



**GOD TAKING**  
**RESPONSIBILITY**  
**FOR SATAN'S WORK**

THE PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF GOD AND  
SATAN IN SCRIPTURE

TROY J. EDWARDS

# God Taking Responsibility

## For Satan's Work

*The progressive revelation of God  
and Satan in Scripture*

*By Troy J. Edwards*

***Vindicating God Ministries***

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

## **God Taking Responsibility for Satan's Work**

**The progressive revelation of God and Satan in Scripture**

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

***Christ's Victory Bible Teaching  
Center***

## Preface

*He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?*  
(Matt. 13:28)

Many Christians are afraid of what they consider to be the God of the Old Testament. A young lady once informed me that some pastors and teachers in her country of origin issued a severe warning to the congregations: “You can talk to Jesus because He is kind, but do not approach God the Father because He may kill you.” This viewpoint is frequently based on a misinterpretation of both the Old Testament and some parts of the New Testament. The inability to read the Bible in light of specific principles clearly stated in the Scriptures has resulted in a mistaken perception of God’s character, which I suppose is heartbreaking to God.

Rather than allowing Biblical principles of interpretation to guide our views about God, we have chosen man-made methods in our attempt to solve so-called Bible difficulties. One of them has been to relegate the Old Testament to a place of irrelevance and only focus on the New Testament alone. Some Christians, in regards to a proper interpretation of the Old Testament, is to have nothing to do with it. Some even claim that only the epistles of Paul should be read and all other portions of Scripture should be avoided. Those who hold such views do not recognize that disregarding certain portions of Scripture in favor of other portions will never solve the difficulties encountered with God’s nature in Scripture. Not only does Jesus and His apostles affirm the Old Testament as God’s divinely inspired Word, they used it in all of their teachings along with the fresh insights that came due to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, some of the same difficulties one may encounter in the Old Testament can be found in the teachings of Jesus and Paul. For example, we can find places in Paul's own epistles such as 2 Thess. 2:11 where we are told, "*And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion.*" This statement by Paul is just as difficult for some to resolve as those places in the Old Testament where God is said to harden hearts, send sickness, deceive prophets, tempt people to sin and then punish them for it, etc. However, what if we told you that in *most*, if not *all*, of those cases in the Old (and New) Testament that attributes harmful behavior to God, that it actually was not God doing it? What if we told you that most or even none of these things were done by God but by another hostile force opposed to both God and men?

Some may be appalled at such a suggestion. From their viewpoint, this is questioning the veracity of God's Word. For them, if the Bible says that God did it then that settles the matter. This is an understandable view if one remains ignorant of *all* that the Bible tells us in regards to how it is to be read. For example, you will learn in this book that the Bible is a *progressive revelation*. You will learn that the minds of men in earlier times were not ready for a full understanding of God's character. Furthermore, due to the innate attraction to idolatry, they were far from prepared to accept a complete doctrine of a being called Satan without being tempted to worship him.

Due to these factors, God often took responsibility for the works of the devil during earlier dispensations. Yet, as revelation progressed, it became clearer that what had been attributed to God was the work of the adversary. After studying the truths in this book, we believe that you will read your Bible and note that when God is said to have done certain things, you will confidently affirm along with Jesus, "*An enemy hath done this.*"

## Chapter One

### God and Satan in the Old Testament

*He that loveth not knoweth not God; for  
**God is love.** (1 John 4:8)*

*And we have known and believed the love  
that God hath to us. **God is love;** and he  
that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and  
God in him. (1 John 4:16)*

***Love worketh no ill to his neighbour:**  
therefore love is the fulfilling of the  
law. (Romans 13:10)*

The word “ill” according to Strong’s Dictionary means, “bad, evil, harm, ill, noisome, wicked.” Thayer’s Greek Definitions defines the word as “troublesome, injurious, pernicious, destructive, baneful.” Since the New Testament characterizes God’s nature as love then it is not within His nature to do things that are harmful or destructive to others.

Moreover, John tells us that “*perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment*” (1 John 4:18a). The Daniel Mace New Testament reads, “*for perfect loves excludes all fear: since pain is the object of fear.*” The Living Bible paraphrases the passage well:

We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us.

Jesus taught us that God is not the kind of person who gives *serpents* for *fish* or *scorpions* as a substitute for



eggs (Luke 11:11-13). God is abundant in love. He does nothing to bring pain or harm to His creatures. He is an approachable God who wants no one to be afraid of Him.

### **Destructive Behavior**

While this understanding of God is made prominent in the New Testament, it does not mean that God's character transformed from one Testament to another. On the contrary, God tells Israel, *"For I am the LORD, I change not"* (Mal. 3:6). Jesus, the 2<sup>nd</sup> member of the eternal Triune Godhead, is *".... the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever"* (Heb. 13:8). As James says, *"Yahweh never changes and He is always good!"* (James 1:17; Unlocked Dynamic Bible).

Despite this truth about God's unchanging love-nature emphasized in the New Testament, there are a number of places in Scripture, primarily in the Old Testament, in which things of a harmful and destructive quality are attributed to Him. For example, we do not have to read too far into the book of Genesis before God is said to destroy mankind with a flood and later to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 6:11-13; 13:10).<sup>1</sup>

This destructive behavior attributed to God can be seen throughout the Old Testament but it is certainly a repetitive theme in Deuteronomy (Deut. 4:3; 7:4, 23; 9:8, 14, 19, 20, 25, 26; 10:10; 11:4), most especially regarding the curses for disobedience (Deut. 28:20, 24, 45, 48, 51, 61, 63). This is pretty rough language for a God of love, especially One who has told us that love does not behave destructively toward its neighbor.

Some theologians and other Bible expositors might argue that the sovereign God has a right to behave this way towards rebellious sinners. That might be a valid (though discouraging) point if this was the consistent picture of God given throughout the whole of Scripture. However, in the ministry of Jesus, he came across a

village of Samaritans that rejected Him. While His disciples wanted to exhibit the “wrath of God” these people deserved, the Lord was not having it:

*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)*

Hebrews 1:2 says, “*Yahweh’s Son is the light of Yahweh’s powerful brilliance. He shows exactly what Yahweh is truly like*” (Unlocked Dynamic Bible). Therefore Jesus, who is God (John 1:1, 14), refraining from destroying rebellious men is a reflection of His Father’s attitude (John 5:19, 30; 8:38; 14:7-11).

Moreover, Jesus later contrasted His work with that of Satan’s. Jesus came to give us abundant life in disparity with Satan’s work “*to steal, and to kill, and to destroy*” (John 10:10). Yet, it is God who is said to do the work of destruction in the Old Testament. Since God never changed from one testament to the next, how do we understand such passages?<sup>2</sup>

## **The Initiator of Sin**

The Old Testament makes God the initiator of sin. It is almost as if He were a Tempter. For example, God is said to have hardened Pharaoh’s heart at least six times (Exodus 4:21; 9:12; 10:20; 11:10; 14:4, 8). During one of those times Pharaoh’s heart was hardened by God, he confessed to *sinning*, “*I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked*” (Ex. 9:27).

The sin that Pharaoh is referring to is the hardening of his heart that God is said to have done in Ex. 9:12. Verse 34 tells us that Pharaoh’s hardened heart was

a sin when it tells us this time, “.... *he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants.*” So whether Pharaoh hardened his heart or whether God did it, this hardening was a *sin*. Therefore, God is said to be the cause of Pharaoh sinning. In another instance Scripture tells us that God, out of anger, outright moved David to perform a sinful consensus:

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

David leaves us no doubt that what he did was a sin: “*And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done*” (2 Sam. 24:10b). Yet, we are told that it was the Lord that moved him to do it. In direct contrast, the New Testament repudiates any idea that God would move anyone to sin:

*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. (James 1:13-14)*

Statements in the Old Testament, especially as they read in our English translations, makes God appear to be a tempter and one who provokes others to sin. The New Testament tells us that God does no such thing. Actually, we are told, “*He that committeth sin is of the devil*” (1 John 3:8; see also John 8:41-44; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 3:12; Matt. 4:1-3; 1 Thess. 3:5). While the New Testament points to Satan as the influence behind sin, the Old primarily attributes it to God. Yet, the New

Testament also affirms that the Old Testament is the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). It tells us that God's nature never changes. Apart from an understanding of how God conveyed His revelation to men, this can be confusing.

### **The Afflicter of Sickness**

There are other places in the Old Testament where God is said to be the afflicter of sickness and disease. Let us look at one example:

*Moreover **he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee. 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.**** (Deut. 28:60-61)*

Some might excuse such language by asserting the idea that God afflicts people with sickness as punishment for sin. Regardless, this still makes God the author of something evil and destructive, which is uncharacteristic of the revelation we are given of Him in the New Testament.

Jesus presents God as better than the best of human parents (Matt. 7:11). No one believes that any decent parent would intentionally expose their child to debilitating and deadly diseases no matter how badly they misbehaved. On the contrary, regardless of what the child has done, a loving parent will do all that they can to get that child well.

In the ministry of Jesus, we find God healing people from sicknesses that come as the result of sin (Mark 2:1-12; John 5:1-14). Jesus, and later Peter, explained that the Lord was delivering such people from satanic oppression (Matt. 12:22-28; Acts 10:38). We also

learn from Paul that it is Satan who afflicts sickness upon those who are in unrepentant sin: *“To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh”* (1 Cor. 5:5a).

Even in one of the rare Old Testament mentions of Satan by name, he is identified as the being who afflicted Job with disease (Job 2:7). When reading these different accounts of sickness being inflicted by God and Satan we begin to wonder if both actively use sickness as a weapon? Or, is there something that we are missing? I believe it is the latter. Without an understanding of God’s method for communicating His revelation in the whole of Scripture, we are left with the belief that the Bible contradicts itself. A true born-again Christian certainly must reject such a notion.

### **Other Characteristics Ascribed to God**

But there is more. There are a number of characteristics ascribed to God in the Old Testament that are contrary to what we learn about Him in later revelation. In some places, God is said to be the author of evil which is repudiated by the New Testament:

*I form the light, and create darkness: I  
make peace, and create evil: I the LORD  
do all these things.* (Isa. 45:7)

In Amos 3:6 we read, *“shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?”* In contrast, James said, *“for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man”* (James 1:13). According to New Testament revelation, God is not the source of moral or physical evil in this world (1 John 1:5; 2:16; James 1:17; 3:13-18). This is a role that the New Testament gives entirely to Satan and those working for him (Eph. 6:12; 1 John 5:18-19). Yet, in another place, God is said to be a deceiver:

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

Deception always involves lying. Yet, we are told elsewhere, especially in the New Testament, that God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:1-2; Heb. 6:18). If God cannot lie then He is also unable to deceive. Hence, the New Testament exposes Satan as the liar and deceiver (John 8:44; 2 Thess. 2:8-10; Rev. 12:9; 20:10).

Then there appears to be emotions assigned to God that are usually the source of sin in men. For example, we are told that God hates a certain class of men (Psalm 5:5; 11:5; Prov. 6:16-19; Hosea 9:15; Malachi 1:2-3).<sup>3</sup> Yet, we are told in other places that God loves all men, even the worst of sinners, and sacrificed Himself to save them (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10). Hatred of men is said to be an attribute of the devil (1 John 3:8-15).

In many places God is said to be a jealous God (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; etc.).<sup>4</sup> The revelation of the New Testament is that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). Paul writes, “*Love is patient, and love is kind. **Love is not jealous***” (1 Cor. 13:4; Easy-to-Read Version). James tells us that jealousy is a satanic attribute and is the source of evil (James 3:14-16).

We must also contrast God’s commandments in the Old Testament to destroy nations (Deut. 13:15-16; 20:16-18; Josh. 6:17-21; 1 Sam. 15:3) with the New Testament command to reach all nations with the gospel of God’s love (Matt. 24:14; 28:19; Mark 13:10; Rev. 5:9).<sup>5</sup> Again, why is God said to be the same loving God in both testaments while acting in seemingly disturbing

ways in one of them? Why were certain things attributed to God that later divinely inspired writers credit to Satan?

### **Complete Opposites in Character**

One of the most perplexing things about the New Testament is how we are taught that God and Satan are complete opposites in character. Note the contrast between the children of God and the children of Satan:

*In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. (1 John 3:10)*

Furthermore, John writes, “*Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer*” (1 John 3:15a). *Murderer* is a characteristic of Satan (John 8:44). A murderer is one who hates and, in this case, is the opposite of the love that God commands us to exhibit even towards our enemies (Matt. 5:43-44; Luke 6:27). Therefore, those who take on the character of God or the character of Satan demonstrate whose children they are. Furthermore, in Acts 26:18 we read:

*To open their eyes, and to turn them from **darkness to light**, and from the power of **Satan unto God**, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*

God describes Himself as light (goodness) and Satan as darkness (evil). This makes Satan the exact opposite of God in every way. But this does not mean that God and Satan are equals. Scripture is clear that there are

*not* two gods but only *one* (Deut. 4:35; Isa. 44:6, 8; 45:5-6; Jer. 10:10-11; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

Satan is not a god but a being created by the true God, Yahweh, to whom Satan has rebelled against (Eze. 28:14-16; Col. 1:16-17; 6:10-12). This created being, like all of God's creatures, was endowed with a free-will. Sadly, that free-will that was given to him by God to freely love God and his fellow creatures was used instead to rebel against Him (Isa. 14:12-15).

This repudiates the idea that God exercises such a stringent control over Satan that Satan only does God's bidding. On the contrary, the two are literally as opposed to one another as darkness is to light (Acts 26:18). However, this truth only increases our wonder as to why God is said in the Old Testament to do things later writers ascribe to Satan.

### **Satan's Presence in the Old Testament**

While Satan is not absent from the Old Testament, there is very little explicit information about him there. Satan is mentioned directly by name three times in the Old Testament (1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Zech. 3:1-2) though there are many allusions to him in other places. He is the *serpent* in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-15), Leviathan the dragon (Job 41:1; Ps. 74:13-14; 104:26; 27:1), destroyer or death angel (Ex. 12:23), Azazel (Lev. 16:6-10), an evil, murderous spirit (1 Sa. 16:14-16, 23; 18:10-11; 19:9-10; 20:33), a lying spirit (1 Kings 22:22-23), the pagan god *Baalzebub* of Ekron (2 Kings 1:2-6), Lucifer the light-bearer (Isa. 14:12-15), the anointed cherub (Eze. 28:11-19), the prince of Persia (Dan. 10:13, 20), and he is referred to as Belial numerous times (Deut. 13:13; Judges 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam. 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:25; 30:22; 2 Sam. 16:7; 20:1; 23:6; 1 Kings 21:10, 13; 2 Chron. 13:7; Ps. 41:8).



Yet, it is only when we get to the apocryphal books written in later centuries before Christ and the New Testament at the advent of Christ that we are able to recognize Satan in these allusions (Matt. 12:22-25; 25:32, 33, 41; John 8:44; 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 6:15; 11:14; Eph. 2:2; 6:10-12; Col. 2:15; 1 Tim. 3:6; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 9:11; 12:3-17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2). Even in regards to the beast prophesied in Daniel, it is not until we get to the New Testament that we are made clear that it is Satan who will be operating through him (Dan. 7:7, 23-25; Rev. 12:3, 7-9; 2 Thess. 2:3-10).

As we have learned, nearly all of the things that were ascribed to God are later attributed to Satan. This begs the question as to why there is so little explicitly said about Satan in the Old Testament, why much that is said about him is only understood by reading the New Testament, and why God is said to have done things that we discover in the New Testament was the work of the devil?

We will learn in the following chapters that God, of necessity, had to give His revelation to men *progressively*. This is not a new teaching but was taught by Tertullian, a church father in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Failure to grasp this truth has led to many unnecessary errors and heresies.<sup>7</sup> As we learn and embrace this principle, we will have a thorough understanding as to why God took responsibility for that which was actually done by Satan.

## Chapter Two

### Progressive Revelation and the Bible

*Throughout our history God has spoken to our ancestors by his prophets in many different ways. **The revelation he gave them was only a fragment at a time, building one truth upon another.** But to us living in these last days, God now speaks to us openly in the language of a Son, the appointed Heir of everything, for through him God created the panorama of all things and all time. (Hebrews 1:1-2; The Passion Translation)*

The William's New Testament renders verse 1 as follows: *"It was bit by bit and in many different ways that God in olden times spoke to our forefathers through the prophets."* The Amplified Bible says, *"In many separate revelations [each of which set forth a portion of the Truth] and in different ways God spoke of old to [our] forefathers in and by the prophets."*

#### Progress in God's Revelation

Why is God purported to have done things in earlier portions of Scripture that are ascribed to Satan in later Biblical writings? Why is Satan mentioned rarely in the Old Testament directly? Why is he spoken of figuratively several times in the Old Testament but this figurative language is only made plain later? Comprehension of these facts requires one to understand that the Bible is a *progressive revelation*.

Paul explains that there was truth given to him that had not been made available to servants of God during the Old Testament period:

*If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which **in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed** unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph. 3:2-5)*

The revelations Paul received were previously unknown. Even the prophets themselves were not entirely aware of what they had written under divine inspiration. God did not reveal these things to Paul until centuries later:

*Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, **But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets**, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith (Rom. 16:25-26)*

According to Thayer's Greek Definitions, the word "secret" means, "to keep silence, hold one's peace." As we will see momentarily, God had to "keep silent" about some things or delay revealing certain truths, not because He desired to withhold information, but because people did not have the capacity to receive these truths.

A better rendering of Paul's statement is, "*the good news of Jesus Messiah that Yahweh did not reveal in any age before our own time*" (v. 25b; Unlocked Dynamic Bible). Again, we see that God's revelation in Scriptures was progressive. Even the truths that Jesus taught His disciples were unknown to previous ages:

*For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*  
(Matt. 13:17; see also Luke 10:24)

The prophets, who were God's obedient messengers in an age before the advent of our Lord, were not privy to what the Lord taught His disciples. Peter would later elaborate on this point:

### **1 Peter 1:10-12**

10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:

11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

12 **Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us** they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

The amazing and dutiful prophets of God were eager to understand the subjects of their writings and prophecies, but God, in His infinite wisdom, saw that some things are best disclosed at the appropriate time (Eccl. 3:1, 17; 8:6). Because of the advancement of revelation, God was able to judge with wisdom when significant truths could be revealed to men.

