deut. 28:45; 30:19; Job 28:22). Death is an invention of Satan. God is life and *not* the source of death (Deut. 30:20; John 11:25-26; 14:6). We are rightly informed in the beautiful apocryphal book Wisdom of Solomon, “For God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living” (Wisdom 1:12). The author compares death to destruction and reminds us that it is not from God and that He does not take pleasure in it, as Ezekiel affirms (Eze. 18:23, 32; 33:11).

Scripture points to death as an enemy that God will eventually destroy: “*The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*” (1 Cor. 15:26). Percy Dearmer well said, “nothing that is not love is consonant with the nature of God, no darkness or death can be of him.”⁵ The Wisdom of Solomon’s author identifies the main cause of destruction and death as follows:

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

Certainly, it was Adam who brought death into the world, but he did so (perhaps ignorantly) by working in concert with the devil. Paul wrote, “*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin*” (Rom.

5:12). Man's sin gave birth to death (Rom. 6:23; James 1:15). It was this *sin* that gave Satan rights to mankind and this world's system:

*He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that **he might destroy the works of the devil.*** (1 John 3:8)

Other translations say that the one practicing sin *belongs* to the devil. Sin gives Satan a foothold into the lives of men (Eph. 4:26-27; James 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:25-26). Adam and Eve were given dominion over the works of God's hands (Gen. 1:26-28; Psalm 8:6). When they sinned, they, in effect, belonged to Satan and became a follower of him (Acts 26:18, Eph. 2:1-2).

Since Adam possessed dominion, by yielding to Satan, he transferred that dominion to him (Luke 4:6). This, in turn, made Satan the ruler over this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:12; 1 John 5:18-19). Satan's primary means of reigning over men was through deception (Rev. 12:9; 2 Cor. 4:4) and death. Paul wrote, "*Nevertheless death **reigned** from Adam to Moses For if by one man's offence death **reigned** by one*" (Rom. 5:14a, 17a).

The primary purpose of Christ's work of redemption was to destroy Satan's works over men. The Greek word for "destroy" in 1 John 3:8 is "*katargeō.*" According to Mounce it means, "to render useless or unproductive to free from, dis sever from."⁶ It is the exact same word in 2 Timothy translated as "abolish:"

*But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, **who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and***

immortality to light through the gospel (2
Tim. 1:10)

The Wycliffe Bible says that Jesus “*destroyed death.*” The Charles Thomson Bible says, “*who hath put a stop to the operations of death.*” Jesus eliminated the devil’s capacity to dominate us through death by destroying his works. Satan no longer has any weapons, making him powerless over us (Luke 11:18-22; Col. 2:14-15). Those who are united to Christ no longer experience the destructive influence of Satan.

No Use of Physical Force

This encapsulates the fact that Satan, who is both God and man’s enemy, was the root of man’s predicament rather than God. Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection amounted to a *rescue* operation in essence:

The mission of Jesus was one of rescue. The world, Satan’s kingdom, was involved in his doom; and the men to whom God had given life from Himself were entangled in the fatal toils of death. Therefore Christ came; the strength and life of God were centred in Him. He came, and He remained, free from the evil that severed men from God and made them subject to Satan. His mission was to undo the malignant work of Satan and reveal the deadliness of sin; and this He did by revealing the love of God and imparting the secret of His life.⁷

It also reveals God’s love in all of its splendor. The universe’s most selfless, forgiving, and self-sacrificing being is God. God nonetheless decided to save men from this foe even though they knowingly chose to ally with Satan and betray Him.

We should be even more amazed and overcome by such an incomprehensible love if we consider how God was able to defeat the adversary by sacrificing Himself on

our behalf. It is crucial to realize that God did not annihilate Satan with physical power. Although God could undoubtedly punish Satan physically, doing so would have violated the law. Given that humans engaged into a covenant of death by succumbing to Satan, he had every right to rule over them (Isa. 28:15, 18). God, despite Satan, angels, and men's disobedience against Him, must be fair to them all because of His righteousness, holiness, honesty, and love. So, even though God has the inherent power to do so, He cannot unfairly employ force against the devil to achieve His ends (Zec. 4:6).

Satan waged a campaign of disinformation against God and is an accuser and liar (Gen. 3:4-5; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; John 8:44; Dan. 7:25; Rev. 13:6-7). If God used physical power against Satan, with his last breath he would have exclaimed, "See, I was right. Yahweh is an angry, vindictive, capricious, hypocritical dictator." This final slander might have caused other angels and humanity to have second thoughts about the character of God (Rev. 12:4). If they had lost trust in God, they would have served Him out of fear rather than love, which is not at all what God wanted (1 John 4:17-18; 2 Tim. 1:7). Heaven would be no different from living under a dictatorship, such as North Korea, China, or any other country on Earth where people are forced to work out of fear rather than love. God detests this kind of monarchy and forbids His servants from engaging in it (Matt. 20:25-26; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).