### **Sin Separates from God**

Why was it necessary for God to reveal Himself to humans gradually? Why was He unable to provide all the information that people had to understand about Himself, about demonic activities, and about the real cause of evil? The grave harm that sin does to our ability to receive from God is unknown to those of us who pose these questions:

Revelation is progressive and necessarily slow. It has required many centuries to reveal to the race what is contained in the Bible, because sin has so blinded our vision that we are slow to apprehend spiritual truth. Furthermore, the Bible has to be revealed to each one separately, as if there were no other person in existence.<sup>1</sup>

The first of sin's many detrimental impacts on humans is that it separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). God is our life, and *spiritual death* results in being cut off from Him (Deut. 30:19-20; Jer. 2:13; 17:13; Eph. 2:1-5). The mind becomes dulled as a result of this separation and is unable to completely receive from God:

*Having the understanding darkened,  
being alienated from the life of God  
through the ignorance that is in them,  
because of the blindness of their heart  
(Ephesians 4:18)*

God told the first man, Adam, that on the day he ate the forbidden fruit that he would *surely* die (Gen. 2:17). God was not referring to physical death but to separation from Him. *Physical* death is merely the result of suffering in an existence of *spiritual* death.

Before Adam disobeyed God, his mind was very sharp. He was able to receive input from God and was a genius in his own right. After all, Adam was able to give names to a multitude of animal species. Sadly, Adam's rebellion brought a separation between him and God that eventually impacted all men (Rom. 5:12-17). A spiritually dead person, one disconnected from God, is unable to receive all that God desires to reveal. God's revelation seems like fanciful foolishness to that person:

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor. 2:12-14)*

Nicodemus is a perfect example of this. Jesus attempted to explain to Nicodemus the necessity of the new birth, which would connect fallen man back to God (John 3:3-8). However, Nicodemus, a teacher of Scripture himself, was unable to grasp what Jesus was saying (John 3:9-10). Our Lord's next statement to Nicodemus explains

why God cannot give too much spiritual insight to spiritually dead people:

*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? (John 3:11-12)*

Jesus told Nicodemus that despite the physical evidence we have given you, you still do not believe us. Therefore, even good and sincere men such as Nicodemus had no capacity to comprehend things of the spirit. The same is also true concerning our Lord's disciples

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

Our Lord spent three years living with His disciples, teaching and training them. Yet, He knew that apart from a new birth, these men could only handle so much truth. This is also why Jesus often taught in parables. It was not that He was intentionally trying to hide the truth from people, but their minds were too dull to catch on to truth taught straight or direct (Matt. 13:10-17; John 10:6; 16:29-30). As another writer explained:

History shows that all the revelations of God to man have been progressive, developing themselves as the human mind was able to comprehend and act upon them .... Moral truth was revealed as fast as

men were prepared to receive it. Christ said to his disciples that he had many things to say to them, but they could not hear them at that time. Men may be prevented from accepting the truth by their passions, or from understanding it by their imperfect social organization. As time rolled on, God became more intelligible to his people; always, however, accommodating his language to human weakness.<sup>2</sup>

If these things are true of our Lord's closest disciples and others of this time period, how much more is this true of ancient Israel and the rest of the nation that existed during the Old Testament period. Sin had dulled men's spiritual communication receptacles; hence, a new birth was required to repair this.

### **The Importance of this Truth**

There are those who claim that the Bible portrays God as One of a questionable character. Others believe that it is full of contradictions. In their attempts to resolve such issues, some "defenders" of God have gone to one extreme or another. Many who rightly believe that the Bible is the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God, have only added fuel to the fire by affirming certain mischaracterizations of God. In many cases, their teachings have given rise to the views of God's enemies when they excuse questionable acts attributed to God as being a result of God's "sovereign control."

Other "apologists" for the Lord have gone to a completely opposite extreme by denying the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. They claim that certain portions of Scripture that appears to put God in a "bad light" were not divinely inspired and were written erroneously by fallible men. The problem with this "defense" is that if one portion of Scripture can be called into question, then all of it can.



Regardless, the Bible itself claims to be the divinely inspired Word of God (John 10:35-36; Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; 4:25-26; 28:25; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:20-21; 2 Pet. 3:15-16). Jesus Himself declares its infallibility (Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Luke 16:17). He quoted and taught from it as the ultimate authority (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-14; 24:25-27; John 5:39; 7:38). Therefore, to cast doubt on any portion of God's written revelation is akin to blasphemy.

Calling Scripture errant and fallible does not resolve the problem when it comes to God's character; it only exacerbates it. It is possible to accept the Bible as God's written Word and resolve its difficult teachings in relation God's loving nature, when we understand that there is a progression of revelation among its contributors:

The Word of God is also a progressive revelation, and so has been the Providence recorded in that Word. The Bible is composed of sixty-three separate books, written by forty various authors, during a period of 1600 years. The sacred writings develop a revelation which was continually unfolding itself through all those years; and close with a book bearing the divinely given title of "The Revelation of Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

Both the Old and the New Testament contain the record of God's progressive revelation through the minds and religious experience of His chosen instruments of mediation and inspiration. It is more exact to say that the Bible is a record of such a developing revelation of God, than the statement that every syllable in it is the Word of God. The prophets, one by one, proclaimed to their times a message from the Most High needed by their times. As the progress of social, moral, intellectual, and religious evolution went on, their voices took on ever higher notes and qualities, their eyes beheld ever loftier visions and prospects.<sup>4</sup>

Men are often conditioned by their surroundings and culture, despite how this culture may be contrary to God's desire for men. Yet, God is a very patient God and is willing to meet men on their level.

### **Revelation of God's Character**

Scripture says, *"In the past, people did not understand God, but God ignored this"* (Acts 17:30a; Easy-to-Read Version). God always desired that men know and understood Him (Jer. 9:24). However, sin caused God to withhold this understanding until He could send the best revelation of Himself, His Son, Jesus:

*And now at this end time in which we are living, God has revealed himself to us in One who is his Son .... And since he is the Son, he is the exact expression of God's reality and glorious character.* (Heb. 1:2a, 3a; Living Water Translation)

The New Living Translation says, *"And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son .... The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God."* Summarily, as the New Century Version translates it, Jesus *"shows exactly what God is like."* It was only through the coming of Jesus that God could fully reveal Himself to men (Matthew 7:9-11; 11:27; John 1:14-18; 8:19; 14:10-11; 16:1-3; 17:25; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; 1 John 1:3-5; 5:20). As one author wrote:

The action of God in redemption and the revelation of himself made thereby as redeemer is necessarily progressive. This is not on account of any imperfection in God, but on account of the limitation and imperfection of man to whom the revelation is made and by whom it is received,

communicated and perpetuated .... Here is the necessity that God's revelation of himself must be progressive. God can reveal himself no faster than is commensurate with the knowledge, the condition, the receptivity of the men on whom he acts and to whom and through whom he reveals himself. There must be a preparatory dispensation before Christ comes. The race must be educated to receive the larger revelation. The redemptive action must be adjusted to the existing capacity and condition of men; the light must be admitted gradually to the eye enfeebled in long darkness; a sudden excess of light would only dazzle and blind.<sup>5</sup>

God had to take "baby steps" in revealing Himself. Again, Pope wrote, "If the real object of life is to know God, the Bible at once becomes the Book of all books, because it reveals God's character and purposes as no other book does."<sup>6</sup> Another wrote, "The Bible is a progressive revelation. Its successive unfoldings bring out in increasing clearness the character of God."<sup>7</sup> As one more has stated:

The progressive development of morals in the Old Testament, and the gradual unfolding of a perfect character was also for Israel a progressive revelation of the character of God.<sup>8</sup>

God's progress of revealing Himself and His ways in Scripture is similar to our modern system of education. We would not teach high school algebra to someone in kindergarten. We begin teaching them numbers. As they progress through the grades, we give them more advanced mathematics. Teachers are wise enough to know that one cannot handle advanced math until they first know what numbers are. Shouldn't we expect an all-wise God to work in the same manner with fallen men?

## Chapter Three

### Progressive Revelation and God's Character

*For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:17-18)*

In the previous chapter we learned that God “*in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son.*” Due to God speaking to us through Jesus in this dispensation we were given a greater revelation of God's character because “*The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God*” (Heb. 1:1-2; New Living Translation).

#### Revelation of God's Character

John tells us that God gave Moses a certain amount of understanding about Himself through the dispensation of His law. During that period, God gave Moses insights into His character in which He revealed His graciousness, goodness, mercy, and patience (Exodus 33:18-19; 34:6-7; Psalm 103:6-8).

Despite God's consistent exhibitions of His love, one only needs to read the history of Israel to see that God's attempts to make Himself known to them was difficult. The people continually rebelled against Him, they consistently accused God of unloving acts towards them, and too often they had a propensity towards worshipping the false gods of other nations who actually exhibited the murderous cruelty that the Israelites sometimes attributed to God.

God Himself recognized how *stiff-necked* these people were (Ex. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; 10:16). God knew that, in their current state, they could not receive as much truth as He desired to impart since stiff-necked people always resist the Holy Spirit who reveals God (Acts 7:51; 1 Peter 1:12). Hence the fullness of revelation could not come by God merely declaring truths about Himself; it would have to come from a living manifestation of Himself:

*Formerly, through the mediation of Moses, God revealed his character and will by a covenant of law. Now, through the mediation of Jesus the Messiah, we have witnessed the reality of God and his grace. Formerly, **no one had seen God in order to know what he was really like, but now God has been revealed by the One and Only Son** who is closer to the Father than anyone could ever be. (John 1:17-18; Living Waters Translation)*

There was a limit to what God could accomplish through His faithful servant Moses. However, He could fully reveal Himself through Jesus, who Himself is God. By Jesus, we can begin to understand and even interpret God's ways and actions in the Old Testament. As one writer correctly observed:

It was not for Moses to tell the whole truth. The revelation of the divine character in history was a progressive work; and it was left for Jesus to give a full manifestation of the character of God. Your interpretation of the divine character should embrace all that Jesus has disclosed; and I know that he has given such a description of the divine character, as to more than explain and remove the

apparent difficulties met with in the Old Testament records.<sup>1</sup>

The progression of revelation concerning God's nature culminates in Jesus Christ. This is why we must learn to read and interpret *all* Scripture through what I like to refer to as the "Jesus grid." Just as it requires a particular grid for electricity to flow through and bring light, the Jesus grid is necessary for providing the illumination of God's true nature in the Old Testament.

### **Old Testament Apart from Christ**

This *Jesus grid* is important because the Old Testament testifies of Jesus (John 5:39; Luke 24:45-47; Acts 17:2-3; 18:28; Rom. 16:25-26). Apart from Christ, there simply is no understanding of it:

*And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. (2 Cor. 3:13-14)*

Jesus disciples said that "*he opened to us the scriptures*" (Luke 24:32). The Living Bible provides an excellent paraphrase of this passage:

Not only Moses' face was veiled, but his people's minds and understanding were veiled and blinded too. Even now when the Scripture is read it seems as though Jewish hearts and minds are covered by a thick veil, because they cannot see and understand the real meaning of the Scriptures. For this veil of misunderstanding can be removed only by believing in Christ.

It is the rejection of Christ that has kept many Jews, atheists, agnostics Muslims and others from understanding the Scriptures. Due to their disconnection to Christ, many atheists today scour the Old Testament in search of proof texts in order to disparage God's character. They misunderstand these texts because they do not read them through the Jesus grid. God certainly does not want anyone to misunderstand these Scriptures, but they can only be understood through Christ:

*And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. (1 John 5:20)*

God has always longed for men to know and understand Him (Jer. 9:24). Contrary to popular theology, God has never desired to be cloaked in "mystery." He has desired to be sought and known. Sadly, sin has dulled and darkened the minds of men. But the purpose of the Son of God's earthly mission was to dispel the darkness that has kept people from seeing the reality of God. Through His life and teachings, Jesus revealed Himself to us, enabling us to comprehend the true nature of God.

This, again, is why we must read Scripture through the *Jesus grid*. The understanding He gives us is equal to light and illumination (Ps. 119:130; Dan. 5:11, 14; Eph. 1:17-18). It is through Jesus that the light concerning God is given:

*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of*

*the glory of God in the face of Jesus  
Christ. (2 Cor. 4:6)*

The Unlocked Dynamic Bible says, “*He has shone his light into our hearts, so that when we trust in Jesus Messiah, we can learn how wonderful Yahweh is.*” Another translation reads, “*He gave us light that shows how bright and wonderful God is*” (Worldwide English New Testament). God is a wonderful person, but that is only understood by Jesus revealing Him.

The Lord said, “.... *neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him*” (Matt. 11:27b). Our Lord is willing to reveal the Father to anyone who will seek Him (Deut. 4:29; 1 Chron. 28:9; 15:2; Prov. 8:17; Isa. 55:6; Jer. 29:13; Acts 17:27). Jesus would never reject anyone that came to Him in sincerity (John 6:35-40). However, no one can know the Father except through Jesus (John 14:6).

### **The Only Way to “See” God**

Therefore, if we want to understand what God is like, we need to study Jesus. John tells us that before Jesus, “*No man hath **seen** God at any time*” (John 1:18). It is unlikely that John was as concerned with men seeing God’s visible form as He was with men truly knowing, understanding and *experiencing* Him. Strong’s Dictionary says that the word *seen* is “by Hebraism to experience.” Jesus’ conversation with Phillip gives us a better understanding of what He meant:

*If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth **ye know him, and have seen him.** Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet*



*hast thou not known me, Philip? **he that hath seen me hath seen the Father**; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?* (John 14:7-9)

To know Jesus is to know the Father. Jesus equates knowing God with seeing God. It is not about knowing what God physically looks like but getting a fuller revelation of His character and nature. This is what is meant by John's statement in 1:18 that Jesus "*hath declared him*" or, as the Living Waters Translation renders it, "*but now God has been revealed by the One and Only Son.*"

John wrote that "*grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*" Another word for "grace" is "loving-kindness". God sent Jesus to show us a God who was full of loving-kindness. He is God who is gracious, loving, kind, and longing for relationship with man. He is not an inflexible tyrant. This is the truth about Him that has been distorted throughout the centuries by satanic blindness.

Even today there are many who view the Father as harsh, vindictive, wrathful and judgmental. In contrast, they see Jesus as kind, forgiving and merciful. Some go as far as to believe that Jesus came to rescue us from the wrath and vengeance of a blood-thirsty Father-God.

These ideas are often founded upon an incorrect understanding of how God is portrayed in the Old Testament. Before Jesus could ever die on the cross for our sins, He had to spend some years correcting the common misunderstanding about God derived from a misinterpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus had to begin with the true purpose for His coming: "*For God **so loved the world**, that he gave his only begotten Son*" (John 3:16a). As one writer noted:

The Revelation of the Father was His work. We have been taught to think, many of us, of His Atoning Work, of His Death, as the one feature upon which it is good to dwell. Such teaching gives us a wrong perspective. Before we can wish to be reconciled, we must know the Being to Whom we are to be reconciled. To know God is our first demand, and so the Revelation of the Father is the first work of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The Father sent Jesus because the Father Himself is kind, compassionate, gentle, self-sacrificing, and very forgiving. He did not send Jesus as a mere substitute to inflict His wrath upon in our place. On the contrary, God sent Jesus to rescue us from the legal bondage and enslavement of Satan that we placed ourselves under by our sins (Eph. 2:1-6; Col. 1:12-14; 2:14-15; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8; Rev. 12:9-11).

The Father and Jesus are exactly alike. When you see Jesus, you see the Father. Every display of compassion, love, mercy, forgiveness and even the sacrifice that Jesus made to the death was Jesus demonstrating exactly what the Father is like. If we think of Jesus as kind, gentle, merciful, compassionate, self-sacrificing, and willing to forgive even major sins then we certainly have an accurate picture of Jesus but we have just described the Father as well. To *see* Jesus is to *see* (know) the Father. Therefore, everything that Jesus is, the Father is likewise.

### **Correcting Distortions and Misunderstandings**

Apart from Jesus, men had a distorted and twisted understanding of the teachings of the Old Testament. In the sermon on the mount Jesus cited one of these misunderstandings when He said, “*Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy*” (Matt. 5:43).

It is possible that the misunderstanding of God's intentions towards one's enemies may have been derived from the so-called "imprecatory" psalms of David (Ps. 26:5; 31:6; 139:21-22) or even statements in the Old Testament in which God Himself is said to hate sinners (Psalm 5:5; Psalm 11:5; Prov. 6:16-19; Hosea 9:15). If this is the case then it is obvious that the teachers of Israel failed to understand the idioms and figurative language within their own Scriptures.<sup>3</sup> By doing so they portrayed God as petty and vindictive and they became like the type of deity that they worshipped (Psalm 115:1-8; 135:15-18; John 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 3:18). Therefore, Jesus had to correct their distortion of the Old Testament by giving them a fresh revelation of God's true character:

*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)

*But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and **ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.*** (Luke 6:35)

Jesus concluded by telling His listeners, "*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*" (Matt. 5:43) or, as Luke recorded it, "*Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful*" (Luke

6:36). Light upon the truth concerning God's character would lead to better behavior from those who truly desire to follow Him (Eph. 5:1-2). The Lord continued to explain this important truth:

*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? **Therefore** all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets* (Matt. 7:11-12)

The word “therefore” is a conjunction that connects two thoughts together. Since God only dispenses good things to men when He is asked, men must follow His example and only do good things for their fellow man. God does not dispense dangerous or harmful things in response to our requests (Luke 11:11-12). He is a God full of love and compassion and only wants our good.

Sadly, the understanding of God had been quite distorted by the time Jesus came to earth. Since we become like the god we worship, this distortion culminated in men acting towards other men with malice, hatred and vindictiveness. After all, it is easy to reason that if God behaves in this manner, then it is perfectly justifiable for His servants to do so as well.

By giving this fresh understanding of God, the Lord was not contradicting what was written in the Old Testament (Matt. 5:17-19). The Old Testament itself encouraged men to love their enemies (Lev. 19:17-18; Prov. 25:21). It also taught God's heartfelt love towards those in egregious sin (Isa. 63:9-10; Hos. 11:3-9).

Jesus pointed to the problem when He told the religious leaders that they truly did not know the

Scriptures (Matt. 22:29; Mark 12:24). This failure to know God's Word led these fallen men to twist its truth by emphasizing particular passages in the Old Testament and failing to interpret them in light of all that it said about God. Therefore, a distorted view about God and man's duty towards one another prevailed.

### **Revealing God to His Disciples**

These erroneous ideas would have continued unless Jesus spent the years that He did in bringing these corrections. Hence, it was imperative that Jesus give a better understanding of God, revealing the truth about His love, patience, and mercy.

This is especially true in the case of Jesus' disciples. Before they could preach the good news to a lost and dying world, Jesus had to first correct their view of God. Otherwise, there would be no distinction between the true God and the pagan deities of other nations who engage in destruction and vindictiveness. In order to win the world to Christ, Jesus had to reveal the Father as One who does no harm to His creatures.

Jesus was satisfied that He was successful with this portion of His assignment. Towards the end of His ministry, as He spent time in prayer to the Father, He said, "*And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it*" (John 17:26). The word "name" is often used in Scripture to reveal one's character (Ex. 33:19; 34:6-7; Gen. 27:36). Another translation says:

*Consequently I have enabled them to know your very nature and character. And I will continue to manifest your character to them in the future, so that they too may experience the same love you have shown me, because I will be with them.* (John 17:26; Living Waters Translation)

Earlier I John 17, Jesus prayed, “*As for these whom you gave to be my disciples, I have **demonstrated to them your very own character***” (John 17:6; Living Waters Translation). In John 14:7 Jesus says, “*If ye had known me, **ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.***” Jesus made God’s character known through His teaching and the miracles performed:

*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 14:10-11)*

It has been well said that if the Father had come to earth as a man instead of Jesus, then the history in the gospels would have been no different. Jesus did nothing different than what the Father would have done. Actually, the Father was doing the works of healing, deliverance, and provision through Jesus. God showed His opposition to sickness, disease, poverty, and oppression in His work through Jesus to free men from it.

Every act of compassion, mercy, and love was the Father working through Jesus. Jesus’ disciples watched and listened to Him. From this they saw exactly how the Father Himself works. This helped them understand the character of the Father and saw that His character is no different than Jesus’. Later, John would write:

*This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that*

*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.* (1 John 1:5)

Another translation says, “***that God as to His nature is light, and darkness in Him does not exist***” (An Expanded Translation by Kenneth S. Wuest). Light, in Scripture, is always associated with love, goodness and health (1 John 2:10; 3:14; James 1:17; Isa. 58:8) and *darkness* is always associated with evil, death, and sickness (Isa. 5:20; Psalm 23:4; 107:10, 14; 91:5-6).

As one of my favorite authors, Albert B. Simpson wrote, “The Lord is a God of infinite benevolence and goodness and ‘in Him is no darkness at all.’ Sickness and pain are as foreign to His nature and beneficent will as sin and death.”<sup>4</sup> God has never done anything related to darkness because it is not in His nature:

.... for the Gospel did not make God our Father; it revealed what He had ever been, is, and ever shall be; it disclosed Him, not as a tyrant, but as a Father: not as a chance, or a fate; not as a necessary thing, but as a person; and in the life of Christ the love of God has become intelligible to us. The Gospel threw light on God: light unknown before, even to the holiest hearts among the Jews. “Clouds and darkness are the habitation of His seat,” spoke the Old Testament: “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all,” declared the New. For out of Christ our God is only a dark, dim, and dreadful mystery.<sup>5</sup>

What earlier ages failed to understand about God, including those in the Old Testament dispensations, we have been blessed to fully understand in Christ. God is good. God is love. This is demonstrated in the example and teaching of our Lord.

## Chapter Four

### Progressive Revelation and Satan Unmasked

The progressive revelation of God's character and purpose, which more and more imperatively demands that the origin of moral evil, and consequently natural evil, must be traced to the created will in opposition to the Divine, leads to the ultimate declaration that Satan is a morally fallen being to whose conquest the Divine Power in history is pledged.<sup>1</sup> (James Orr)

The fullness of the revelation of God came with the unveiling of our Lord, Jesus Christ. However, in order to give men this important comprehension of God, it was also necessary to expose the one who is behind the evil, suffering and oppression of men. One author noted:

The very presence of Christ was a direct challenge to the whole power of Satan, a threatening overthrow of his whole dominion .... The evil Spirit is now fully unmasked; and in the steadfast resistance of Christ, by which the very sufferings endured are so many witnesses of the continued, triumphant submission of Jesus to the Divine will, and of his inflexible purpose to complete his glorious work, that Spirit comes under judgment and condemnation.<sup>2</sup>

Our Lord's advent and His revelation of God's love also meant the unmasking of the devil.

#### **Satan is this World's Ruler**

As we have seen in previous chapters, during the Old Testament era, God was attributed with numerous



actions that are properly categorized as destructive and evil. In addition, the Old Testament has very little explicit information on Satan, and what little is said about him is masked by figurative language. All that would change with the arrival of Jesus. As another writer points out:

Most worthy of notice is the plainness with which the doctrine concerning Satan and his agency, his active hostility to the blessedness of man, of which there is so little in the old Testament, comes out in the New; as in the parable of the Sower, and again in this. As the lights become brighter the shadows become deeper. Not till the mightier power of good had been revealed, were men suffered to know how mighty was the power of evil.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus began by exposing Satan as the tempter of men (Matt. 4:1-3; Luke 4:2). From that experience He taught men to pray for protection from satanic temptation (Matt. 6:13; Luke 11:4). However, in the midst His battle with Satan, an important truth would be exposed:

*And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. (Luke 4:6-7)*

Satan himself asserts that the serpent that tempted Eve was not merely a talking snake, but a representative of Satan himself (Gen. 3:1-7).<sup>4</sup> Satan and the serpent are one (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). Jesus, rather than denying Satan's claim, referred to him as the *prince* or *ruler* of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). As another has stated:

The Satan of the Old Testament is not as yet revealed as the 'prince of the world' (John 16: 11)

as in the New Testament, which discloses ‘the deep things of Satan’ (Rev. 2: 24) only along with the completion of revelation.<sup>5</sup>

According to Genesis 1:26-28 and Psalm 8:6, God granted man dominion over this earth, which man later surrendered to Satan. Because of humanity’s submission to him, Satan is able to use death, darkness, and deception to rule over people (Rom. 5:12–17; Heb. 2:14–15; 2 Cor. 4–4, Acts 26–18; Col. 1:12–14; Eph. 6–10–12; 1 John 5–18–19). Satan rules this planet, and he is the source of all illnesses, diseases, wars, and other destructive forces. But Jesus came to retrieve everything from him (1 John 3:8).

### **The Murderous Serpent**

The Lord clashed frequently with Israel’s religious authorities throughout His earthly mission. These leaders intended to murder Him. Jesus used one of these encounters to once more identify the agent hiding behind the serpent in Genesis 3:

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

The phrase, “from the beginning,” is referring to the time of Adam and Eve (see Matt. 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-9).<sup>6</sup> Bullinger’s Companion Bible translates it, “*he was a murderer [manslayer] from the beginning [of the human race]*,” and the Unlocked Dynamic Bible renders it, “*He was a murderer from the time people first sinned.*”

The word for “devil” in John 8:44, according to Thayer's Greek Definitions, means “prone to slander, slanderous, accusing falsely.” The Context Group Version translates John 8:44 as, “*You are of the father the slanderer ‘devil’.*” The Etheridge New Testament (1849) says, “*You are from your father the accuser.*” As it disparages God's character in its discourse with Eve, the serpent's satanic nature is made abundantly evident:

*And the serpent said unto the woman, **Ye shall not surely die:** For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (Gen. 3:4-5)*

The serpent's first lie was to falsely accuse God of selfishness and envy towards the first couple. He claimed that by eating the fruit that “*Ye shall not surely die*” in direct contradiction to God's warning to Adam that “*thou shalt surely die*” (Gen. 2:16-17). Using a lie and working through Adam's sin Satan brought *death* into this world and ruled over men through it (Rom. 5:12-17; Heb. 2:14-15).<sup>7</sup> A *murderer* is one who abides in *death* and has no life in him (1 John 3:14-15; see also Num. 35:31a).

As “*a murderer from the beginning,*” all of the pain that men experience in this world finds their beginnings with the devil. It covers everything related to death. It entails every single physical and spiritual death that has occurred through the history of mankind. Every war, every malicious killing done by one human to another, every natural disaster, every accident, every sickness and disease, and every other source of death that has been the experience of men owe its origins to the murderous intent of Satan. All that is deadly, harmful, painful, violent and dangerous must be attributed to him.

Satan murdered our first parents, and by extension, all of mankind, through a lie (1 Sam. 11:14-15; 12:7-9; 1 Kings 21:1-19). John would later identify Satan as the influence over Cain's murder of Abel (1 John 3:10, 12; Gen. 4:1-8). This is why Jesus presents him as both a liar and a murderer. It is the same method that the religious leaders used in their attempts to murder the Lord, which is why He referred to the devil as their father.

In contrast, and contrary to some "orthodox" theology, God is *not* the author of evil (1 John 1:5; 2:15-16; James 1:17; 3:13-18). The noncanonical book, *Wisdom of Solomon*, rightly says, "For God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living" (1:12; see also Eze. 18:23, 32; 33:11). All murder and death have its origins in Satan.

### **Satan Has His Own Kingdom**

Jesus would also reveal that Satan is the ruler of a kingdom that is entirely distinct from and hostile to God's. When Jesus healed a man who was deaf and dumb, some accused him of employing the power of an Old Testament pagan deity:

*Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. (Matt. 12:22-24)*

*Beelzebub*, also known as "Baalzebub" in Hebrew, was the pagan god of the Philistine city of Ekron. When King Ahaziah became ill, he turned to this god, and Elijah

reprimanded him for seeking a false god instead of the true God of Israel (2 Kings 1:2–6, 16).

This would not be the only instance such a defamatory charge was made against Jesus (see also Matt. 9:34; 10:25; John 7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20). Jesus did not dispute with the religious leaders by disavowing the reality or existence of this pagan deity. Instead, He took the opportunity to give some insight into the Old Testament that had been previously hidden. He exposed Beelzebub's (or, "Baalzebub's") true identity as Satan:

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

Before our Lord, no one is known to have recognized this heathen god from the Old Testament as Satan. The only way Christ could shed further light on Satan's identity—which had hitherto been concealed in figurative language—was by disclosing the truth about God. Jesus asserted that the Old Testament contained evidence of Satan's activity. Although there were indications, men were not prepared for a complete disclosure of that until the arrival of Jesus.

Jesus also revealed the truth that Satan rules over a kingdom that is distinct from God's. In the Old Testament, God warned that wicked spirits were

functioning behind the idols that the pagans worshipped (Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17; 2 Chron. 11:15; Ps. 106:37). However, it is only when we come to Jesus' ministry that we discover that it is all structured by a single leader.

Along with exposing Satan's monarchy, Jesus would also proclaim the reality that all the suffering inflicted upon humanity—diseases, illnesses, disabilities, mental anguish, poverty, slavery, etc.—came from a kingdom at odds with God's. Paul later learnt directly from Christ about a satanic dominion that is at odds with God's kingdom, and he highlighted this as the cause of human bondage (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:12-14; Eph. 6:10-12).

### **The Author of Sickness and Disease**

During a subsequent encounter with the religious authorities, Jesus revealed the genuine will of God towards humanity by healing a lady who was possessed by a malevolent demonic spirit:

*And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. (Luke 13:11-13)*

The main reason for the Pharisees' ire was that Jesus performed this action on the Sabbath day (Luke 13:10). They didn't care as much about other people's suffering as they did about their artificially created standards on the meaning of the Sabbath and works. Their belief that God punished people who suffered from disabilities because of their parents' sins or some other sin

from a previous life perhaps contributed to their lack of compassion (John 9:1, 2, 34).<sup>8</sup> Their doctrine was a synthesis of Old Testament Scripture with erroneous influences from Greek philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, whether it was a Sabbath day or not, the Pharisees' legalistic worldview would not allow for mercy and compassion, something that Jesus would reprimand them for (Matt. 23:23-24). Their god was one whose laws were strict and necessitated pain and misery for those who disobeyed. He was the cause of all illnesses and diseases. There was no doubt that they had sufficient Old Testament evidence to back them up (Ex. 15:26; Deut. 28:60-61). Nonetheless, Jesus corrected that view by pointing to Satan as the culprit:

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

God connected the “spirit of infirmity” to Satan’s agency. The demons of sickness and disease push Satan’s kingdom agenda. The good news is, “*But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you*” (Matt. 12:28). Jesus demonstrated that, in contrast to Satan’s dominion, God’s kingdom is characterized by God’s unwavering resolve to free people from the tyranny of the devil (Matt. 9:35; 10:7-8; Luke 9:1-2; 10:9-10). Peter offered the following summary:

*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)*

Jesus demonstrated via His teachings and miracles that the Father was a kind God who wished to deliver people from the oppression of the devil. He introduced a kingdom of joy, righteousness, peace, healing, and deliverance. It was necessary for God to disclose the truth about Satan, whose realm was diametrically opposed to God's, in order to unveil this truth about God and His kingdom.

### **Author of Evil**

Jesus also unmasked Satan as the epitome of all evil. Jesus, according to many of our English translations, refers to Satan as the *evil one* (Matt. 5:37; 6:13; John 17:15). The Greek word used for evil is *ponēros* which, according to Strong's Dictionary, has a variety of meanings such as, "hurtful, ill, diseased, devil, bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked."

These words tell us the nature of Satan's work in contrast to God's love that does no evil nor works any harm to its neighbor (John 10:10; 1 John 4:8; Rom. 13:10). In another one of our Lord's teachings, this word is also translated in the King James Version in reference to Satan as the wicked one:

*When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh **the wicked one**, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. (Matt. 13:19)*

The other Evangelists, having recorded this same teaching, uses the words "Satan" and "devil," thus demonstrating exactly who Jesus is referring to here (Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12). Paul and John also ensured that



readers of Scripture identified the wicked one as Satan (Eph. 6:10-16; 1 John 2:13-14; 3:8-12; 5:18-19). However, it was Jesus who first made this identification.

Similar to what we find in 1 John 3:10, Jesus distinguishes His children from those of Satan when He refers to him as the wicked one, “.... *the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the **children of the wicked one***” (Matt. 13:38). Here again, we find Jesus giving us insight into Satan’s activities in the Old Testament. In many places there we read about the *children of Belial* (Deut. 13:13; Judges 20:13; 1 Sam. 10:27; 1 Kings 21:13; 2 Chron. 13:7).

Belial, according to E. W. Bullinger, is “A word denoting all that is wicked and worthless; hopeless, as to character and destiny.”<sup>10</sup> It is translated as “evil” once in the KJV (Ps. 41:8) and “wicked” at least five times (Deut. 15:9, Job 34:18, Psalm 101:3, Nah. 1:11, 15).

Some scholars believe that it should be read as “wicked one.” Regarding Eli’s son being referred to as “sons of Belial” (1 Sam. 2:12), Ingram Cobbin writes, “This priest had sons, but they were ‘sons of Belial;’ that is, wicked men, sons of the wicked one.”<sup>11</sup> In Deut. 13:13 where Moses reminds Israel concerning “*Men, sons of Belial went forth from the midst of thee,*” another translation reads,

*Certain men, **the sons of the Evil One**, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known.* (E. W. Bullinger’s Companion Bible)

Another scholar has stated, “Belial is literally ‘wicked one,’ or ‘worthless one,’ and is not an idol. The scriptural ‘sons of Belial’ is no more than ‘children of

darkness.””<sup>12</sup> Though scholars differ with each other on whether or not Belial is a proper name in the Old Testament, Paul provides us with sufficient authority that it is another designation for Satan (2 Cor. 6:14-15; Acts 26:18; Col. 1:12-14; Eph. 6:10-12). Thus, Jesus was once more unmasked Satan in the Old Testament who was hidden under the name “Belial.”

### **The Enemy of God and Men**

Moreover, concerning the wicked one in Matt. 13, Jesus also identified the wicked one who planted the tares as an adversary: “*He said unto them, An **enemy** hath done this*” (Matt. 13:28). Alone with His disciples, the Lord clarified the identity of this enemy:

*He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; **The enemy that sowed them is the devil**; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. (Matt. 13:37-39)*

Jesus revealed that there is an enemy of both God and men. Through these progressive insights He made the world to understand that God is not their problem. There is one who is opposed to God’s good intentions.

The Old Testament, on those rare occasions where Satan is mentioned by name directly, presents him as an adversary who accuses God of bribery (Job 1:6-12; Zech 3:1-2). Yet, many of the Jews of the past and some scholars today believe that he is merely a prosecuting attorney in the service of God, sent by Him to test the faithfulness of men. Jesus leaves us with no doubt that Satan is God’s enemy as well as ours.

Due to the corruption of sin on the minds of men, these insights regarding Satan had been hidden from the foundation of the world (Matt. 13:34-35). Even the Old Testament prophets were not yet ready for them (Matt. 13:17). But why did God have to wait until Jesus was manifested before He could fully reveal the truth about Satan as the enemy of God and men? One more incident in the life of Jesus may help us answer this:

*And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and **over all the power of the enemy**: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. (Luke 10:17-20)*

Before Jesus, all men were under Satan's dominion (Acts 26:18; Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 1:12-14; 1 John 3:8). After Jesus defeated Satan's temptations there was finally a *sinless man* who could exercise complete dominion over satanic forces (Matt. 4:1-11, 17, 23-25; Luke 4:1-15). Apart from this, men would have been helpless against Satan. Even worse, they would have feared him. Men, especially those during Old Testament times, often worshipped what they feared.

Now men would not only have knowledge of Satan's kingdom, but authority to overcome him. Once Jesus accomplished this then He could explain that "*The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy*" (John 10:10) without the concern for fear of him. This progression in revelation was necessary for man's benefit.

## Chapter Five

### Progressive Revelation and Satan Exposed

The Scriptures do not often explain the part that the tempter and his hosts took in the toils, the struggles, the sins of the Old Testament church: but under the Gospel dispensation, enough is revealed to enable us to trace his workings in former times, even where he was not specified by name.<sup>1</sup>  
(Charlotte Elizabeth)

James Ormiston writes, “The revelation of the existence of the great Evil Spirit, like every other fact divinely made known in Scripture, was progressive.”<sup>2</sup> The previous chapter revealed how Jesus exposed the schemes of Satan prior to His arrival. As more of His apostles’ writings were added to the New Testament, they continued to expose Satan.

#### The Origin of Satan

One of the things the New Testament writers would assist us with is greater light into Satan’s origins. This truth was hidden in prophetic language in the Old Testament but interpreted in the New. For example, we learn that Satan is a fallen being that was, at one time, one of God’s heavenly light-bearers:

*How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! (Isa. 14:12)*

The name Lucifer, according to *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Definitions* means “Light-bearer.” There

are some who argue that this passage is not referring to Satan but rather to the king of Babylon.<sup>3</sup> First there is no indication that the king of Babylon was ever in heaven so it is impossible for him to have fallen from there. Such language is reserved for those who have actually been there such as Satan, *“I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven”* (Luke 10:18). Moreover, the Orthodox Jewish Bible renders the second part of Isa. 14:12, *“How art thou cast down to the earth.”* In the New Testament, this is again a revelation of Satan’s demise:

*And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: **he was cast out into the earth**, and his angels were cast out with him. (Rev. 12:7-9)*

Second, nowhere in Scripture has any Babylonian king ever been called a “light-bearer.” “Light-bearer” is a title reserved only for God’s faithful servants.<sup>4</sup> This has been literally true in relation to God’s faithful angels who often in appear to men in the glory of God’s brightness (Eze. 10:4; Luke 2:8-9; Acts 12:7; Rev. 18:1).