God does not have "one law for me and another for thee," unlike fallen humans. He is not a God of contradictions. God provides us with a model to imitate (Matt. 5:43-45; Luke 6:35; John 13:39; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 5:1-2). As a result, God could only deliver people from satanic oppression through legal means, i.e., by abiding by His own righteous laws and standards.

How Satan Was Destroyed

Since man granted Satan the legal right to his tyranny over men through sin, it would take a man—one over whom Satan had no rights—to take it away from him. By His legal entry into the earth through Mary’s consent (Luke 1:26-38), our Lord took on human flesh and became like His brethren (John 1:1, 14; Phil. 2:5-9; Heb. 2:17).

Nonetheless, despite being severely tempted by Satan, Jesus, unlike other men, never sinned (Heb. 4:15; 7:26; Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-14; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:21-22). Satan had nothing to exploit against our Lord because He was without sin:

*I won't speak with you much longer, for the ruler of this dark world is coming. But he has no power over me, **for he has nothing to use against me.** (John 14:30; The Passion Translation)*

Satan had no sins to accuse Jesus of having committed, unlike other men. He had no authority to kill Jesus, yet in his blindness, bloodlust, and hatred of God, he nonetheless made the decision to do so. Jesus told the men who arrested him, “.... *this is your hour, and the power of darkness*” (Luke 22:53). Another version says:

For many days I was with you in the temple, but you did not try to arrest me at all! But this is the time you are doing what you want. It is also the time when Satan is doing the evil things as he wants to do. (Unlocked Dynamic Bible)

Satan is the power of darkness (Eph. 6:10-12; Col. 1:12-14). Scripture makes it quite apparent that Satan

influenced the men who killed our Lord (John 8:40-44; 1 Thess. 2:15). Rescuing mankind from satanic tyranny would require the ultimate sacrifice on the part of Christ and the ultimate demonstration of love (John 10:15-18; 15:13).

Satan's enmity toward God and determination to have Him killed would require the Lord to willfully submit to it. With his numerous temptations, Satan tried everything to find something wrong with Jesus. But, he was never able to and lacked the authority to accuse him of guilt. Yet Satan's hatred of God made him blind. Satan, like any insane man blinded by hatred, disregarded the consequences of killing an innocent man and deluded himself into thinking he could imprison Jesus in his fortress of death (Acts 2:22-27).

However, we are told, "... *God raised Jesus and unleashed Him from the agonizing birth pangs of death, for death could not possibly keep Jesus in its power*" (Acts 2:24; The Voice). Christ's resurrection demonstrated that Satan had no legal authority over Him because Jesus never sinned (1 Cor. 15:54-58). Without realizing that this would result in the demise of his authority, Satan illegally and blindly subjected Jesus to his power of death (1 Corinthians 2:8). Heb. 2:14-15 in another translation emphasizes the following truth:

*Since, therefore, the children of whom he was speaking, all share a common mortality, he likewise took on their same mortal nature, in order to submit to the Devil's power of death and then **overturn death by resurrection, and thereby liberate all** who lived in slavery to the Devil's ways due to their fear of dying* (Living Waters Translation)

Due to sin, the first Adam, who serves as our corporate leader, granted Satan authority over *all* men. The “last Adam” was Jesus, who took over as the new head of the human race (1 Cor. 15:45). Satan lost control over all of humanity as a result of his unlawful murdering of our sinless Christ. Satan is vanquished by Jesus’ blood, and people are set free from his tyrannical rule (Acts 26:18). Everyone who embrace it has a legal right to be free from Satan because of the blood (death) of Jesus:

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:13-14)

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. (Rev. 12:11)

Satan no longer has the right to bring charges against us before God or demand any rights from us because of the blood of Jesus (Rev. 12:10). Satan lost supremacy over the entire human race by murdering a sinless, innocent man. God defeated Satan without straying from any of His precepts. God crushed Satan and his activities against men by simply allowing Satan to utilize his own blind rage and bloodlust against him.

Because of his blood-thirsty hatred and blinded by his desire to harm Jesus, Satan destroyed himself. He believed he had laid down a trap for Jesus, but God had instead used it to defeat Satan (Psalm 35:7-8). God is said to destroy when He allows sinful beings to perish as a result of their own sin (Prov. 1:31-32; Hos. 13:9).

Chapter Eleven

Destruction and Christ's Hard Teachings

*But he did not speak to them without a parable. And when they were alone, **He explained all things** to His disciples.*
(Mark 4:34; Modern King James Version)

Despite the fact that Jesus typically portrayed God as a merciful, forgiving, gracious, and beneficent being, several of His parables—if not properly explained—might give us the idea that Jesus also taught that God is a vindictive destroyer.