Lucifer also means “Morning Star” and “Daystar.” While Jesus is the actual bright and morning star, He sends His angels to relate this truth to other creatures (Rev. 22:16). God associates His faithful representatives with Himself. Jesus says, *“I am the light of the world”* (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46) and tells His faithful followers, *“Ye are the light of the world”* (Matt. 5:14). Satan was previously an angel who faithfully followed His Creator

and bore His light until his wickedness extinguished it (Job 18:5; 38:15). Hence the New Testament tells us, “*And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light*” (2 Cor. 11:14).

### **Pride Brought Satan’s Downfall**

Isaiah points to Satan’s desire to be God as the reason for his fall:

*For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; **I will be like the most High.*** (Isa. 14:13-14)

The New Testament again affirms that this is a reference to Satan as he will attempt to fulfill this desire through his anti-Christ:

*Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God .... Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders* (2 Thess. 2:4, 9; see also Dan. 11:36)

Strangely, Satan seemed to be jealous for the worship that only Yahweh, the true God, deserves. This appears to be the reason why he pushes for his fellow angels and men to worship him (Ps. 106:37-38; Matt. 4:8-10; 2 Cor. 10:20-21; Rev. 13:4). This shows that pride and arrogance began to overcome Satan.

We learn more about what gave rise to this pride in Satan's beginnings in Ezekiel's account. He is described as a "anointed cherub" by Ezekiel (Eze. 28:14, 16). The Bible mentions a class of angels known as the Cherubs, or Cherubim, over 69 times. None of the individuals depicted in this description can be human. The person to whom Ezekiel was directing his prophecy was in the Garden of Eden and was described as "perfect in beauty" (Eze. 28:12–13). Once more, God could not be directing this toward the Tyrean ruler but rather toward Satan, the spiritual force behind him.

Satan did not start out this way. God said, "*Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee*" (Eze. 28:15). So what happened to bring him to rebellion? He became proud due to the beauty that resulted from the brightness God gave him as His light-bearer:

*Thine heart **was lifted up** because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.* (Eze. 28:17)

It is unlikely that the original readers of Ezekiel's prophecy would have been able to pinpoint this as a description of a fallen angel named Satan. However, it is inexcusable for a reader of the New Testament to miss this truth. Paul, using similar language as Ezekiel, warns Timothy against appointing new converts into leadership when he writes, "*Not a novice, lest being **lifted up** with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil*" (1 Tim. 3:6). Proverbs 16:18 says, "*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*" Satan's arrogance brought about his downfall.

As a result of this pride God said, *“I will cast thee to the ground.”* The Hebrew word for “ground” is “*erets*” and is also translated 712 times as “earth” in other portions of Scripture. Other translations read, *“I have cast you to the earth”* (Hebrew Roots Bible), *“I will cast thee to eretz (earth)”* (Orthodox Jewish Bible) and *“I did cast thee to the earth”* (E.W. Bullinger’s Companion Bible). Just as we saw in Isa. 14:12, this is consistent with what is said directly about Satan in Rev. 12:9 where we read, *“he was cast out into the earth.”* Based on the progression of revelation in the New Testament, there is no doubt that Isaiah and Ezekiel were referring to Satan.

### **Satan in the Book of Genesis**

In the previous chapter, we have already learned how our Lord unmasked Satan as the serpent in Genesis. The serpent was quick to slander God (Gen. 3:4-5). Slander is a trademark of the devil, a word itself which means *slanderer* and *false accuser* (John 8:44).

Eve accused the devil of tricking her by this slander (Gen. 3:13). We are prompted to believe that Satan was operating through the snake by Paul’s comparison of the serpent’s seduction of Eve to the deceptive false prophets and teachers of his day, whom he referred to as Satan’s ministers (2 Cor. 11:3-15).

However, the clearest revelation identifying the serpent as Satan (besides our Lord’s words in John 8:44) would be given to the Apostle John in *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him”* (Rev. 1:1):

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



*And he laid hold on the dragon, **that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan,** and bound him a thousand years (Rev. 20:2)*

This should not be difficult to understand. We know that it was *Judas* who betrayed our Lord (Matt. 10:4; 26:25; 27:3; Luke 22:4, 48). Scripture also says that Satan worked through Judas (Luke 22:3; John 13:2) Judas himself is referred to as “a devil” (John 6:70-71). The serpent and Judas are equally credited for Satan’s work.

Another truth identifying the serpent to Satan would also come centuries later, after the advent of Christ. This is the first announcement of Jesus, who would overcome Satan’s enslavement of men:

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

God announces a war that will end with the bruising (or “crushing”) of Satan’s head. In the culture in which the Israelites lived, to have something under one’s feet is a metaphor for having defeated an enemy (Josh. 10:24; 2 Sam. 22:38-39; Psalm 18:40; 91:13; 110:1) as well as to have taken dominion (Psalm 8:6). Yet, there is no mention either of Satan or Christ directly in Genesis 3:15. It is only as we move over into the New Testament that we begin to get a clear understanding that this is a prophecy concerning the Lord’s victory over Satan (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Col. 2:15).

There are also promises in which the Lord will eventually make His victory over Satan a visible reality when He has put all of His enemies under His feet (1 Cor.

15:25-28; Heb. 2:8). There is no mistaking that this is a direct reference to Satan:

*And the God of peace **shall bruise Satan under your feet** shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. (Rom. 16:20)*

Because of these insights in the New Testament, we do not have any difficulty seeing that Satan is the serpent whose head Jesus will crush. But there is nothing indicating to the early readers of Genesis that such was the case.

### **Murder, Hatred and Darkness**

Genesis 4:1-8 gives the account of the first physical murder in which Cain killed his brother Abel. God, knowing Cain's murderous intent, and lovingly desiring to show him a better way, warned him, "*sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire.*" Sadly, Cain rejected God's advice and slew his brother. However, it is only in the New Testament that we learn that there was a murderous spirit operating behind Cain:

*In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother .... Not as Cain, **who was of that wicked one**, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. (1 John 3:10, 12)*

Here is an early hint of Satan's activities but it is only after many centuries that Satan is identified as the

influence behind Abel's murder. This is more evidence of the progress of revelation within Scripture.

Men who exhibit such a murderous hatred are said by John to be in darkness (1 John 2:9, 11). In the Old Testament, those who displayed this hatred towards their brothers were said to be of *Belial* (Deut. 13:13; Judges 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam. 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17, 25; 30:22; 2 Sam. 16:7; 20:1; 23:6; 1 Kings 21:10, 13; 2 Chron. 13:7). While the Old Testament is not clear on the identity of Belial, the New Testament exposes him as Satan:

*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath **light with darkness**? And what concord hath **Christ with Belial**? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?* (2 Cor. 6:14-15)

Jesus commissioned Paul to, “.... to turn them from **darkness to light**, and from the power of **Satan unto God**” (Acts 26:18a). Satan is the ruler over darkness (Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:12-14). Belial is darkness and is therefore Satan. In contrast, “*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1:5b). Ormiston writes:

The New Testament use of this word ‘Belial,’ as applied to the devil, would seem to imply that the Jews (at any rate in St. Paul’s time) understood those places in the Old Testament where the title is used as meaning Satan himself.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, it is only New Testament believers that have the privilege of discovering this truth.

## Chapter Six

### Progressive Revelation and God's Responsibility

Since there is no developed picture of a devil or satan in most of the Old Testament, God takes responsibility for everything, even for evil he might have prevented.<sup>1</sup> (Douglas R. Clark)

God is not the author of sin or its fruit, which is death, pain, sickness, violence and destruction. Satan is the father of all these things. All that is classified as evil, be it physical, spiritual or natural, have its origins in him. That includes all of the evil, cursing, violence, death and destruction found in the Old Testament.

#### Israel's Habitual Idolatry

Israel, however, was not prepared for this knowledge just yet. The issue with those from that era is that Satan was able to propagate *polytheism*, or the belief that there are other gods in addition to the one true God.

Like their pagan neighbors, Israel had a penchant for idolatry. This is vividly depicted in Israel's deliverance from Egypt by God's power. Despite God giving spectacular manifestations of His power and demonstrating His superiority over the false gods of the Egyptians, Israel held on to those idols and worshipped them (Ex. 12:12; Num. 33:4; Acts 7:36; Ps. 106:21-22; Josh. 24:14; Eze. 23:8; 20:6-8).

Shortly after their departure from Egypt, the Israelites requested a new god to guide them back (Ex. 32:1-9, 23; Acts 7:37-42). Numerous Israelites were readily enticed to worship idols even later in their wilderness experience (Num. 25:1-3; 31:15-16).

Israel's continued history after the wilderness displays their propensity towards idolatry as they began to worship the very gods that the true God warned them against (Deut. 6:14-15; Judges 2:11-13, 16-19; 3:6; 6:9-10; 10:6, 13, 14). During the history of the kings, beginning with the wisest king of all, Solomon, this constant desire to worship other gods was difficult to quell (1 Kings 11:2-10; 12:28; 14:9; 2 Kings 22:17).

Hence, God's primary work with Israel was to establish in their minds the truth concerning *monotheism*—that there is only *one God* (Ex. 20:3-5; Deut. 4:15-18). With Israel's addiction to idolatry, exposing the truth about Satan as the author of all evil would have only served to encourage the majority of these people to worship him as a god, comparable to that which is found in the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. Therefore, God had to dispense revelation concerning Himself and His enemy progressively. As others have noted:

A simpler explanation of the history of the doctrine and personality and agency of Satan is that it has been the subject of development under the influence of a progressive revelation. The complete revelation of such a being as the malignant author of evil was reserved for the time when, with the advent of Christ's kingdom, the minds of God's people were prepared, without the risk of idolatry.<sup>2</sup>

The reason of this imperfect revelation of the character of Satan under the old dispensation is unknown to us; but it has been conjectured, from proneness exhibited by the Israelites to the sin of idolatry, that it was a merciful provision on God's part to save them from paying worship to so powerful a spirit, and to preserve them from any a priori tendency to the dualistic theory of the Persian mythology, with which they came in long and close contact after captivity.<sup>3</sup>

This is not to say that God kept Israel in complete ignorance concerning Satanic activity. The people were warned that demons were the power behind pagan idols (Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17; 2 Chron. 11:15; Ps. 106:37; 1 Cor. 10:20-21; Rev. 9:20). Despite having been given this knowledge, Israel was not dissuaded from their idolatry.

Centuries later Jesus and His apostles revealed that Satan is the ruler of these demons (Matt. 12:22-29; Luke 13:10-16; Rev. 9:1-11). If God had fully exposed Satan prior to this, it may have led the Israelites to set up a “two-god” system of worship. Hence, God had to begin working with His people by embedding in their minds the truth about monotheism.

### **God Takes Responsibility**

Until the proper time in which the minds of men could handle a full exposure of Satan and his activities without making him an object of their worship, God of necessity, took responsibility for his actions. In regards to God hardening Pharaoh’s heart and similar things ascribed to Him, it is necessary to account for idioms and figurative language prevalent within Eastern cultures, especially the Semitic ones, that had a major influence upon Hebrew expressions.

In this culture a king took responsibility for that which occurred in his kingdom. The Lord was Israel’s king (Ps. 10:16; 89:18; 98:6; Isa. 33:22; Jer. 10:10). Therefore, according to Hebrew understanding, God was responsible for all that took place under His reign:

And, as it is also distinctly stated, “that Pharaoh hardened his heart,” so the divine procedure in allowing him and his people to go their own way to ruin, is perfectly consistent with every principle of justice and good government. We must remember the difference of idiom which subsists between

eastern and western languages: for the former are by no means so precise as the latter, but delight in bold and figurative modes of speech. So that even in our own land, a king is often said to do that which his servants execute; a Monarch might easily be represented in the east as doing that which he knows some of his people to be performing, but which he declines interfering to prevent.<sup>4</sup>

A leader taking responsibility for the behavior of those under him is a principle that continues even in our time and in some aspects of our Western culture. Allow me to use an illustration from a personal experience. Years ago, when I was in the military, I was tasked with putting an emergency shelter in place in the event of an enemy attack. I was given the personnel and the building along with full authority to utilize both in order to complete the assignment.

I went to the supply manager with a list of items I needed to complete the task, which he promised to order immediately. A week went by and I did not receive the material. I followed up with the supply manager who reassured me that he was taking care of it. Despite more follow-ups, the items I requested were never provided.

A little more than two weeks later I was called into a meeting with the commander, who, along with the other officers, demanded an update on the status of the emergency shelter. I began to tell him that I was making every effort to complete the task, but \_\_\_\_\_ has not ordered the materials I requested. The commander immediately reprimanded me: “You were given this project. Do not blame others for your failure to complete it. This is your responsibility.”

Afterwards I assured him that the task would be completed by the deadline. Despite the shortcomings and unreliability of others, I had to find an alternative for getting the job done. Thankfully (with wisdom from the

Lord) we were able to get the shelter operational by the deadline and all were pleased.

Take note that I was in charge of a project and I was completely responsible for it. While it was not my fault that I did not have favorable results at the time I was asked for a status update, this did not negate my responsibility. Despite the fact that another person's neglect hindered me, I was the one in charge and the responsibility for moving it forward was still mine.

### **Evil and God's Government**

The Random House Unabridged Dictionary defines "responsible" as follows: "answerable or accountable, as for something within one's power, control, or management." No one would question the fact that God is the Creator of the universe and is very much in charge. The earth and every other portion of the universe is under His management.

However, God created numerous intelligent beings called angels and humans. These creatures were created good but were also created with the freedom to choose. In other words, God did not create preprogrammed automatons. Therefore, these angels and humans can choose to rebel. Sadly, Satan, who began as a good angel, was one of those who later rebelled against God (Isa. 14:12-15; Eze. 28:11-19).

We are told that the book of Job is one of the oldest books in the Bible and one of only three books in the Old Testament that mentions Satan by name. We learn from Job chapter 1 that since God is the ruler of the universe, Satan remains accountable to Him and is still required to give a report of his whereabouts. Yet, when this chapter is read carefully, we see that Satan acts on his own and is quite antagonistic towards God, even making false accusations against Him and His servant Job.<sup>5</sup>



Afterwards, the restraint on Job is temporarily released and Satan, being the murderer that the Lord unmasked him to be, kills Job's children and servants and steals his property (Job 1:13-19). Yet, God takes full responsibility for all of it. He told Satan, "... *thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause*" (Job 2:3b). Despite the clear evidence that Satan did the destroying, God holds Himself responsible because He did not prevent it.

In the last chapter of Job, the narrator tells us that Job's friends and family "*comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him*" (Job 42:11b). Job himself, while chastising his wife, said, "*shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*" (Job 2:10b). Job had no knowledge of Satan's working and names God as the source of the evil. As one writer well notes, "Thus the God of Job's Day .... was responsible for evil and suffering in the world as much as He was for the good."<sup>6</sup>

## **Responsibility and Progressive Revelation**

Like many others in the Old Testament, Job was unaware of Satan's activities. Even if Job was aware there was nothing he could have done about it prior to the advent of Christ. Job ought to assist us in comprehending and interpreting the passages of Scripture that claim that God is the author of evil. For example, God said through prophets such as Isaiah, "*I form the light, and **create darkness**: I make peace, and **create evil***" (Isaiah 45:7). Also, in Amos 3:6 we read, "*shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?*" Yet, other places in the Old Testament repudiate the idea that God authors evil. Job 34:10 says, "*God would never do what is evil! God All-Powerful would never do wrong!*" (Easy-to-Read Version). Zeph. 3:5 reads, "*The Lord in her is upright; he will not do evil*" (Bible in Basic English).

The New Testament revelation is adamant *“that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all”* (1 John 1:5). James says that God is *“the Creator of the heavenly lights, who does not change or cause darkness by turning”* (James 1:17; Good News Translation). Therefore, Scriptures appearing to portray God as the author of darkness and evil must be read in the light of God *taking responsibility* due to Israel’s ignorance of Satan at the time:

Preexilic Hebrew prophets believed that Jehovah was responsible for both good and evil. Amos says (ch. 3:6): “Shall evil befall a city, and Jehovah hath not done it?” In Isaiah 45:7 we read: “I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I am Jehovah that doeth all these things.” The Hebrew prophets took this point of view because Satan did not emerge in Hebrew thought to relieve Jehovah of the responsibility for evil until after the Babylonian exile.<sup>7</sup>

H. A. Ironside, the well-respected pastor and prolific writer of many books and Bible commentaries, had this to say on Isaiah 45:7 and Amos 3:6:

“I create peace and I create evil.” It is evil in the sense of calamity. In other words, **if there is a thunderstorm and great damage is done, GOD says, “I take full responsibility for it”**; if everything is fair and beautiful GOD says, “This is from Me”; if there is a great earthquake, GOD is behind that. Whatever it is, “I the Lord create peace, I create evil.” And so we read, “Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?” (Amos 3:6).

**GOD takes the responsibility for everything that occurs, but it is not always that He is working directly Himself, but that He permits others to work. For instance, He permitted Satan to try Job.** But the point here is that there are not two

great powers in the universe in conflict with each other, both of whom are god, a good god and an evil god; **but there is one GOD, though there is an evil power working against Him.**<sup>8</sup> (Emphasis added)

While God says in Isaiah that He creates darkness and evil, thus taking responsibility for it, He revealed some centuries later that Satan and the evil spirits that are aligned with him are the actual rulers over these things:

*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against **the rulers of the darkness of this world**, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* (Eph. 6:12)

John also exposes the one ultimately responsible for evil in this world when he writes, “*and we know that the whole world is under the control of the evil one*” (1 John 5:19b; Unlocked Dynamic Bible). Hence, Old Testament passages such as Isa. 45:7 must be read from the “permissive sense,” or from the principle of God’s non-interference:

This does not make God the author of evil, nor the source of evil; the devil is, with the cooperation of perverse humanity. But in a permissive sense, **God is responsible for allowing calamities.** By saying that both good and evil proceed from God, He is reassuring people that there is no greater power at work in all creation.<sup>9</sup> (Emphasis added)

Since God is taking responsibility for that which He did not intervene to prevent Satan from doing, then we must always read passages where God is credited with evil as *permissive* rather than *causative*.

## Chapter Seven

### Progressive Revelation and Bible Interpretation

Interpreting the word in its fair and logical sense, according to the idioms, and grammatical constructions, of the languages in which it has been conveyed; and, comparing scripture with scripture, take scripture alone as the basis for its belief.<sup>1</sup> (Walter Chamberlain)

Bible revelation is progressive. Because of their fallen state, men were unable to receive complete revelation regarding spiritual matters. As such, the oldest writings in the Bible do not identify the cunning force responsible for all of the evil in the world. Consequently, it was also necessary to refrain from providing us with an in-depth explanation of God's benevolence and love. God had to assume the responsibility for the actions of the devil.

With the coming of Christ, we have more understanding of God's character and the evil of Satan, therefore when we read the Old Testament, we must use certain interpretive guidelines. In order to understand God and the real cause of all evil in a way that is consistent with Scripture, this is crucial.

#### Interpreting Scripture with Scripture

It has always been necessary to *interpret* Scripture (Neh. 8:7-8; Prov. 1:6; Luke 24:25-32 Acts 8:30-31). Peter writes, "*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation*" (2 Peter 1:20). A private interpretation is one that is built upon a preconceived theological bias.

A private interpretation starts with a particular doctrinal viewpoint and then searches through Scripture to find verses that support it. It often ignores (or attempts to reinterpret) Scripture that contradicts its faulty premise. Examples of private interpretations in past and present history abound.

It is essential to understand when we are reading Scripture that certain parts are a progressive development. God was speaking to people who were incapable of grasping certain truths and had to speak on their level. He also knew that future Bible readers' spiritual capacities to receive truth would be more refined. Hence, He ensured that explanations were provided in other places in Scripture to enable the understanding of what may appear to be more obscure ones:

It will be found by one who carefully examines the Scriptures, that they always, in this way, explain themselves; that while, in one place, language is used such as was accommodated to the gross people to whom it was first addressed,—yet, in another place, usually not far off, there will be found other expressions that modify the former,—expressions that bring out the real truth, and show the Divine character as it really is. And this is, doubtless, intentionally so ordered by the far-seeing and all-wise Author of the Scriptures, who had all men in view, when He wrote or dictated His Word,—those of a future age as well as those to whom it was directly addressed. He knew who would be reading it three thousand years from that time, as well as He knew who would read or listen to it when first it was uttered: and He took care to accommodate it to both. And this character of accommodation to men of all times is one of the wonders of the Scriptures.<sup>2</sup>

We are thankful for the many wonderful Bible study resources provided by able Biblical scholars. We

benefit greatly from the many Bible dictionaries, commentaries and other study references. However, there is no better expositor of the Bible than the Holy Spirit and He has placed within the Scriptures themselves the necessary explanations for other portions.

The primary method, then, for interpreting any difficult passage of Scripture is to compare with another within the context or elsewhere in the Bible:

But in respect of the truth or doctrine revealed in them, the writings of Scripture must be taken as a whole, each helping to interpret and illustrate the other. They form part of one divine authorship; and, unless we hold that the many communications of the one and undivided Spirit are inconsistent with each other, we must be prepared to acknowledge the justice of that method of interpretation that would compare Scripture with Scripture throughout the whole range of the inspired volume, and make the one to interpret the other.<sup>3</sup>

Surprisingly, as the author further states, this principle of interpreting Scripture has been “so often objected against,—the principle of explaining what is doctrinally obscure in one passage by truths that may be clearly revealed in another.”<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, men throughout the ages have attested to the validity of this principle. The great theologian, John Owen, wrote, “It is by contrasting Scripture with Scripture, that we can arrive at its true meaning.”<sup>5</sup> Owen affirmed that it is only by this method that we are able to interpret Scripture that appears to mischaracterize God:

.... in a similar manner must be interpreted those, strong expressions that are applied to God, which in their literal meaning imply what is contrary to his revealed character, to his holy nature, to one whose eyes are purer than he can look on iniquity. Such as, that He hardened Pharaoh’s heart, that he gave

the Jews the spirit of slumber and that He shut up all into unbelief. By these and the like expressions no moral agency can be conceived to be intended; but a withdrawing hand, a giving up of the individuals to the unrestrained influence of their wicked hearts. In the latter instance the very nature of things clearly shews that this was the case.<sup>6</sup>

Understanding this method will remove the stigma of there being contradictions in the Bible. A principle that we must keep at heart is that there are no *contradictions* in the divinely inspired Word of God; There are only *explanations*. Later revelation always explains previously given revelation.

### **God Taking Responsibility**

One of the greatest examples of God taking responsibility for Satan's actions in which He is later vindicated in later writings, thus proving the necessity of allowing Scripture to interpret itself, is found in 2 Samuel:

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

2 Samuel was written between 913 B.C. and 722 B.C. Several centuries later between 450 and 425 B.C., the great scribe, Ezra, gave a fresher understanding of the event recorded in 1 Samuel: "*And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel*" (1 Chron. 21:1). It is obvious that the revelation concerning God's character had progressed during those centuries. Furthermore, God felt comfortable in doing more to unmask Satan as the source of evil.

These two passages, when studied in sync, not only demonstrates the progress of revelation but it

provides the master key for interpreting all passages in which God is said to do things that are contrary to His revealed character. For example, Sir Edward Fry believes that from these passages we can understand Isaiah 45:7 where we are told that God “*create darkness .... and create evil:*”

.... before the captivity, Satan was but little known to the Jewish people, and that Moses, amidst his many warnings of the snares and temptations that would assail the people, nowhere mentions him; hence, in the earlier books of the Old Testament, and even in Isaiah, evil as well as good referred to the Almighty as its cause .... On the return from the captivity, we find Satan, as Bishop Warburton observes, better known; and things there are ascribed to him, as the immediate and proper author, which (while Divine Providence thought fit to keep back the knowledge of him) were before given, in an improper sense, to the first and ultimate Cause of all things: thus, in the Second Book of Samuel, it is said, that God moved David to number the people .... But in the first book of Chronicles, which was written after the captivity, Satan is said to have moved David to this folly .... As God is said to create evil, in that He suffers its existence, as He was said to move David to number the people, in that He suffered Satan to move him; so we must needs conclude that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, in that He suffered him to harden it himself.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, there are many people who not only take passages in which God is said to create evil and harden people's hearts literally, these passages actually undergird their faulty theological systems. On the other hand, 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1 helps us to see that by comparing Scripture with itself, we can come to better conclusions concerning God:



Again 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, to say, Go number Israel and Judah; compared with 1 Chron. xxi. 1. And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. Here we see, that the very same thing is ascribed in scripture to God and to Satan, viz. the stirring up a spirit of pride and vainness of mind in David; which led him to number Israel and Judah. But this could not be God's act; because, if it were, then, he moved David to do what is displeasing to himself, which is most absurd to suppose. From both these instances, I think, it is plain and evident, that a thing or action being ascribed to God, in scripture, is not a proof, that it was, in reality, done by him; seeing, in the instances before us, he is said to do what his agency was not concerned with. Again, with respect to what is represented in scripture, as punishments from God; God is said to do what he was not, in the least, concerned with an instance of which is more immediately to the present purpose.<sup>8</sup>

The author explains that just because God is said to do something in Scripture that is clearly defined as evil in other places does not mean that such a passage should be taken in the most literal sense. It only means that God took responsibility for that which Scripture ascribes to Him. That is why 2 Sam. 24 and 1 Chron. 21:1 make the strongest case for making a comparison of Scripture to understand God's actual part in that which is attributed to Him:

Infidels have laid hold of this [2 Sam. 24:1], and impugned the justice of God, because he first moved David to number the people, and then was angry with him, and punished him for doing so. But, if you look at the margin of your bibles, you will see that the word "Satan" is added there; and a reference is made to the parallel passage of 1 Chron. xxi. 1 .... This shows the importance of

comparing scripture with scripture, and illustrating one portion by another. There is no real contradiction between the two, however it may at first sight appear to be so. We know that the Israelites had grievously offended Jehovah by their repeated sinfulness and rebellious conduct. The punishments inflicted on them did not suffice for their correction. God therefore allowed Satan to prompt David to a sinful act. Why then is it said to be of the Lord? Simply because God withdrew his restraining influences, and permitted David to follow the suggestions of Satan without any check or hindrance. The first verse might be translated "Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, because one, i.e. Satan, the adversary, had moved David against them, to say, Go number Israel and Judah."<sup>9</sup>

2 Sam. 24:1 compared with 1 Chron. 21:1 gives us the key for understanding how to interpret Scripture. By comparing earlier revelation with later revelation on the same subject then we remove from our minds all supposed contradictions and alleged discrepancies and gain a greater insight into God's goodness.

### **God's Non-Interference**

As we study Scripture, we find that God often took responsibility for things He did not intervene to prevent Satan and others from doing (Job 1:9-12; 2:3-7; 42:11; 2 Thess. 2:3-12). As John Dunlavy has noted:

To obviate these arguments it is insisted that God is sometimes said to do that which he doth not interpose to prevent, because in some cases God is said to do that which is afterward ascribed to another very opposite cause. Thus it is said that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and again, that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Again, It is said that God moved David to number Israel, "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he

moved David against them to say, Go number Israel and Judah.” But in another place it is said that satan did it; “And satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel.” (2 Saml. 24. 1, i Chron. 21. 1.) In this manner it is insisted that God is said to smite, or bruise his Son, and to smite the Shepherd, when in reality the devil and wicked men did it all, but God did not interpose by any absolute or coercive power to prevent it. And this reasoning cannot well be overturned; for we cannot believe that God and the devil join issue in the same mind, so that the devil should aim to do the will of God; for what concord hath Christ with belial? And that the devil and his agents did this deed is not to be denied. For satan put it into the heart of Judas to betray him; and Him ye have taken, said the apostle, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.<sup>10</sup>

Dunlavy points to the fact that God and Satan are not partnering together to destroy men nor is Satan working as a servant at God’s bidding. While God may be said to do that which He did not intervene to prevent, this is not an indication that He desired for the event to take place. However, God will often overrule Satan’s work and turn it into a defeat for him with our cooperation.

Dunlavy refers to a comparison of 2 Sam. 24:1 with 1 Chron. 21:1 to make this case for God being said to do that for which He did not interfere to prevent the devil from doing. God’s policy of non-interference as seen throughout Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, has been called by some an “idiom of permission.” Again, using the passages in Samuel and Chronicles, Joshua Brooks explains:

**First, that, according to the scripture idiom, God is often said to do that which he only permits.** Thus he is said, in 2 Samuel xxiv. 1, to move David to number Israel; whereas in 1 Chron. xxi. 1, Satan

is expressly said to have been the author of that temptation.<sup>11</sup> (Emphasis added)

Numerous scholars throughout the centuries have taught this truth that where Scripture attributes a clear evil to God, it should be understood that He is said to do that which He merely permitted. A number of them have referenced 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1 as the basis for this truth. Here are a few examples:

Thus in 2 Sam. xxiv, 1; it is said the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he moved David against them, to say, Go number me the people. But in 1 Chron. xxi. 1; the instigation to this act is ascribed to Satan. Hence it is clear beyond a doubt that God is sometimes said to do what he permits to be done by another.<sup>12</sup>

.... we read in the prophesy of Ezekiel, chap. iii, 20, of God's laying a stumbling block before him that turns from his righteousness and committeth iniquity. And it is an idiom of the Hebrew language, which we find often in the Holy Scripture, to express that as done by another, which is only permitted to be done. To give but one instance of this, God is said in one place, to move David to number the people, whereas 'tis said in another, that Satan moved David hereunto, so that the meaning of God's doing it, must be that he permitted Satan, for great and wise reason, to do it.<sup>13</sup>

*He moved David against them.*-In the parallel passage, 1 Chron. xxi. I, we read, *Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel*, and some have preferred to take the he of the text indefinitely, as equivalent to one, and representing the Satan (or adversary) of the Chronicles. But there is no real difficulty in understanding that it was the Lord who moved David to number the people, though, as we learn

from the subsequent narrative, that numbering was in some way contrary to God's will. God may be said to do what He permits to be done, especially when, as in the case before us, certain of His righteous purposes are brought about by permitted acts of Satan, or by acts of men, which are themselves unrighteous.<sup>14</sup>

In the same way sinful tempers, or sins which are the results of yielding to temptation, are in the language of the Bible attributed in the same sense to the operation of the Almighty. He is repeatedly said to have hardened the heart of Pharaoh. Indeed Himself describes it as His work, - "*I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.*" He is spoken of as having sent Joseph into Egypt, while we know it was the agency of his brothers, instigated by the spirit of evil, which sold him into the house of bondage. In one place we read, "*The Lord moved David to say, Go number Israel and Judah,*" while in another Scripture it is written, that "*Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.*" And if one case could be stronger than another, it would be that which we establish from the sufferings and death of our blessed Lord, of which St. Peter says that "*being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, He was taken, and by wicked hands was crucified and slain.*" The fact then must be undoubted that God is spoken of, or speaks of Himself, as tempting men, whenever He permits them to be tempted.<sup>15</sup>

Verse 1. 'And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.'—In the parallel text, 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, we read: 'And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David,' etc. Some have sought to evade this seeming discrepancy by various contrivances, none of which are satisfactory. It is better to take the words as they stand: God is sometimes said to do what he permits to be done by others. Thus he "hardened Pharaoh's heart." This does not mean

that he infused positive wickedness or obstinacy into his mind, or that he influenced it in any way inconsistent with his perfections, but that he withdrew his grace, allowed the heart of Pharaoh to take its natural course, and thus to become harder and harder. He permitted it to be hardened. So in the present case, God permitted Satan to tempt David. The Lord withdrew his supporting grace from the king, and the great adversary prevailed against him.<sup>16</sup>

God, in the language of Scripture, is said to do that which He permits another to do, who in so doing accomplishes, whether designedly or not, some end of His just and holy government. A remarkable instance of this way of speaking may be seen in the case of David's numbering the people. The author of the Second Book of Samuel says, "And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." While the writer of the First Book of Chronicles says, "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." The contradiction is only verbal and superficial. The direct mover was Satan, who was actuated by his hatred of God's people, and his desire to do them harm. And God did not restrain him in his evil purpose, but suffered him to succeed in it, in order that David and his people might receive a salutary chastisement for the pride and worldliness of which their act was the flowing out and open expression, and, in the end, be benefited by a timely correction. The moving, on Satan's part, was active; on God's, simply passive and permissive.<sup>17</sup>

Taking this idiom into account, other translation such as E. W. Bullinger's Companion Bible renders 2 Samuel 24:1, "*He **suffered** David to be moved against them.*" The Rotherham Emphasized Bible reads, "*he **suffered** David to be moved against them.*" An older

translation renders 2 Sam. 24:1 in a way that removes all doubt as to who the culprit was: “*because Satan moved David to say, Go, number Israel and Judah*” (The Holy Bible, with emendations by J.T. Conquest).

The idea is that God’s only part was to permit Satan to move Dave as affirmed by 1 Chron. 21:1. Because the people were not prepared for a full knowledge of Satan during the time of the writing of 2 Samuel, God took responsibility since He permitted it. Since God’s part was only permission, then Satan deserves full credit for the act. Hence, the version by J. T. Conquest explains how 2 Sam. 24:1 and all similar Scripture must be read.

However, we must be careful when using the words “permission” or “permit.” Many have confused the word *permission* with *commission*. Some of these same people use the word as a form of soft-predestination. Their idea is that God was the ultimate cause behind Satan’s working. Nevertheless, the word *permit* just sounds much nicer than *predestinated*.

When we speak of God permitting, allowing or letting something occur, this does not mean that He desired it or wanted it. However, for different reasons He may not interfere to prevent Satan. There are many reasons why God may not intervene and each case must be studied in order to ascertain those reasons. Nonetheless, when we speak of the “idiom of permission,” we are referring to God’s non-interference. It is in this manner that Scripture attributing evil to God must be read. He is said to do that which He takes responsibility for.

## Chapter Eight

### Progressive Revelation and Temptation

*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. (James 1:13)*

The contributors of Scripture were fully inspired by God and the principles taught in them may be applied in all ages (2 Tim. 3:16). Nonetheless, many things were also written to address circumstances that were occurring during the period in which a particular book was written. In this instance, James had to caution the people who made up his original audience about the irresponsibility of attributing their troubles and temptations to God.

#### Early Misconceptions about God

People were not that much different in James' time than they are in ours. In those days there were a number of religious factions and a variety of views in regard to God's character just as there are now. Moreover, just as men do now, people of James' time justified their views about God by using (or *misusing*) Scripture:

Trials from within (= temptations). The Jews seem to have sometimes believed (from a mistaken interpretation of passages like 2S24:1) that God sent temptations, and that it was therefore impossible to resist them (Ro9:19). This error was fatal alike to any true conception of God and to any realisation of human responsibility. It made the one God inconsistent with Himself.<sup>1</sup>

Some individuals in James' time, like many today, did not allow Scripture to interpret itself. Consequently, in



order to defend one's conduct and place the responsibility on God, it was easy to invoke 2 Samuel 24:1, which states that, "*the Lord .... moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.*" It would be just as easy to overlook the explanation given later by Ezra which says, "*And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.*" As another author noted:

"Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." James i. 13. It is true the Lord permits the enemy to tempt, and men, if they choose to do so in defiance of grace, to harden their hearts in sin; and what the Lord permits, or suffers to be done, is, in a limited sense, sometimes attributed to him, when he is not actually the procuring cause of it. As an instance, take the case of David, 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, where God is said to "move David" to number the people. It is plain that God could not be angry with him for numbering the people, if he moved him to do it; and in 1 Chron. xxi. 1, it is expressly said, "And satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel."<sup>2</sup>

It is apparent that many first century Christian, just as many Christians in our own time, had not yet grasped the Scripture idiom in which God is said to do that which He merely permits. This is due to the failure to understand the progress in revelation that is given to us in Scripture. Peter H. Davids explains:

But what about "God does not tempt [test] anyone"? To deal with this problem we must consider the development of doctrine within and between the testaments. Old Testament Hebrews, at least in their earlier period, traced all events directly back to God. Whatever happened, God caused it. This level of revelation was quite appropriate, since God's first task with Israel was to convince them

that there was only one God for them to worship. Beginning late in the Old Testament, however, and continuing into the intertestamental period, it became clear that other beings often actually caused the test.<sup>3</sup>

If we focus on certain portions of Scripture at the exclusion of others, especially the later contributions to Scripture, we will, of necessity, have a skewed view of God's character. It is essential that we keep in mind that very little is said about Satan in the early portions of Scripture and that it is only in Christ that a full disclosure of him is made. In his comments on James 1:13, William Bridge explained:

If ye look into the Scripture, ye do not find in all the Old Testament, that the word temptation is given to Satan, that Satan was said to tempt any: Satan did frequently tempt, we read in the Old Testament; but, I say, the word tempt is not given unto him. Satan tempted Job, but Job's afflictions in the Old Testament are not called Satan's temptations. As our Lord and Saviour Christ in the Old Testament was veiled, the Old Testament was full of Christ, yet Christ was hidden there: so was Satan and his temptations masked. Now when the light of the glorious gospel shined more clearly in the coming of Jesus Christ, as Christ's veil was taken off, so Satan's mask was taken off.<sup>4</sup>

These facts should affect how we interpret Scripture because Scripture interpretation has a bearing upon how we view God and influences our own behavior.