Jesus' Parable of a Vineyard

Jesus once told a parable involving a man who planted a vineyard and then employed workers to care for it. After sending several representatives and finally his son, who was killed, to reason with the workers in order to receive his fruit, the vineyard owner took action:

*When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, **He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.*** (Matt. 21:40)

The audience's (comprised partly of the chief priests and leaders who consistently challenged Jesus and sought to kill Him. See v. 23) *response* to the Lord's question was that God (of whom the "lord of the vineyard" represents), "will miserably destroy those wicked men." Our Lord does not dispute their answer.

Instead, He quotes from Psalm 118:22-23 and expounds it, revealing how the parable applies to them:

*Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, **The stone which the builders rejected**, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matt. 21:40-43)*

The wicked men represent the Israelite leaders who would participate in the assassination of Jesus. The Lord likens the “destruction” of these evil people to the taking of the kingdom away from the Jews who had been initially chosen for it. He adds the example of the stone that the builders rejected to illustrate this.

Jesus is that stone that the builders (the leaders of Israel) rejected. John says, “*He came unto his own, and his own received him not*” (John 1:11). God sent our Lord especially to the lost sheep of Israel but they rejected Him (John 3:32; 5:40; Acts 13:46). It is for their rejecting of this stone, Jesus, that caused them to be broken off and crushed (Matt. 21:44; Rom. 9:31-32; 11:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-8). Sadly, as God told Asa, “*If you seek him, he will respond to you, but if you reject him, he will reject you*” (2 Chronicles 15:2; New English Translation).

When we reject the Lord, we are asking Him to depart from us and leave us alone (Deut. 31:16-18; Job 22:17; Isa. 59:1-2; Hosea 9:12). The Antediluvians told God, “*Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways*” (Job 21:14), and, as a result we are told, “*how oft cometh their destruction upon them!*” (v. 17).

Destruction is always brought on by rejecting God (and the knowledge of Him):

*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: **because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.*** (Hosea 4:6)

The Bible in Basic English says, “*Destruction has overtaken my people because they have no knowledge; because you have given up knowledge, I will give you up.*” We must interpret our Lord’s parable in this light. When these men rejected, forsook, and pushed away the Christ, salvation was lost to them and they were abandoned to the demonic forces that seduced them.

Jesus’ Parable of the Marriage

In a another parable Jesus recounts the tale of a king who was planning his son’s wedding. The king dispatched ambassadors to extend invitations, but they received poor treatment (Matt. 22:1-6). Finally, Jesus says:

*But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and **destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city*** (Matt. 22:7)

The obvious implication is that God the Father was planning God the Son’s marriage to His bride, the Church (Eph. 5:25-26). The Jewish people, whom He invited, vehemently refused His invitation that He sent through His messengers. This is a reference to how God sent prophets to His people to lead them back to Himself,

but they were mocked and slaughtered for it. (2 Kings 17:13; 2 Chron. 24:19; Jer. 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4).

God sent a prophet to King Amaziah when he turned to idolatry, telling him, “*God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel*” (2 Chron. 25:16b). We see God’s method of destruction when we are told He “.... *might deliver them into the hand of their enemies*” (2 Chron. 25:20b).

In a similar way, the “king,” who stands in for Father-God, will destroy our Lord’s killers and set their city on fire. God was forced to allow the Romans to demolish Jerusalem since the people rejected Christ and, in turn, His protection:

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation (Luke 19:41-44)

And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24)

When Vespasian, the Roman emperor, dispatched his son Titus to quell the Jewish uprising in 70 A.D., Our Lord's prophecy was realized. During this time, Titus successfully annihilated the Jewish people. In Psalm 81, God addresses His people as follows:

*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, 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)*

The Jews were destroyed because they no longer had God's protection after they killed His Son in defiance of Him. Jesus foretold this catastrophe in Matthew, saying, "*Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*" (Matt. 23:38). The Amplified Bible renders this, "*Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate (abandoned and left destitute of God's help)*" and the Complete Jewish Bible reads, "*Look! God is abandoning your house to you, leaving it desolate.*" Jerusalem experienced destruction as a result of its rejection of God's benevolent protection, which allowed the adversary to triumph.

Fear Him Which is Able to Destroy

The teachings of Christ that seem to imply that God will personally destroy the body and soul of sinners

in hell are probably the most puzzling. For instance, in Matthew, we read:

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matt. 10:28)

The text contrasts who we should be afraid of and who we shouldn't. It compares human persecutors to another person. The individual who has to be feared because of his capacity to destroy both body and soul in hell is frequently at the focus of this discussion.

Some people think that, in contrast to men, the devil is the one we should be scared of. Yet since Jesus overcame Satan and gave us power over him, this is untrue (Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8; Luke 10:17-20; James 4:7). Never have fear of the devil. He must be resisted and vanquished with the blood of Jesus (Eph. 6:10-12; 1 Pet. 5:8-10; Rev. 12:9-11). As a result, God is the only clear subject Jesus could be alluding to.