### **Satan is the Tempter**

Essentially, because God could only give partial revelation during the Old Testament period, we have to learn to distinguish between God's actual activities and those for which He merely took responsibility. Most

people miss the fact that our Lord taught us how to make this very distinction in His teaching on what we refer to as “the Lord’s Prayer.” Concerning temptation Jesus taught us to pray, *“And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one”* (Matt. 6:13).

Note that Jesus, using the idiom prevalent in Scripture, instructs us to pray that God does not lead us into temptation. However, the Lord immediately refers to the “evil one,” Satan, as the one with whom we need God to deliver us from (Matt. 13:38-39).

James Knight explains that Jesus is referring to a common way of speaking in the Old Testament when he writes, “What is the import of the Petition, ‘Lead us not into temptation,’ .... in the language of Scripture, God is sometimes said to DO a thing, when He PERMITS IT TO BE DONE.”<sup>5</sup> He then supports his case by citing 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1. Another writer adds in relation to Christ’s instruction here that God, “.... is sometimes figuratively spoken of in scripture, as actually doing, what he merely permits his creatures to do, or suffers evil spirits to do to them.”<sup>6</sup> This idiom was the result of revelation’s progressive nature:

It is a frequent peculiarity of Scripture language to impute to God, as done by Him, whatever He permits, or does not prevent .... The fact is, that throughout the Old Testament there is a development of doctrines in the line of clearer expression and additional instruction as the book advances. This is true of the doctrine of Satan as well as of others which became more fully unfolded as the worship of Jehovah was more firmly established.<sup>7</sup>

In essence, the Lord was advancing the understanding of how God is portrayed in the Old Testament with more insight on the workings of Satan that is slowly being developed in the new dispensation.

Today, we would better interpret the Lord as saying, “*Do not let us do wrong things when we are tempted, and rescue us when Satan tries to harm us*” (Unlocked Dynamic Bible).

Where the Old Testament may not have been very clear, the New Testament is much more direct concerning Satan’s role in temptation. Beginning with Jesus we are told, “*And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan*” (Mark 1:13) and “*Being forty days tempted of the devil*” (Luke 4:2). Temptation is such a characteristic of Satan that he is referred to as “the tempter:”

*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be **tempted of the devil** .... And when **the tempter** came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. (Matt. 4:1, 3)*

Paul also makes this same reference when, due to his concern for the Thessalonians, he writes “.... *lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain*” (1 Thess. 3:5). To the Corinthians he makes it plain that he is referring to Satan: “*that Satan tempt you not for your incontineny*” (1 Cor. 7:5).

### **Did God Tempt Abraham?**

The progressive nature of revelation where God’s character is more revealed in Christ and Satan more unmasked can assist in some of the more perplexing Old Testament stories such as that found in Genesis concerning Abraham’s offering of Isaac:

*And it came to pass after these things, that **God did tempt Abraham**, and said unto*

*him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. (Gen. 22:1-2)*

Scripture is clear that God hates the taking of human life (Genesis 9:5-6; Proverbs 6:16, 17). We also know that He condemns human sacrifice and finds it reprehensible (Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; 32:35). Therefore, many have been perplexed that God would play the part of a tempter and ask Abraham to undertake this task.

Some scholars note that the words “burnt offering” in our English translations is a misinterpretation and should not be there. According to this view, God was not asking Abraham to kill Isaac but to simply offer him in the same sense that He would have Moses some centuries later instruct the Israelites to offer their firstborn sons in committed service to Him.<sup>8</sup> This is the view I primarily hold to and have expounded on it in other books.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, there is another viewpoint that I believe is just as legitimate that serves to vindicate God and is in sync with our subject on progressive revelation. According to Jewish tradition, it was Satan who actually wanted to try Abraham in this manner.

In a Job-like experience, prince Mastêmâ (the name the Jews gave to Satan during that period) brought an accusation to God against Abraham in order to prove that Abraham would never obey God. In the Apocryphal book of Jubilees, we read:

And the prince Mastêmâ came and said before God, 'Behold, Abraham loves Isaac his son, and he delights in him above all things else; bid him offer him as a burnt-offering on the altar, and Thou wilt see if he will do this command, and Thou wilt know if he is faithful in everything wherein Thou dost try him. (Jubilees 17:16)

This is similar to Job chapters 1 and 2 where Satan falsely accused God of bribing Job and buying his worship as well as accusing Job of only serving God for the blessings he received from Him. Satan claimed that if God no longer protected Job, resulting in great loss, he would curse God (Job 1:11; 2:5).

Since Abraham did not withhold his son from God, the author of Jubilees concludes, "And the prince Mastêmâ was put to shame" (Jubilees 18:12). This is comparable to how Satan was humiliated when he falsely accused God and Job and was ultimately vanquished after being given the opportunity to test Job. Some academics read Genesis 22:1-2 in the context of 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1, believing that Satan may have played a role in this:

We must also remember, under penalty of constant error, that the theology of the ancient Hebrews was of necessity very loose and indefinite as compared with ours .... Thus, to take only one example, we read in the book of Samuel, 'The Lord moved David to say, Go, number Israel;' while the Book of Chronicles, recording precisely the same event, affirms 'Satan provoked David to number Israel.' The very temptation which, in one book, is ascribed to God, is, in the other book, ascribed to the devil. And it is very possible that if we had two inspired biographies of Abraham, both written by ancient Hebrew scribes, one of them would say, 'God tempted Abraham,' and the other, 'Satan tempted Abraham';<sup>10</sup>

Satan's possible involvement has a basis in Jewish Bible interpretation and, according to Cox, a Biblical case can be made for it. It can also give an explanation as to why God is represented as having given such commands. Edward John Hardy writes:

But it may be asked, Did not God give apparently cruel commands for no judicial reason, as that one to Abraham to sacrifice his son, or the snare, so to speak, said to have been set for David about numbering the people? We answer that the Jews were in the habit of ascribing everything that happened to God. If mistaken zeal and unenlightened faith urged Abraham to sacrifice his son it is said that God told him to do it. If Pharaoh's heart became hard they said that God hardened it. If David took the wives of his master God is represented as saying that He gave them into his bosom. Even a lying spirit in the mouth of a prophet and other things, which at most God only permitted, are ascribed directly to Him. Where we would say that we are convinced we ought to do a certain thing Old Testament worthies said, "The word of God came unto me saying."<sup>11</sup>

It doesn't matter if one agrees with or disagrees with this viewpoint. The most crucial thing to remember is that, given how revelation has developed in Scripture, we would never anticipate God requiring of anybody what some people think God demanded of Abraham:

To begin with. We must remember that we are reading the Old Testament, and not the New; we are reading a very early part of the Old Testament; we must therefore regard the whole transaction from an Old Testament standpoint. Such a command as that which was given to Abraham could not be given now, could not even have been given at a later period of the Bible story. It was given then because it fitted in with the ideas then prevalent; but when those ideas gave place to

higher and better ones, such a command could not have been given.<sup>12</sup>

Ball concludes, “God deals with each age as He finds it.”<sup>13</sup> Abraham lived in and was surrounded by a pagan culture, one which believed in human sacrifices. Abraham did not have the revelation in regards to God’s hatred of human sacrifice as we have today. God often accommodated himself to the ignorance of men during certain periods:

*Now God made allowance for the times when people were still uninformed [about His complete will], but now [in the Gospel age] He requires all people everywhere to repent [i.e., change their hearts and lives].*  
(Acts 17:30; An Understandable Version)

The Easy-to-Read Version says, “*In the past, people did not understand God, but God ignored this.*” Abraham, who had less light, could justify actions that are unforgivable for us now since we have received far more insight about God’s nature. Whatever one’s interpretation of the story of Abraham and Isaac, a thorough reading of Scripture should lead one to the conclusion that God in no way tempts anyone to sin.

### **Old Testament Interpretation**

We must never allow statements made in earlier Biblical writings to stand on their own. These must be interpreted in the more recent light of Jesus and His apostles. Every passage in the Scripture must be interpreted in light of James statement, “*He Himself tempts no one with evil*” (James 1:13; A Faithful Version). Thomas Erskine, in reference to God hardening Pharaoh’s heart, elaborates on this point:



.... when God is said to harden Pharaoh's heart, the real meaning is, that He permitted him to harden his own heart; as indeed in the chapters which relate to that history, we find it as often said, that Pharaoh hardened his heart, as that God hardened it. It is the idiom of the Hebrew language; and we ought always to read such expressions along with this explanation, 'Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.' James i. 13."<sup>14</sup>

As we interpret Scripture in this light, we will avoid falsely mischaracterizing God:

To the false character painted of him, that because he suffers evil, and betimes withdraws his restraining hand, he is the author thereof, he replies, vindicating himself; and again throwing back the responsibility on man's degraded soul—"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" (James i. 13, 14).<sup>15</sup>

Satan, not God, has always been the tempter. Any place that appears to make God a tempter must be understood to mean that God was merely taking responsibility for Satan's work until men were prepared for more light on the subject.

## Chapter Nine

### Progressive Revelation and Evil Spirits

*And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, **How can Satan cast out Satan?*** (Mark 3:22-23)

When our Lord was wrongly accused of rescuing individuals from demons through the authority of the demons' prince, He did not deny that they had a ruler. All he did was point out how absurd it was to think this prince would deliberately wreck such havoc on his own kingdom. Furthermore, He identified Satan by name as the prince of devils.

#### Pagan Gods

As we have stated throughout these lessons, one of God's primary goals with Israel was to help them embrace *monotheism*. When Israel had godly kings, they worshipped Yehovah as the one true God and the Creator of all things. However, they continued to believe that the surrounding nations actually did serve other "gods," though they saw the God of Israel as superior to them (Ex. 15:11; 18:9-11; Deut. 10:17; 2 Sam. 7:23; 1 Chron. 16:25; 2 Chron. 2:5; Psalm 86:8; 95:3; 96:4; 97:9; 135:5). They recognized the true god as the "God of gods," thus asserting His superiority above the others (Deut. 10:17; Josh. 22:22; Ps. 136:2; Dan. 2:47; 11:36).

Yehovah occasionally reminded Israel that He is the *only* true God (Deut. 4:35, 39; Isa. 37:16-20; 42:8; 43:10-11; 44:6-8; 45:6, 21, 22). He did not deny the existence of other spirit beings that referred to themselves

as “gods” since He is the One who created them. But early in Israel’s history He gave them some glimpses of truth in regards to the true nature of these “gods:”

*They sacrificed **unto devils**, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, **to new gods** that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. (Deut. 32:17)*

Hence, Israel was taught that the practice of idolatry was in fact the worship of evil spirits (Lev. 17:7; 2 Chron. 11:15; Ps. 106:37). God was concerned with the destructive bondage that His people would encounter by worshipping these devils (Ex. 23:33; Ps. 106:36-38).

As a result, God frequently warned Israel not to associate with those who had familiar spirits (Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; 18:11; 2 Kings 21:6; 23:24; 2 Chron. 33:6; Isa. 8:19; 19:3; 29:4). Consultation with demonic familiar spirits contributed to King Saul’s death (1 Sam. 28:3, 8, 9; 1 Chron. 10:13). Ironically, these familiar spirits were also referred to as “gods” (1 Sam. 28:13).

### **Progressive Revelation**

Since there was no fully developed picture of Satan as the leader of these evil entities, God’s people did not fully grasp this truth. Hence, it was too easy for them to continually refer to these evil spirits as “gods,” which, especially during periods of apostasy under ungodly kings, removed any resistance to worship them.

The need to minimize Satan’s involvement in the affairs of earth during that time period meant that God would often have to condescend to the Israelite mindset, sometimes adopting their language in reference to the fallen spirits. Hence, Yehovah Himself would (sometimes derisively) refer to these pagan objects of worship as “gods” (Ex. 12:12; Num. 33:4; Judges 10:13-14; 2 Kings

1:3). Hence, the full understanding of the truth about these gods had to be disseminated progressively. In his book, “God’s Rivals,” Gerald R. McDermott writes:

Christian theology has recognized for thousands of years that revelation has been progressive, which means that the picture of God evolves through the Bible. Some things are shown in the New Testament that are not shown so clearly in the Old. And some concepts seem to develop in stages, as it were, through the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup>

Once Jesus came to give us the fullest understanding about the *only* God, then the truth about false gods and evil spirits could also be fully exposed. Again, McDermott notes, “.... The early church resolved these questions by seeing these ‘gods’ as demons and cosmic powers that war with Christ and his kingdom.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul reminds the Galatians, “*Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods*” (Gal. 4:8). Paul is adamant that those evil spirits worshipped by pagans are not truly gods. Addressing the Corinthian church, Paul states that there is only one God and Creator while the others are “pretender gods” (1 Cor. 8:4-6). Paul reiterates this fact two chapters later when, quoting Deut. 32:17, he cautions against partaking of things offered to idols, as doing so is fellowshiping with evil spirits:

*But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. (1 Cor. 10:20-21)*

## The Prince of the Evil Spirits

Moreover, it is only when we come to the New Testament do we find Paul making a connection between Satan (Belial) and these so-called “gods” when he writes: *“And what concord hath Christ with Belial? .... And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?”* (2 Cor. 6:15a-16a). The Etheridge New Testament, 1849, gives us this rendering:

*Or what concord [Or, peace.] hath the Meshiha with Satana? Or what portion hath the believer with the unbeliever? Or what union hath the temple of Aloha with (that) of demons?*

Therefore, it is only in the New Testament, beginning with the Lord’s earthly ministry, do we get a complete understanding that there is one primary ruler over these demons. In Matthew 9:34 where another false accusation was made against Jesus, we read, *“But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.”*

It was a slander and nonsensical to accuse Jesus of bringing deliverance from devils by being in league with their prince. But we see the progress in Biblical revelation as Satan is unmasked and exposed as the ruler over demonic forces. Some paraphrases of Matt. 9:34 provide more clarity on this point. The Unlocked Dynamic Version says, *“It is Satan, who rules the demons”* and in the Living Bible, the Pharisees claim that Jesus was, *“possessed by Satan, the demon king!”*

In the book of Revelation, we are told concerning the demons that will be released to wreak havoc on the planet in the last days, *“And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit”* (Rev. 9:11a). We

know this to be Satan. Yet, it is only as we come to the New Testament that we learn this.

### **God Sent an Evil Spirit**

Since men during Old Testament times were not yet prepared to learn about the one who ruled over these devils, we find God occasionally assumed responsibility for their activity:

*Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech. (Judges 9:34)*

Readers today are perplexed by such passages and ask why a good and holy God sends evil spirits to bring strife, contention and treachery. Some “defenders” of God claim that the evil spirit is not an actual demonic entity. They say that the phrase “evil spirit” simply means an *evil disposition* or *temper*. However, as John Ellicott noted, “The later Jews would have made little or no difference between the two, since they attributed almost every evil to the direct agency of demons.”<sup>3</sup> German scholars Keil and Delitzsch were much more direct:

“An evil spirit” is not merely “an evil disposition, but an evil demon, which produced discord and strife, just as an evil spirit came upon Saul (1 Sam. xvi. 14, 15, xviii. 10); not Satan himself, but a supernatural spiritual power which was under his influence.”<sup>4</sup>

Other “defenders” of God make appeals to His sovereignty. Indeed, God is sovereign but He is not schizophrenic. God does not work with Satan but is opposed to him (Matt. 12:25-28; John 10:10; Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 6:14-16). God is primarily love and love never

sends things that brings harm (1 John 4:8, 16; Rom. 13:10; Luke 6:35-36; 11:11-13). However, for the reasons we have noted throughout this book, this distinction is not always stated in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup>

An accurate vindication of God is to recognize the progressive development of revelation in Scripture. In the New Testament we are taught that the strife and contention brought by the evil spirit in Judges 9 never originates with God but with demons:

*But if you have bitter envy among yourselves, or contention be in your hearts, be not inflated against the truth, nor lie; because this wisdom from above descendeth not; but is earthly, from the reasonings of the soul, **and from demons.*** (James 3:14-15; Etheridge New Testament, 1849)

The Contemporary English Version renders verse 15, “*It .... comes from the devil himself.*” It is incumbent upon the reader to get a more valid interpretation of Judges 9:23 that is consistent with this truth. This is discovered as we examine more closely the word “sent.” It comes from the Hebrew word “shalach”. One Bible expositor explains this word in relation to Judges 9:23:

The word *shalach*, which is rendered ‘he sent,’ diverges into a variety of applications, as the verb ‘sent’ does in English: as release, dismiss, discharge, &c.: and as applied to the evil intentions of the men of Shechem, the meaning evidently is, **that God permitted things so to work** in his universal providence, that the spirit of evil in these men, manifested itself against Abimelech; for so it is in the original. So that there is a very material difference between an evil spirit, and a spirit of evil.<sup>6</sup> (Emphasis are mine)

With this in mind, Rotherham's Emphasized Bible renders the passage, "*Then God **let go** a spirit of mischief between Abimelech and the owners of Shechem.*" When reading such passages, one must remember that our Bible is derived from an Ancient Eastern culture with unique idioms different from our own. In their culture, God was made responsible for whatever happened even if He did not do it.<sup>7</sup> Our duty as modern readers is to interpret these idioms in the light of Scripture's progress in revelation. Hence, it is necessary to read passages such as Judges 9:23 in the permissive sense:

*God sent an evil spirit]* Everything that happens by God's permission is said to be done by Him in these historical books, a fact which may serve to explain many difficulties. In a sense it is perfectly true. From the day of Adam's fall, God's laws provided for the evolution from sin of its own dire effects, among which were its connection with similar rebellion on a vaster scale beyond this earth, of which Scripture gives us hints, but into which it does not fully enter. See I Sam. xvi. 14, xviii. 10. Also I Kings xxii. 21, 23.<sup>8</sup>

Hence, resolving the issue with God having sent an evil spirit comes from recognition that the Bible is a progressive revelation. God took responsibility for what He permitted until the time Satan could be exposed. In such cases, the New Testament must be allowed to interpret the Old.

### **An Evil Spirit from the Lord**

In a similar incident with King Saul, we are given further evidence that an evil spirit can only operate where the Holy Spirit is not present:



*But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him .... And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him. (1 Sam. 16:14, 23)*

1 Samuel 18:10 also says, “*And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul.*” This evil spirit not only brought about mental distress for King Saul, it led him to commit violent, murderous, and unreasonable acts, even against his own family members (1 Sam. 18:10-11; 19:9-10; 20:31-33; 1 Sam. 22:18-19). The New Testament reveals this spirit is definitely from Satan (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8-15).

Long before the Holy Spirit departed from Saul, the king had already departed from God (2 Chron. 15:2; 24:20; Deut. 31:16-18). Men like Saul choose a course of rebellion, thus resisting, grieving and quenching God’s Spirit (Acts 7:51; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). God’s Spirit could not strive with Saul forever (Gen. 6:3). Yet, only in the New Testament do we learn that this meant that Saul was eventually turned over to Satan (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:5). Satan always demands his right to torment such individuals (Job 1-2; Zech. 3:1-2; Luke 22:31).