But the Bible makes it quite plain that God does not want us to be terrified of Him (1 John 4:17-18; Luke 1:74-75; Rom. 8:15; Heb. 4:16). But when we realize that Scripture uses the word "fear" in a variety of contexts, this problem is rectified. *Fear* indicates to be terrified when used towards men. However, it frequently refers to *adoration* and *worship* when referring to God (Psalm 96:9; Also compare Deut. 6:13; 10:20; with Matt. 4:10).

Fear is also used in the sense of *trusting God* (Ps. 31:19; 56:4; Isa. 50:10). The psalmist wrote, "*Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield*" (Ps. 115:11). This is in contrast to being afraid of men, "*The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe*" (Prov. 29:25).

In this scenario, our Lord's admonition in Matthew 10:28 is not to be scared of God, but to *worship Him* instead of being terrified of those who are persecuting us because they can only hurt the body physically, but not the soul that God has *preserved* (Ps. 86:2; 97:10; 121:7; Prov. 16:17; 1 Thess. 5:23).

God Destroying Body and Soul

How do we deal with the fact that God is said to destroy soul and body in hell in light of the question we attempted to answer in this book, "*Does God Destroy?*" As we've seen throughout this book, God is frequently said to do what He doesn't intervene to prevent others from doing or take responsibility for the consequences of our destructive choices. This is as true here as it is anywhere else in the Bible.

The Psalmist writes, "*He protects the souls of His godly ones (believers), He rescues them from the hand of the wicked*" (Psalm 97:10; Amplified Bible). Nonetheless, God honors the freedom He has granted His people and permits us to make decisions that cause us to lose that protection and bring about our own destruction:

*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and **broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction**, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*
(Matt. 7:13-14)

People have a choice between the "narrow way" that leads to life and the "broad way," which leads to disaster, as Jesus explains to those who are listening to Him. Those who opt for the broad way are like Israel, who God declared, "*thou hast destroyed thyself*" (Hos.

13:9). Consequently, sin—not God—causes destruction. As one man wisely wrote, “Thus, sin destroys both soul and body here and hereafter.”¹

Men, not God, are the ones who yearn for God to leave them (Job 21:14-17; Job 22:17). Hell is nothing more than a willful (and ultimate) separation from God’s benevolent presence (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:41). When this occurs, God is said to “give them up” and “deliver them” to the consequences of their choices (Hosea 11:8-9). So, to be separated from God is to be left in the hands of whatever destructive powers exist (Jer. 6:8). When Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for mankind’s sins, He was given the following promise:

*For You will not **abandon my soul, leaving it helpless in Hades** (the state of departed spirits), nor let Your Holy One know decay or see destruction [of the body after death]. (Acts 2:27; Amplified Bible)*

The New Life Version says, “*You will not leave my soul in death. You will not allow Your Holy One to be destroyed.*” Jesus was relying on God’s promises to redeem and deliver his soul from hell (Ps. 49:15; 86:3). This truth was applied by Peter to our Lord’s resurrection:

*He, foreseeing this, spoke [by foreknowledge] of the resurrection of the Christ (the Messiah) **that He was not deserted [in death] and left in Hades** (the state of departed spirits), nor did His body know decay or see destruction. (Acts 2:31)*

These statements of the Lord concerning the interval between His death and resurrection shed light on how God is believed to have destroyed both soul and

body in hell. He doesn't carry out this operation on a personal level. He reluctantly gives us the option. Because of our deliberate decision to abandon Him, He is compelled to abandon us to suffer the consequences of taking the broad road to destruction.

God's Non-Interference

God uses separation from the unrepentant sinner to destroy them, withdrawing His protective presence and allowing the sinner's default choices to take effect (Exodus 12:12, 13, 23; 2 Kings 13:23; 2 Chron. 12:7; Job 2:3-7; Psalm 5:10; 73:27-28; Isa. 34:2; Jer. 7:29-31; 18:7-10; Eze. 21:31; 22:30-31; 32:12-13; Hosea 4:5-6). The "sowing and reaping" process is how one experiences destruction in hell:

*The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: **the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaion. Selah. The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God** (Psalm 9:15-17)*

By no longer preventing the reaping from occurring, God "destroys." It is because God is no longer intervening that the destruction, whether it be momentary or eternal, affects our lives. God is only said to destroy both body and soul in hell in this sense:

God withdraws his grace or the striving of his Spirit from men who are resolved to keep their sins. So he did to the heathen world, who did not choose to retain the patriarchal knowledge and covenant of God; he gave them up to work all manner of uncleanness with greediness. So he will do still:

those who slight his calls and grace shall be abandoned to their own way, till body and soul are involved in destruction.²

Whatever the case, God definitely does not want this. He says to Ezekiel:

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

Peter writes, “*He doesn’t want to destroy anyone but wants all people to have an opportunity to turn to him and change the way they think and act*” (2 Peter 3:9; God’s Word Translation). Hence, individuals who choose to spend eternity without Christ are doing it of their own free will. This “eternal destruction” operates as follows, according to S. D. Gordon:

God answers the obstinately continued pleading. At last He consents to withdraw, to do nothing. This makes the lake of fire. Sin kindles the fire. Man at last left to himself-God shut out, and going out-that is the worst. Jesus’ heart-breaking cry over Jerusalem lays bare the heart of God,—“I would . . . ye would not.” Man’s utter freedom has never been interfered with by so much as the lifting of a little finger. He is still in the image of God in power of choice, even in this ungodlike use of his free choice. There is an incorrigible minority at the end. Yet wise, tender love is still in control. The incorrigible quarantine ensures the safety of the race. That God is love, pure, just, wise, and tender, will never be so well understood and appreciated by all men as at the last.³

Jesus' most challenging teachings must therefore be understood in the context of His love, which implores us to make the right decisions (Deut. 30:15, 19). But this love must also grant us the liberty to pursue our desires and to bear the resulting costs (Rom. 1:24-28; Psalm 81:10-16).

Why Such a Harsh Representation?

Why, one might wonder, did Jesus present God in His parables in such a severe manner? We can infer that this is somewhat a result of the Jewish leaders' own conceptions of God. For instance, their perception of God's order to love our friends and hate our enemies is reflected in their perception of God's treatment of His adversaries (Matt. 5:43). This is why it was essential for Jesus to refute this false perception of God (Matt. 5:43-45; Luke 6:35-36).

Furthermore, take note of their objections to healing and deliverance occurring on the sabbath day (Matt. 12:10-14; Luke 13:10-16; John 5:1-19; 9:1-16). Because they believed that God was more concerned with the legalistic observance of certain laws and regulations than the health and welfare of his own creatures, they had a very limited understanding of his compassion.

Jesus mentioned the same authorities who killed the Lord and His followers in the belief that they were serving God (John 16:1-3). Once more, this reflects their perception of God. In the end, we resemble the deity we serve (Psalm 115:1-8; 135:15-18; 2 Cor. 3:18). They were completely unaware that they were imitating Satan (John 8:44).

Their comprehension was based on a faulty interpretation of the Old Testament rather than a careful study of it (John 5:37-42). Otherwise, they would have understood and put into practice its teachings of love, kindness, and justice (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). Jesus

emphasized that these religious authorities had a poor understanding of the Scriptures and how to interpret them (Matt. 12:1-6; 22:29; Mark 12:24).

The only chance Jesus had of reaching them—as slim as it was—was to present God in a way that reflected their worldview since their minds were already hardened to a harsh perspective of God. In the long run, if they did not turn from their embrace of this conception of God, their judgment would only worsen. The tale of the evil and slothful servant who claimed that his lord was a hard man serves as an example of this (Matt. 25:14-30). The message of this tale is: If you think God is like this, shouldn't you have tried harder to win His favor?

But we must keep in mind that Jesus frequently used inelegant analogies to convey truths about a perfect Creator. Because He was dealing with a people whose minds had been dulled by sin, He found that stories and illustrations were the most effective means of communication (Matt. 13:10-16). No one of them was to be taken out of context. Jesus, for instance, told a parable about an unfair judge (Luke 18:1-8). The purpose of the story was not to portray God as being unjust, but rather to demonstrate that if one could be persistent with such an unjust judge and obtain results, how much more so would we be if we continued to pray to a God who is actually just? (Gen. 18:25).

Hence, none of the images of God in these parables should be accepted literally as the most accurate description of Him. Their goal was to provide concrete examples of certain facts. We must consider Jesus' life, miracles, and more concrete explanations of the Father's love for us in order to acquire the most accurate picture of God (John 3:16-17; John 14:6-12; 1 John 1:5; 5:20).

Chapter Twelve

Destruction and Natural Disasters

The process in judgment is immensely significant and instructive. We must remember that the Oriental language of the Bible gives results rather than processes. It catches the picture at some one stage and so presents it. Yet even so, the process is clearly pointed out in this Book. The process in judgment is by withdrawal. It is not by God doing something, but by His ceasing to do something, and ceasing at the urgent plea of the one who suffers the judgment.¹ (S. D. Gordon)

Thus far, it has been clear that God is not a literal destroyer. God does not use His omnipotence and power as a means of wreaking havoc on the world. He utilizes His power to defend rather than destroy. But, in Scripture, He is described as destroying when His might is no longer at work to avert destruction.

The Flood of Noah

This concept is relevant to the historical narratives of the deluge in Noah's time, the annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah, and other devastating incidents mentioned in Scripture. Using the rules of interpretation from the preceding chapters, we can see that God is only being said to do things that He has already permitted or is no longer preventing from happening.

The flood of Noah is the ideal illustration of this. God warns Noah that He is about to flood the earth and destroy it, utilizing idioms of the people in Biblical history:

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth (Gen. 6:11-13)

As if that weren't apparent enough, God repeats Himself, "***And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh***" (Gen. 6:17a). God uses verbs like as "destroy" and "bring" when referring to the flood. Many people who read these statements come to the conclusion that God caused the flood by using His creative power.