Just as with Judges 9:23, a number of scholars deny that a satanic agency was involved and limit Saul’s condition to a mental disorder. So again, they prefer to interpret “evil spirit” as an “evil disorder” or “evil temperament.” We are thankful for other scholars who repudiate this notion.<sup>9</sup>

But most importantly, the evidence of the New Testament is on our side. Not only does it associate evil spirits to Satan and demons, it even names them as the

source of sickness, violence and insanity (Matt. 8:16; 17:14-18; Luke 7:21; 8:2; Mark 16:9; Acts 19:12, 15, 16). Until men were capable of receiving this understanding we are given in later centuries, God took responsibility for demonic activity. Michael Russell explains:

Belief in Satan as the head of the malignant angels in opposition to Jehovah, unknown before the Babylonian Captivity.—There is not in any part of the Old Testament which was written before the Captivity, the slightest allusion to Satan, as being the head of the malignant angels, or as having set up a kingdom for himself in opposition to the gracious intentions of the Almighty in behalf of man.<sup>10</sup>

Russell, appealing to the progressive understanding between 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1, offers an understanding of Saul's "evil spirit from the Lord" in this light:

It deserves to be noticed, too, in this case, that the demon which enticed the king of Israel into the undutiful act which brought so heavy a requital upon the heads of his subjects, is no longer described as an "evil spirit from the Lord;" nor as having received any commission from the Almighty to infatuate the mind of the royal son of Jesse, and thereby to accomplish the objects of the divine indignation. Satan, on the contrary, appears before us, in the narrative, as an independent and voluntary agent.<sup>11</sup>

Since God took responsibility for Satan's actions in these earlier times, we must keep in mind that Saul's "evil spirit from the Lord," as one scholar stated concerning the subject, has more to do with, "the idiomatic peculiarities of the languages in which the Bible was originally written."<sup>12</sup> T. O. Summers adds:

The agency of evil spirits in tempting men to sin, and in tormenting them, is distinctly recognized in 1 Sam. xvi. 14-23. xviii. 10—and as clearly distinguished from that of the Most High. “The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.” Compare 1 Kings xxii. 21-23. What were these evil spirits and lying spirits, but Satan, or fallen angels under his sway? .... Nobody that knows anything about Hebrew idioms wants to be told that the Hebrew writers frequently speak of a person’s doing a thing, or appointing a thing, which he only permits or does not prevent.<sup>13</sup>

F. B. Meyer writes, “The evil spirit is said to have come from God. In the bold language of Scripture, because He permitted it.”<sup>14</sup> This truth is made evident in the book of Job. Satan complained about the hedge of protection surrounding Job and preventing him access (Job 1:9-10). Satan says, “*But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath*” (Job 1:11; see also 2:5). In this statement, Satan was demanding that this protection be removed since, in the idiom of Scripture, God is said to do that which He permits.

The narrator then informs us, “*So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD*” (Job 1:12; see also 2:6-7). Therefore, “from the Lord” is a statement of permission or non-interference. Some translations have illuminated this truth. The VOICE Translation interprets 1 Sam. 16:23, “*God **allowed** the evil spirit to afflict Saul.*” The Contemporary English Version renders 1 Sam. 18:10, “*the Lord **let** an evil spirit take control of Saul.*”

## Lying Spirits from God

In the next example we are told that God put a lying spirit in the mouth of some false prophets:

*And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith?  
And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a  
lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.  
And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and  
prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now  
therefore, behold, **the LORD hath put a  
lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy  
prophets**, and the LORD hath spoken evil  
concerning thee. (1 Kings 22:22-23)*

As with the evil spirit in Judges and 1 Samuel, some scholars deny the operation of an actual agent of Satan here and claim that the language in 1 Kings is *figurative* in the sense that Micaiah was merely telling a story or a parable rather than dictating an event that actually occurred. Others accept that Micaiah is relating an actual event that took place, but also remind us, on the basis of 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1, that the language is idiomatic of God's permission:

“Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?” margin “Shall not the Lord do somewhat?”. (Amos iii. 6.) God is the author of evil in the way of permission, the devil in the way of instigation. David sinned in numbering the people; and we are told that he was moved both by God and by Satan to do it. [Compare 2 Sam. xxiv. 1 with 1 Chron. xxi. 1.] We do not think enough-nor sufficiently try to understand about evil spirits; they are much spoken of in Scripture, and are exceedingly numerous, thousands having been cast out of one man.—(Luke viii. 30.) We must not look on such histories as that of Ahab's temptation as figurative, for doubtless they are true, and not mere visions. What a world of ideas are suggested by the name there used, “the lying spirit.”—(1 Kings xxii. 22.) 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. -(Jer. i. 10; Ezek. xliii. 3.)<sup>15</sup>

Concerning this lying spirit, Benjamin Hoadly explained, “.... in Scripture all Events are ascribed to the Lord; and things which he only permits, represented sometimes as his Decree, and 'his Will.’”<sup>16</sup> James Smith adds:

.... that it is a known idiom of the Hebrew language, to express things in an imperative and active form, which are to be understood only permissively .... So likewise here, where an evil spirit offered himself to be a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophet, and God says, “Go forth and do so,” this only signifies a permission, not a command.<sup>17</sup>

Some Bible translations recognize the permissive sense in these passages. In verse 23, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible says, “*Yahweh hath suffered a spirit of falsehood to be put into the mouth of all these thy prophets.*” The Awful Scroll Bible renders it, “*Jehovah is to have allowed a deceptive breath, to be in the mouth of the prophets.*” The Unlocked Dynamic Bible also states, “*So now I tell you that Yahweh has let all of your prophets lie to you.*”

It gets easier to appreciate the flow of knowledge regarding the origin of this lying spirit as we move on to the New Testament. In John 8:44 Jesus tells us concerning Satan, “*When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*” God does not have to compel Satan to lie. He does it of his own free-will. Furthermore, Satan “fathered” or rather, gave existence to what is now known as a lie. This was not God’s doing. The New Testament also informs us that Satan is the

agent behind those spirits that speak through false prophets:

*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; **Speaking lies in hypocrisy**; having their conscience seared with a hot iron. (1 Tim. 4:1-2)*

*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (2 Cor. 11:13-15)*

*Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (2 Thess. 2:9-10)*

In contrast, we are told by John that not every spirit comes from God:

*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1)*

The Contemporary English Version says, “*Test them all to find out if they really do come from God.*” A lying spirit cannot originate with God because His holiness prevents Him from taking part in a lie (Num. 23:19; Psalm 89:33-35; Titus 1:1-3; Heb. 6:17-18). Nonetheless, this truth is only established through a comprehension of the progress in Biblical revelation:

The Old Testament is a record of the progressive stages by which God has given a revelation of Himself to man .... And with this thought in mind we shall be in no way surprised or alarmed to find the Hebrews attributing to Jehovah Himself thoughts and deeds which, judged from the Christian standpoint, are inconsistent with the character of God. We cannot now think of Him as commanding human sacrifice or as sending out a lying spirit to deceive the people.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup>

It is only as revelation progressed that God could give a full disclosure in regards to evil and lying spirits operating in the Old Testament. Until then, as a good king, God took responsibility for those things that occurred in His domain, even those things he permitted or did not prevent from taking place.

## Chapter Ten

### Progressive Revelation and Vindicating God

In favor of this view we may observe that since the fall sin and evil have run parallel with the history of mankind, and with the development of the knowledge of God, and of the progressive revelation of the Messianic Kingdom. Human sinfulness, everywhere, as already intimated, tends to anarchy and ruin. It is the result of Satan's wickedness, whose aim is only to destroy.<sup>1</sup>  
(Samuel Z. Beam)

Because men in the earlier times in which Scripture was being written were unprepared for a full-blown exposure of Satan, God took responsibility for many of his works. This explains why in some passages of Scripture, incredibly evil actions seem to be attributed to God. We shall look at a few of those instances in this chapter where God is alleged to have done things that later revelation attributes to the devil.

#### “It Was of the Lord”

In Judges 14:1-3, Samson becomes infatuated with a Philistine woman and demands that his parents, against their protests, allow him to marry her. To marry such a woman was prohibited by the Lord since it influences the husband to worship his wife's pagan gods (Ex. 34:16; Deut. 7:3-4; 1 Kings 11:2-4). Yet, we are given this remarkable statement:

*But his father and his mother knew not that **it was of the LORD**, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that*



*time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. (Judges 14:4)*

Reading such passages carelessly leads one to believe that God would have us violate His commands in order to fulfill a divine purpose. Many who adhere to a Calvinist philosophy by which all things happen as the result of God's "all-controlling sovereignty" often refer to this and similar passages as God enacting such sins under the guise of divine providence.

However, such interpretations not only provide fuel to those atheistic enemies of God bent on finding as much evidence as possible to prove that He is unworthy of worship and possesses a dubious character, it displays vast ignorance in regards to the proper method for interpreting Scripture of this nature.

In the New Testament we are made certain of the fact that God never tempts any man to sin for any purpose and it is a slander to claim that He does (James 1:13, 20; Romans 3:5-7). We are taught that all sin is not *of the Lord* but *of the devil*:

*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)*

Those who sought to kill our Lord were told, "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do*" (John 8:44a). So, where Judges said that Samson's sin was "*of the Lord*," later revelation reminds us that all sin "*is of the devil*." This is easily resolved by recognizing the former as the result of revelation concerning God and Satan being in its infancy:

The theory of the Old Testament language in regard to God's providence seems to be this: *Whatever act of man, however free or wicked, contributes to the higher scheme of Jehovah's purpose, and so, though divinely disapproved, is divinely recognised, and wrought into the series of events, is roughly said to be of the Lord, and his act and doing.* The Old Hebraic age had not yet attempted to draw the metaphysical line between God's *will* and God's *non-prevention* of those sins which are necessarily to be admitted into that system of free-agency from which the highest good shall accrue. Those sins, therefore, which are seen by the inspired writer to *adjust into the high scheme of God*, and to bring out his intended results, are, in lump, attributed to him. They are not *his* by approval, by decree, nor by fore-ordination; but are indiscriminately said to be *his*, because, foreseen by him, they are simply *non-prevented*, and woven into his complex plan for bringing but the highest good. This is not a Hebraism in the sense of a Hebrew idiom; but it is a Hebraism in the sense of being a Hebrew style of thought and expression. The Hebrew knew, indeed, that Jehovah was absolutely holy, and men's sins were wicked, but had never fully adjusted the relation between the two. **A later age, when moral thought becomes more defined, raises the question of God's exact collision with sin, and draws the discrimination.**<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis added)

Old Testament scholar, Walter C. Kaiser, in his comments on Judges 14:4, writes, "Remember, scriptural language frequently attributes directly to God what he merely permits."<sup>3</sup> Though God did not ordain or desire Samson's sin, being the superior resourceful God that He is, would not be hindered by it but overruled it to achieve His goals. In other words, God took responsibility for not restraining Samson. This is how all such Old Testament statements of this nature are to be read (see also Joshua 11:19-20).

## God Deceived Prophets

Some places in the Old Testament attribute lying and deception to God (Jer. 4:10; Isa. 66:4). A classic example is found in Ezekiel 14:9:

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

God tells Ezekiel that He is the One deceiving the false prophets. Such claims are exploited by those who oppose God and the Bible to cast doubt on the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures and to dispute the existence of God. Furthermore, theologians who identify as “liberal” but reject the inspiration of Scripture have not been any more beneficial than those who identify as Calvinist and maintain that a sovereign God has the authority to irresistibly decree immorality.

As we have already established, the people of Ezekiel's time knew little to nothing about Satan. Only in the New Testament is Satan completely revealed as the deceiver. John writes, “*And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world*” (Rev. 12:9a). Deception is Satan's modus operandi (Rev. 20:7, 8, 10; 2 Cor. 4:4; John 8:44). Therefore, as with all Scripture that attributes such reprehensible acts to God such as Eze. 14:9, the simplest way to understand them is in the light of later revelation. The apostle Paul explains exactly how we are to interpret this passage:

*Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all*

*deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:9-11)*

Paul said that God would send them strong delusion. Yet, immediately before this, he acknowledges Satan as the deceiver. Paul explains that God sends this delusion only by no longer restraining Satan: “.... *only he who now holdeth back will hold him back, until he is taken out of the way*” (2 Thess. 2:7; 21<sup>st</sup> Century KJV).

As one author reminds us in relation to Eze. 14:9, “It is true that God is represented in the Bible as *doing* things, which he only *permits*. This, however, is common to Scripture phraseology.”<sup>4</sup> Paul, who was a Hebrew (Phil. 3:5), occasionally wrote using the idiom of his people in which God is said to do that which He permits Satan to do (2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:11-12; 42:11). This truth, as Adam Clarke remarks, must be applied to Ezek. 14:9:

I the Lord have deceived that prophet - That is, he ran before he was sent; he willingly became the servant of Satan's illusions; and I suffered this to take place, because he and his followers refused to consult and serve me. I have often had occasion to remark that it is common in the Hebrew language to state a thing as done by the Lord which he only suffers or permits to be done; for so absolute and universal is the government of God, that the smallest occurrence cannot take place without his will or permission.<sup>5</sup>

Concerning Eze. 14:9, Edward Bird writes, “God's permitting the False Prophet, for his Wickedness, to be Deceived by the Deceiver, that is, the Devil.”<sup>6</sup>

William Matson adds, “This strong language simply emphasizes the fact that God permits—as a judgment upon the wicked—Satan to lead them astray.”<sup>7</sup> Robert Jaimeson also stated, “I the Lord have deceived that prophet—not directly, but through Satan and his ministers.”<sup>8</sup> In essence, as H. A. Ironside points out, God took responsibility for what He permitted:

As for the false prophets who were misleading them, **the Lord Himself took the responsibility for having permitted this**; for it is a principle in Scripture that when men refuse the truth, God Himself often gives them up to falsehood. Even as in the last days of the great tribulation, those who receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved, will be given up to strong delusion that they might believe the lie of the Antichrist, and so all be judged which obey not the truth but have pleasure in unrighteousness.<sup>9</sup> (Emphasis added)

Deception involves lying. God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:1-2; Heb. 6:18). Therefore, Ezekiel 14:9 is better rendered, *I the LORD have **permitted** him to be deceived* (E. W. Bullinger’s Companion Bible). Consequently, when God is accused of deception in the Bible, it simply means that He assumed responsibility for everything that occurred under His reign until men were capable of receiving further light in regards to Satan.

### **Evil Angels from God or Satan?**

The above examples provide us with the necessary tools for interpreting all Scripture that attributes to God those actions we discover in other places were actually Satan’s doings. Let us look at just a few more of the many examples in Scripture that can be cited.

In the book of Exodus God said that He would kill the firstborn of Egypt though He later attributes this to another agency called the destroyer or death angel (Ex.

12:12, 23). Because of the New Testament, we have no doubt that this destroyer and death angel is Satan (Heb. 2:14-15; Rev. 9:11). Nonetheless, some confusion arises when we read about the same incident in the psalms:

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

Because it says that God *sent* these evil angels a number of theologians understand this to mean that these were angels that worked for God who were particularly assigned to bring about the calamity that the firstborn in Egypt suffered. However, if Scripture is to be read in the light of a progressive revelation, then to claim that angels that cause evil of any kind as originating with God is a faulty understanding.

In the New Testament we learn that Satan was able to deceive a number of angels into following him. Therefore, he has his own angels (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:7-9; Eph. 6:10-12; Col. 2:15; Jude 6). His angels are the ones that wreak evil and havoc among men (2 Cor. 12:7; Rev. 6:1-8; 9:13-21). Thus, an interpretation in light of progression in revelation concludes that it was satanic angels who killed the firstborn in Egypt.

### **God Bruising Jesus**

In Isaiah 53:10, concerning the sacrifice Christ made on our behalf, we are told, “*Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.*” However, one writer explains regarding this passage:

Old Testament usage in speaking of God's agency authorizes us to take this as simply *permissive*-done by others and not directly by himself. But so much as this the words must mean: God was pleased to *permit* this bruising.—Yet there is not the least occasion to suppose that this pleasure was vindictive, or that it implied in the slightest degree any pleasure in the suffering for its own sake, or the least lack of love for his suffering Son. All such notions are ruled out at once both by the known character of God, and by the explanatory clause subjoined here, viz.: "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands." This shows that God's pleasure in the suffering turned on the results. Here were results that nothing less, nothing else, could secure.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, God's pleasure is in the *results* of the sacrifice of Christ (our salvation) and *not* with the evil done to Him. In the New Testament, we are told that what happened to the Lord did not please God:

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

Moreover, in Genesis God prophesied that *the serpent would bruise the Messiah* (Gen. 3:15). We already learned in previous chapters that the serpent is a reference to Satan (Rev. 12:9; 20:2; 2 Cor. 11:3, 13-15) and Gen. 3:15 is a direct reference to what Jesus would do to him (Luke 10:17-19; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 15:25-28).

It was Satan who instigated men and demons to kill our Lord from His betrayal to His crucifixion (Luke 22:3, 4, 33; John 13:2; 8:40-44). God, in His infinite resourcefulness, was able to overrule Satan's act and bring about our redemption from the devil through Christ (Acts 2:24-27; Col. 1:12-14; 2:15; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John

3:8). Hence, Isaiah 53:10 must be interpreted in the light of progressive revelation.

### God Afflicting People

Isaiah also says concerning Christ, “.... yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:4). In the book of Ruth, Naomi complained that, “.... the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?” (Ruth 1:21). In contrast, the New Testament exposes Satan as the afflicter:

*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the **same afflictions** are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. (1 Peter 5:8-9)*

Those who read the Old Testament apart from progressive revelation often blame God for their afflictions. Because of this, they never put up a resistance against Satan as Scripture commands us to do (Luke 10:17-20; Eph. 4:7; 6:10-18; James 4:7). Such faulty methods of reading Scripture have permitted Satan to have free rein throughout God’s church and in the lives of His people. One writer explains:

Pending their being finally “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” to be “tormented day and night forever and ever, the devil and his angels are present in this world, and Satan is permitted to exercise a limited power and dominion, not only over evil angels, but over unstable souls of men, as prince and god of this world. Man’s sin has given devils power over him. This power was gained by wicked craftiness and cannot become a right to which Satan is entitled. But the responsibility of



man for engaging in his service cannot be evaded, and constitutes the obvious reason why God permits Satan to rule over him. This is the quasi “right” which certain ancient writers supposed God to concede to Satan. If it may thus be regarded, it is, in any case, nullified, so far as faithful Christians are concerned, by their redemption by the blood of Christ. By reason of this redemption Christians can put the devil to flight by resistance, although they still have reason, because of the seductiveness of sin and the incitements of their own lusts, to fear Satan, lest he should regain power to destroy both soul and body in hell.<sup>11</sup>

Old covenant saints knew very little about Satan. Furthermore, they did not have a legitimate advantage over him anyway until Jesus dealt with him. Consequently, at that time, God accepted responsibility for all suffering, including that which Jesus would endure. Now that Satan has been vanquished by our Lord, we can now come against affliction in the authority of Christ.