This is a failure to allow Scripture to interpret itself. The book of Job contains similar wording used by God. In Job 2:3 God tells Satan, "*.... thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.*" In Job 42:11 we are told about, "*.... all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him.*" The context of Job, however, demonstrates that God did not personally harm the patriarch in any way. He only speaks in this way because He did not stop Satan from attacking Job (Job 1:12; 2:6).

Similar terminology is used to describe God when He ceases to suppress the effects of sin. Most people are unaware of the severity of sin. Sin not only causes death and destruction for the offender, but it also has a negative effect on the environment around him.

God granted man authority over the planet and His creations (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:6). Hence, man's actions not only affect him but also everything else over which he

was granted dominion (Gen. 3:17-18; 4:10-12; Lev. 18:24-28; 20:22; Isa. 24:4-5; Hosea 4:2-3; Zech. 12:12; Rom. 8:18-22). Because of man's immorality, the earth was overrun by violence, which had a terrible impact on the planet. Gen. 6:12 says that, "*the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.*" Another translation says, "*she was damaged given that all of the flesh destroyed his road upon the land*" (Ancient Hebrew Research Center Revised Mechanical Translation by Jeff A. Benner).

The word "corrupt" in the KJV, according to the ***Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew Definitions***, means, "to spoil, ruin, destroy." It is the exact same word used by God in v. 13 where He says, "*I will **destroy** them with the earth.*" God is said to do that which He will no longer restrain men from doing as a result of their rebellion. In Revelation 11:18, the 24 elders proclaimed that God, "*shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.*" However, Revelation also tells us that God's method by which He would, "*hurt the earth,*" would be to command the angels to cease, "*keeping back the winds from blowing and destroying things on the earth,*" (Rev. 7:1-3; Unlocked Dynamic Bible). God will destroy the earth and all living things on it by removing His protection from the consequences of man's sin, which is causing the destruction that the earth is experiencing.

God's Restraint Removed

God, in His mercy, never brings judgment immediately. He has no pleasure in the death or destruction of the wicked. He desires their repentance (Eze. 18:23, 32; 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9) and He always gives space for that (Rev. 2:21). This is exactly what He did before the flood of Noah by having the Holy Spirit strive with men for 120 years:

“Then Jehovah said, ‘My Spirit must not forever be disgraced in man, wholly evil as he is. I will give him 120 years to mend his ways.’” (Gen. 6:3; The Living Bible).

This is more than sufficient time to repent. Yet, they literally pled with God to leave them instead of confessing their sins, which would have saved them (Jon. 3:1–10):

*Hast thou 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 them?** Yet he filled their houses with good things: but the counsel of the wicked is far from me.* (Job 22:15-18)

S. D. Gordon notes that this kind of request to God, in which He is actually being pleaded to distance Himself from the exact people He intends to protect, can properly be referred to as a “prayer”:

Man’s defiance and blaspheming and ignoring are likewise a most intense pleading, a pleading to be left alone; so great is man’s wilful, foolish ignorance. His very attitude is a shutting of God out, so far as he can. Man’s shutting of God out so far as possible always goes before God’s withdrawal. There’s a bit of light incidentally on prayer here. Prayer is a coming over voluntarily, and more fully, into the atmosphere of God’s presence. Every faculty works better in that presence, for it is our native air. Now judgment, when it comes, is merely God’s granting of man’s prayer by withdrawal.²

God behaves politely when asked to leave a situation. Notwithstanding His reluctance, God departs, saying, “.... *woe also to them when I depart from them!*” (Hosea 9:12b). In the book of Job we read, “*If he holds back the waters, then they dry up; if he releases them, they destroy the land*” (Job 12:15; New English Translation). The God who said, “*I restrained the floods thereof, and the great waters were stayed*” (Ezekiel 31:15) was left with no choice but to release that restraint and let the floods loose:

*.... and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah as the eighth person [to be preserved], a proclaimer of righteousness, **having let loose the deluge upon the world** of those who were destitute of reverential awe towards God. (The New Testament: An Expanded Translation by Kenneth S. Wuest)*

The Bible in Basic English also says, “*when he **let loose the waters over the world of the evil-doers.***” As G. H. Pember wrote, “God withdraws His restraints from the element of water, and the flood ensues.”³ God’s protection that kept the flood waters at bay left with Him when He departed as requested. S. D. Gordon elaborates further on this:

It would seem quite clear, in connection with the Flood, that the chief thing aimed at was the preservation of the race, while the result to those perishing was a logical result of their sin. Sin was burning the race out. Something radical must be done. The careful plans for preserving seed of every sort of animal life reveals the underlying purpose in the event. **The actual coming of the vast deluge of water would, of course, be simply through a partial withdrawal of the controlling Hand upon**

the powers of nature. Those forces were, and are, being held in check constantly by God's act for our sake. A brief partial withdrawal let the waters loose.

The result that came to the crowds-death would have come inevitably as a logical result of their sin. The Flood merely moved the clock forward a little, and changed the mode. These changes were controlled by a purpose of love toward the race thus preserved. The action was not arbitrary, except in restraining judgment up to this time. It was simply an answer to the tacit pleading that God would leave them alone. He might have done so long before. In His patience He waits until this time, so prolonging their lives and their opportunity.⁴
(Emphasis added)

The only thing that prevented the waters from overflowing and destroying was God's power (Genesis 1:6-10; Hebrews 1:3; 2 Pet. 3:5-7). God "destroyed" men by leaving them (as they demanded) and allowing the results of their wickedness to bring about the unavoidable devastation because they would not repent:

*For a small moment **have I forsaken thee;** but with great mercies will I gather thee. **In a little wrath I hid my face from thee** for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. **For this is as the waters of Noah unto me:** for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. (Isa. 54:7-9)*

The Living Bible provides the following pertinent paraphrase of verse 9:

“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.”

Keep in mind that God did not directly cause the effects of Israel’s transgression; rather, He abandoned them, veiled His face from them, and removed His protection. God likens this to how He dealt with the people of Noah’s day who pleaded with Him to *leave* them. God therefore stopped suppressing the rivers as a result of the earth’s destruction brought about by their sin.

Sodom and Gomorrah

The Sodom and Gomorrah narrative can be comprehended in a similar way. Once more, we concur with the late S. D. Gordon’s writing:

The Sodom story is essentially a repetition of all this. The unspeakable sinfulness, carried to the awful degree of attempting to use the divine visitors in their lust, the long-time patience, the gracious sustaining of life in these blasphemous, unclean people, the witness of Lot, **then the partial withdrawal of the restraint upon nature.**⁵
(Emphasis added)

Scripture does in fact expressly attribute the annihilation of Sodom to God. When Lot separated from Abraham the Bible says he, “.... *beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before **the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah***” (Gen. 13:10a). In a subsequent chapter of Genesis, God is said to have rained fire down upon several cities:

*Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and **fire from the Lord out of heaven**; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground (Genesis 19:24-25)*

Yet as we've seen in earlier lessons, it's not always the case that when God is said to have engaged in devastation, He actually used His power to do it. It typically indicates that He stopped protecting people who rebelled and forced Him out of their lives.

The phrase "fire from the Lord out of heaven" has led many to believe that God supernaturally sent fire from heaven to destroy these towns. This conclusion, however, is founded on a failure to interpret Scripture with Scripture, as one scholar has noted:

To those who do not balance and compare dispersed texts with sufficient attention, it might seem, at the first glance, that the destruction of "all the plain" was the consequence of its inundation by the "burning brimstone" which the Lord rained out of heaven. But we must recollect that it was not a submersion (by a "fiery deluge," but an "overthrow;" and remembering the "slime-pits" which were exposed in the plain, we can see that a combustion must have ensued, which, by its action on subterraneous gases, would explode the whole plain, casting its contents far and wide, and ultimately causing a great depression of its surface. The Scriptural intimations, and all existing appearances, are in favour of this view.⁶

The surrounding territory of Sodom, known as *Siddim*, was replete with hazardous slime pits: "*And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits*" (Gen. 14:10a). This fact is mentioned in divine Scripture for a reason. Many

archaeologists have remarked that the area around Sodom was full of petroleum gases, which is what these “slimepits” were. These pits were teeming with explosive potential. God’s protection prevented them from doing that (Rev. 7:1-3). Sadly, God’s protection had to be withdrawn because Sodom showed no signs of repentance. The science behind this is as follows, according to one minister:

Nothing is more certain than that science supports the Bible. Prof. G. F. Wright, of Oberlin College, a man who stands high in the ranks of scientists, shows clearly in his volume, “Scientific Aspects of Christian Evidences,” that the whole region about the Dead Sea has the appearance now of being an abandoned “oil district,” and that all the conditions for the catastrophe described in the Bible were present in the inflammable accumulations of oil and gas reservoirs. We have only to suppose that at the time of the destruction quantities of gas and petroleum existed below the plain; then their escape through a fissure would produce the results described.⁷

The author concludes, “We see here how God can punish sinners with physical forces associated with their own sin.”⁸ In other words, by ceasing to interfere with the natural repercussions of their immorality, which would manifest themselves through those “slimepits,” God is said to have rained down fire on Sodom and Gomorrah.