### **Inflicting Sickness**

There are numerous places in the Old Testament that implicates God as the source of sickness. In Exodus 15:26, God said, *“I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians.”* In Deut. 28:60 we read, *“Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt.”* In Leviticus 14:34 God tells the Israelites, *“I put the plague of leprosy in a house.”*

In the New Testament Satan is given credit for all of the sickness and disease encountered by Jesus. Regarding a spirit of infirmity afflicting a woman, Jesus names its true source when He says, *“whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years”* (Luke 13:13, 16). In Acts 10:38, Peter tells those at Cornelius’ house that Jesus, *“went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.”*

Failing to interpret Old Testament passages regarding sickness in the light of progressive revelation has led many believers to unnecessarily suffer sickness and disease because they believe that these things are “God’s will.” This belief continues to prevail in the church and has destroyed faith in God’s healing promises.

Yet early Jewish theologians, for the most part, rejected the belief that God is the source of sickness and that it is His will.<sup>12</sup> Most of Judaism, especially in later centuries leading up to the birth of Christ, began to see Satan and demons as the source of sickness.<sup>13</sup> Naturally, this was reflected in their interpretation of Old Testament passages on sickness. For example, where Leviticus 14:34 reads, “*I put the plague of leprosy in a house,*” one Rabbi interprets it as “Those plagues which are inflicted by the insufflation of the devil, not by the hands of men.”<sup>14</sup>

There is an obvious progression in understanding regarding God and Satan’s roles in sickness which requires us to interpret these Old Testament passages in the Hebrew idiom of permission. Again, commenting on Leviticus 14:34, one old study Bible notes:

When it is said, “I put the plague of leprosy in a house,” it sounds as if God himself were the author of the disease; but, according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, God is often said to do what in the course of events he merely permits to be done.<sup>15</sup>

The contributors to *The Treasury Bible* agreed and applied this principle to other Bible passages that appear to make God the author of sickness and other evils:

.... it is well known, that in Scripture, God is frequently represented as doing what, in the course of his providence, he only permits to be done. Ex.15:26. De.7.15. 1 Sa.2:6. Pr.3.33. Is.45.7. Am.3.6.-6.11. Mi.6.9.<sup>16</sup>

God is no longer viewed as the afflicter of sickness and disease when we understand the progress in revelation regarding God and Satan's roles in sickness and the subsequent need to interpret certain Old Testament passages in the permissive sense.

### **God Makes People Handicapped**

We may list countless other examples, one of which being the belief that God is the source of disabilities. A prime example is found in Exodus 4:11:

*And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?*

This passage makes it appear as if God is the one who brings about blindness, deafness and dumbness. Nonetheless, one scholar, John Bellamy, says that this is not an accurate translation:

Here is a serious charge, say objectors, brought against God: viz. that all who are dumb, or deaf, or blind; are necessarily made so by God. But as the works of God are perfect, and as we know that these misfortunes arise from accidental causes, which are frequently removed; it necessarily follows that the translation is wrong. The word שׁוֹמֵם *yaasoum*, is translated, maketh; viz. who maketh the dumb. The radical meaning of this word is not to make, but to pay a particular attention to that which is made; seriously to regard.<sup>17</sup>

Centuries later Jesus reveals that it is an evil spirit working for Satan that inflicts such handicaps (Matt. 12:22-28; Mark 9:25-26). In contrast, Jesus constantly healed people of blindness, deafness, and dumbness (Matthew 9:27-31; 11:5; 15:30-31; 20:30-34; 21:14; Mark

7:32-37). In doing this, we are told that Jesus was undoing the works of the devil (Acts 10:38; 1 John 3:8).

Therefore, even if one is inclined to disagree with Bellamy in regards to whether or not Exodus 4:11 is incorrectly translated, the progression in revelation necessitates that we at least see it as idiomatic of permission. In his comments on Exodus 4:11, Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser wrote, “While God was not to be blamed for directly creating any defects, his wise providence in allowing these deprivations....”<sup>18</sup> was used to illustrate His ability to overcome Moses’ alleged speech inadequacies.

Remember, Moses complained that he was disqualified to speak to Pharaoh due to a speech impediment. The statement in Exodus 4:11 was not meant to reveal the source of men’s handicaps but to boost Moses’ confidence in God’s ability to assist him. Hence, God took responsibility for these disabilities. A better interpretation of Exodus 4:11 is, “***Who’s responsible for making them unable to speak or hard of hearing, sighted or blind?***” (Exodus 4:11b; Common English Bible).

### **Principle of Accommodation**

This truth also refutes a lot of the criticisms leveled at God for seeming to support practices that many would reasonably argue are not Christlike in the modern world, such as polygamy, divorce, slavery, war, the death penalty, and retaliation.

In another book, I have dealt with what has been referred to as “the principle of accommodation.”<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Our Lord provides a brief overview on the subject in His response to the religious leaders’ questions to Him about the divorce law instituted by Moses:

*They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement,*

*and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses **because of the hardness of your hearts** suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. (Matt. 19:7-8)*

God has expressed His hatred of divorce (Malachi 2:14-16). He has the exact same hatred for slavery, war, polygamy, etc. So why did He permit these things? It is due to the hardness of men's hearts. Sin hardened men so their education for higher godly ideals came at a slow pace. John Edward Hardy observes:

Slowly through the centuries God educated the Jews to be a nation of religious teachers to the world. In doing so He used kindergarten methods, so to speak, suited to their undeveloped minds. He trained them like children with what St. Paul calls weak and beggarly elements, the A B C of morals and religion. These were inadequate and partially untrue, and were meant to be superseded by fuller revelations. This progressive nature of revelation accounts for the anthropomorphic, almost childish conceptions of God for the permission of easy divorce, of polygamy, of slavery; for relentless massacres, for witch-killing, and for other things which, until we think of the reason of them, shock us when we find them in inspired books.<sup>20</sup>

If men understood this principle, not only would there be less incentive to attack God and the Bible, but Christians would not be so easily thrown off and discouraged by such attacks. It would alleviate much confusion when reading Scripture and we will be able to provide an answer to all who ask. Most importantly, we will see God for who He truly is and we will understand and genuinely love God and His Word.

## Notes

### Chapter One

1. For a more detailed analysis on the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah narratives, I recommend two of my books: Edwards, Troy J. **Does God Send Natural Disasters? Vindicating God's character concerning Accidents and Disasters** (Pawtucket, RI Vindicating God Ministries, 2016); Edwards, Troy J. **What About the FLOOD OF NOAH? A Unique Perspective in Relation to God's Character of Love** (Pawtucket, RI Vindicating God Ministries, 2017).
2. While we will be covering a number of problems related to God's alleged behavior in the Old Testament, for a more detailed study about destruction being ascribed to God, I highly recommend our book, Edwards, Troy J. **Does God Destroy?** (Pawtucket, RI: Vindicating God Ministries, 2023).
3. For a more detailed explanation see our book, Edwards, Troy J. **Understanding Hebrew Idiomatic & Figurative Language: To Vindicate the Loving Character of God** (Pawtucket, RI: Vindicating God Ministries, 2023).
4. Ibid.
5. For more insight into why God commanded this, see: Edwards, Troy J. **The Bible Principle of Accommodation** (Pawtucket, RI Vindicating God Ministries, 2020), pp. 65-82; Edwards, Troy J. **Does God Kill?** (Pawtucket, RI Vindicating God Ministries, 2020), pp. 79-88.
6. Tertullian (160 to 220 AD) is said by historians to have expounded upon the truth concerning Scripture as a progressive revelation. One writer notes "Tertullian .... never receded from his belief in the unique authority of both the Old Testament and the New as inspired by God. He insisted, moreover, on a truth which is never without need of emphasis—the progressive revelation of the Holy Spirit." See Barry, George Duncan **The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture: A Study in the Literature of the First Five Centuries** (London: Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1919), p. 66
7. A gnostic leader in the 2nd century named Marcion had difficulty accepting the Old Testament as God's Word. This led him and his followers into many errors. As one author explains, "Marcion, by the admission of his opponents, was an able and honest man, however deeply he was mistaken. Had he and others like him been able to grasp the fact that the Old Testament contains only the record and the outcome of a multifarious, fragmentary, and progressive revelation,

they might have been saved from falling into false and Manichean views.” See Farrar, Frederic William **The Bible, Its Meaning and Supremacy** (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1897), p. 94

## **Chapter Two**

1. Pope, H. W. “How to Enjoy the Bible” in **Record of Christian Work, Volume 25** (East Northfield, MA: W. R. Moody, 1906), p. 406
2. Berg, J. F. **Great Discussion of the Origin, Authority and Tendency of the Bible** (Boston: J. B. Yerrington & Sons, 1854), p. 32
3. Guinness, Henry Grattan **The Approaching End of the Age Viewed in the Light of History, Prophecy and Science** (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1882), p. 2
4. Antrim, Eugene Marion **The Greatest Things in Religion: Being Studies in Some of the Christian Fundamentals with Sidelights on the “New Theologies”** (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1910), pp. 156, 157
5. Harris, Samuel **The Self-Revelation of God** (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons), p. 455, 456
6. Pope, “*How to Enjoy the Bible*,” p. 406
7. Vincent, J. H. (Editor) “Lessons about Joshua” in **The Church School Journal, Volume 7** (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1875), p. 6
8. Gore, Charles **Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation** (London: John Murray, 1904), p. 53

## **Chapter Three**

1. Parker, W. F. **Which: Spiritualism Or Christianity?: A Friendly Correspondence Between Moses Hull, Spiritualist, and W.F. Parker, Christian** (New York: Liberal and Scientific Publishing House, 1872), p. 34
2. Eyton, Robert **The Lord’s Prayer: Sermons** (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., LTD), p. 29
3. For a better understanding of statements concerning God’s hatred as well as the “imprecatory” psalms of David, see Edwards, Troy **Understanding Hebrew Idiomatic & Figurative Language: To Vindicate the Loving Character of God** (Pawtucket, RI: Vindicating God Ministries, 2023), pp. 33-42 and 103-114.
4. Simpson, Albert B. **The Lord for the Body: With Questions and Answers on Divine Healing** (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing Company, 1925), p. 102
5. Robertson, Frederick William **Life, Letters, Lectures, and Addresses** (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871), p. 627

## Chapter Four

1. Orr, James (Editor) **The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Volume 4** (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), p. 2695
2. Higbee, E. E. “The AntiChrist of Protestantism” in **Mercersburg Quarterly Review, Volume 14** (Philadelphia: S. R. Fisher & Co., 1867), p. 214
3. Trench, Richard Chenevix **Notes on the Parables of Our Lord** (Philadelphia: William Syckelmoore, 1878), p. 78
4. However, our Lord was not the first to identify Satan as the serpent in Genesis. For example, the author of the so-called, *Apocalypse of Moses*, written between 330 to 140 BC, wrote, “The devil answered through the mouth of the serpent .... “Fear not, for as soon as thou eatest of it, ye too shall be as God, in that ye shall know good and evil. But God perceived this that ye would be like Him, so he envied you and said, Ye shall not eat of it. Nay, do thou give heed to the plant and thou wilt see its great glory” (The Apocalypse of Moses 7:4, 5; 8:4-6). Nonetheless, Christ’s affirmation of Satan’s statement along with statements found in Rev. 12:9 and 20:2 allows us to speak authoritatively that Satan was the tempter of the first couple.
5. Weidner, Franklin **Biblical Theology of the Old Testament** (Philadelphia: H. R. Gardner, 1886), p. 170
6. Some have interpreted the words “from the beginning” as though Jesus was saying that Satan was a murderer from the time he was created. However, God creates only good things (Gen. 1:21). This is especially true of the anointed cherub who later became the devil. God says of him, “*Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee*” (Eze. 28:15).
7. Again, our Lord was not the first to identify this fact. The apocryphal book, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, written somewhere in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century centuries before Christ,<sup>2</sup> recognized Satan as the serpent and murderer of men: “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). While this book is noncanonical, it gives us a glimpse into the progressive understanding that the Jews had concerning a being called Satan.
8. Major, Henry **Notes of Scripture Lessons, Part 2** (Nottingham: H. Major, 1876), p. 81. Major writes, “A common belief among the Jews, that God punished persons for their parents' wickedness.” See also, Peloubet, Mary Abby Thaxter **Select Notes: A Commentary on the International Lessons, Volume 12** (Boston: W.A. Wilde and



Company, 1885), p. 177. Here we are told, “The Jewish error consisted in believing that all special afflictions were divine visitations for special sins (Job 4: 7; 8: 6), an opinion which was not confined to the Jews (Acts 28:4).”

9. Nicolaides, Archimandrites S. **An Evangelical and Exegetical Commentary upon Select Portions of the New Testament, Vol. I** (London: Longman & Co., 1860). See pp. 529-531 where the author explains how “the Pharisees admitted the doctrine of Metempsychosis, that is, they believed that the soul of man, after death, entered into another body, in order to be purified from sin.”

See also Fawcett, John **An Exposition of the Gospel According to St. John, Vol. II** (London: Hatchard & Co., 1860), p. 109.

10. “Note on Deut. 13:13” in E. W. Bullinger’s **Companion Bible Notes**, 1909, E-Sword edition.

11. Cobbin, Ingram **The Child’s Commentator on the Holy Scriptures, Volume 68** (London: Jackson, Walford and Hodder), p. 173

12. Macaulay, Thomas Babington **Macaulay’s Essays on Addison and Milton** (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1898), p. 80

## Chapter Five

1. Elizabeth, Charlotte **Principalities and Powers in Heavenly Places** (New York: John S. Taylor & Co., 1842), p. 42

2. Ormiston, James **The Satan of Scripture** (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1876), p. 4

3. Lucifer, now known as Satan, was certainly the influence behind the king of Babylon, and this is why God is addressing both the king and the evil spirit influencing him (Job 1:12-17; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 John 5:18-19).

4. Light-bearing is a characteristic reserved strictly for those connected to God who take on His character (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 58:8-11; Matt. 5:14-16; Luke 16:8; John 1:4-9; Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 John 2:10).

5. Ormiston, *The Satan*, p. 7

## Chapter Six

1. Clark, Douglas R.; Brunt, John C. (editors) **Introducing the Bible Volume I: The Old Testament and Intertestamental Literature**, p. 171

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8. See Exodus 13:2, 13, 15; 22:29-30; 34:20; Numbers 3:13, 13, 40-50; 8:16-18; 18:15; Romans 12:1.
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5. Pipenberg writes, "The most characteristic feature of the activity of the divine spirit in the world is unquestionably that by virtue of which it is represented as the agent of evil. In early Hebraism there is no reference, as there is in the Jewish and the Christian church, on the one hand, to good spirits, whose activity is always beneficent, and, on the other, to evil spirits, whose influence is always harmful. The same spirit of God is believed to act sometimes in the one way and sometimes in the other. Hebraism is thus as far removed from dualism as from pantheism .... Thus, in order to explain the discord that broke out between Abimelech and the inhabitants of Shechem, it is said, Jud. ix. 23, that God sent an evil spirit among them. The melancholy that takes possession of Saul is referred to the influence of an evil spirit coming from Jehovah, or of an evil spirit from God. This is the Hebrew standpoint with respect to evil spirits; they appear, not as personal beings independent of God, least of all as beings hostile to God, but as simple emanations or effects of the activity of God in the world." See Piepenbring, CH. **Theology of the Old Testament** (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1893), p. 158

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7. While refuting infidels who used Judges 9:23 as proof against the God of the Bible, one writer explained, “You again object to the book of Judges, because it states, that God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; but it is necessary to understand the idiom of Eastern languages, before these expressions can be criticised or appreciated. The want of this knowledge has caused you to suppose, that crimes and calamities are imputed to God in this book; but the Eastern languages, both ancient and modern, use phrases of this import on the subject of public calamities, whether they were famines, pestilences or war.” See Chichester, Edward **Deism Compared with Christianity; Being an Epistolary Correspondence, Vol. 2** (London: F. C. & J. Rivington, 1821), pp. 406, 407
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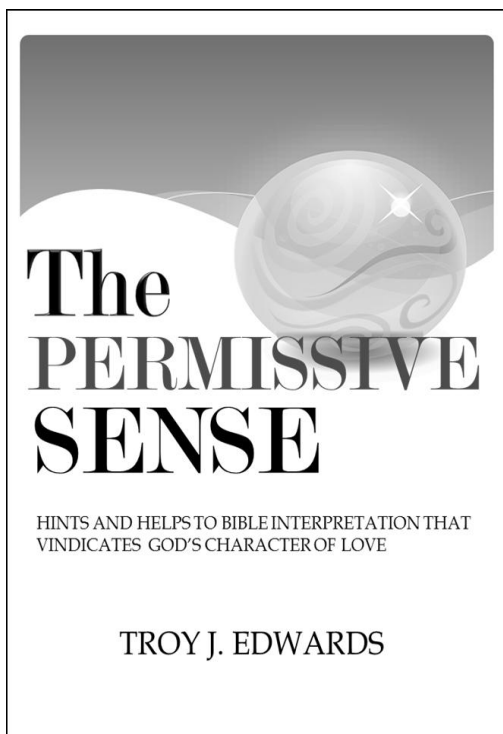
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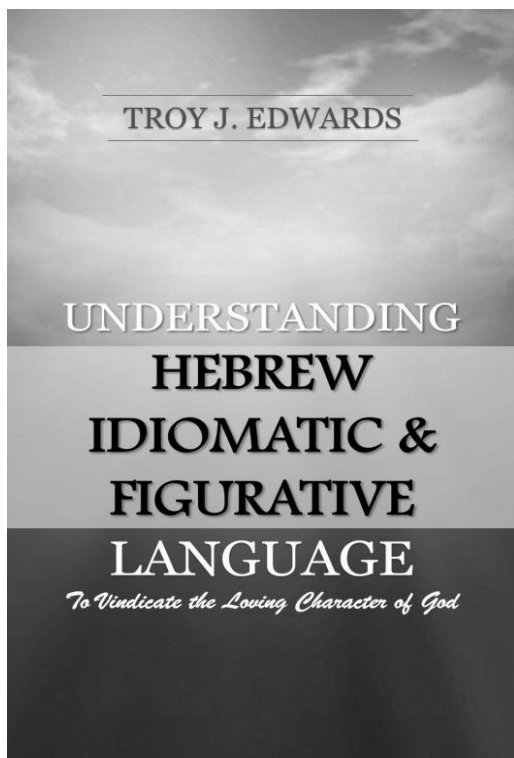
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