Gave Them Over to Destruction

God removed His supernatural protection and permitted the destruction of these cities as a result of Sodom and Gomorrah’s ongoing, unrepentant immorality. Hosea reaffirms this:

*How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, **I will not return to destroy Ephraim:** for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city (Hos 11:8-9)*

Admah and Zoboim, which were located nearby Sodom and Gomorrah, shared the same sins, including homosexuality (Gen. 10:19; 14:2, 8; Deut. 29:23). God therefore withdrew His protection from that area and gave the brewing slime pits (containing harmful gases) free reign, resulting in the destruction of those towns.

God “destroyed” Sodom and Gomorrah by “delivering” or “giving them up” to the results of their disobedience. This describes the terminology used to characterize God’s alleged use of fire and brimstone to personally overthrow or destroy certain cities. As Thomas Whittemore wrote, “Sodom being overthrown by a shower of fire and brimstone, any land given up to devastation was said to become brimstone and burning.”⁹

Let us take heed to this. A person or nation is in serious jeopardy if God gives them up. But if He does abandon us, we cannot hold Him accountable for the difficulties we face. Let us turn from our transgressions and ask God to aid and guard us once more.

Notes

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Invitation and prayer for salvation

To become a TRUE Christian One must be born again

-1. John 3:1-7

We must be born of the water and the Spirit. This water is not speaking of water baptism but of the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23; James 1:18; 1 Cor. 4:15; Eph. 5:25-27).

There is only ONE avenue into heaven and that is to be born again. Water baptism, church membership, religious duties, giving to the poor, living a moral life, taking the Lord's supper, being a member of a denomination, or an INTELLECTUAL reception (vs. a heart reception) of Jesus Christ cannot save you. You must be born again.

Are you born again? If you are not you will not spend eternity in heaven with Jesus Christ but instead you will enter into eternal damnation. I urge you to consider accepting Jesus Christ as your savior.

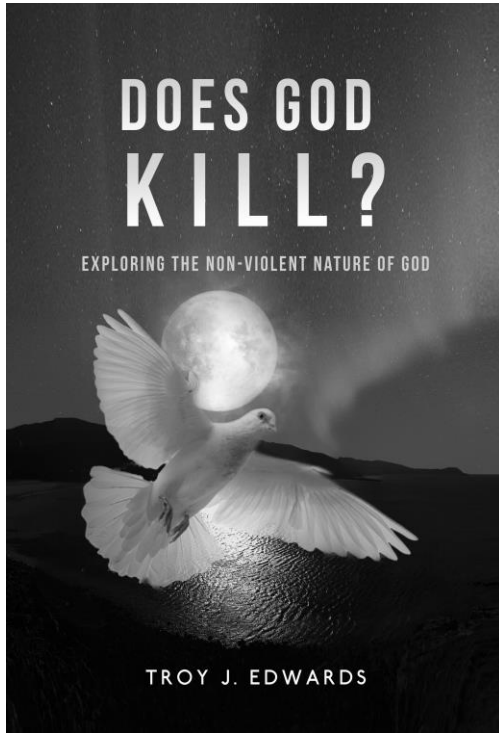
To be born again is very simple. You need only accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Why not give your heart to Him today. All you need to do is ask Him to come into your life. Here is a simple prayer to pray:

Lord Jesus

I ask you to come into my heart right now. You said in your word that if I confess you with my mouth and believe in my heart that God raised you from the dead then I will be saved (Rom. 10:9). I recognize that I am a sinner and I need your forgiveness and a change in my nature. I repent of all my sin. I know that all that come to you, you will not reject (John 6:37). Thank you for your dying for me so that I can be born again. Thank you Father for Jesus. Thank you Holy Spirit for coming in to my life. AMEN.

You are now born again. It's that simple. By the way, welcome to the family!

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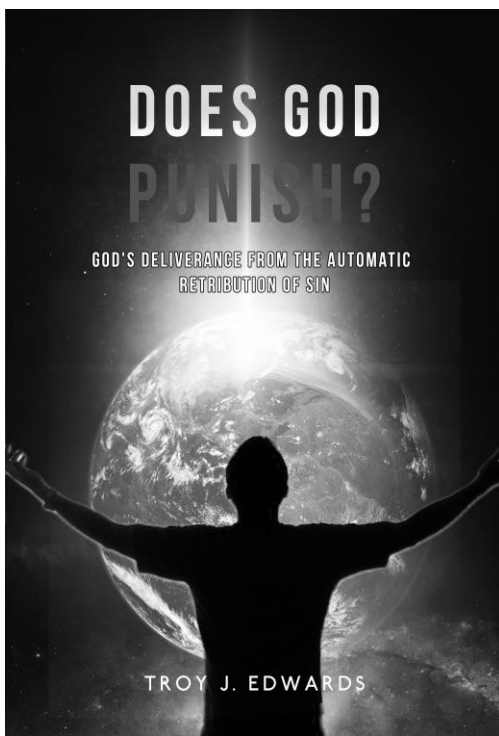
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Numerous verses in the Bible mention God's generosity, kindness, mercy, love, compassion, holiness, integrity, and other attributes. But other Scriptures also depict Him as a destroyer.

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