

God's War against Evil throughout the Ages

Lesson 2: Is God the Author of Evil? (Part 2)

Introduction: In our last lesson we thoroughly examined of Isaiah 45:7 and saw that does *not* teach that God is the active author of moral or physical evil. Isaiah 45:7 teaches that God claims responsibility for what happens in this universe due to having established moral and natural laws. However, those who make God the author of evil have found other Scripture to teach this false idea. In this lesson we will examine them and then establish what the Bible says is the true source of evil, thus taking a step in the direction of solving this “problem” or “mystery”.

I. When the principles Lesson 1 are understood then we are in a better position to interpret other passages of Scripture that appear to ascribe evil to God.

1. Example 1: “*Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? **Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?***” (Lam. 3:37-38)
 - a. The interpretation is found within the context:
 - b. ***It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. **For the Lord will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. **For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.******* (Lam. 3:22-33)
 - c. Other translations of Lam. 3:31 are, “*For the Lord does not give a man up for ever*” (Bible in Basic English), “*Jehovah does not give a man up for a very long time*” (New Simplified Bible), and “*For the Lord does not abandon anyone forever*” (New Living Translation).
 - d. *Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and **forsake us** so long time? Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. **But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.*** (Lam. 5:20-22)

- e. God causes grief or “brings about evil” by *casting off* (giving up, abandoning) those that reject Him; by forsaking, rejecting and leaving them unprotected and open to the consequences of their rebellion. This is how He exercises His wrath. God is not the *direct cause of evil in that He actively brings it about*.
 - f. Even in His “casting off” He does it unwillingly. People force God’s hand and He is left with no other choice.
2. Example 2: *Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.* (Amos 3:6-7)
- a. But God asks, “*You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*” (Amos 2:2-3)
 - b. Due to their constant sinning Israel was not in agreement with God and therefore was not walking with God. They had forsaken Him. After much pleading God is said to have forsaken them:
 - c. *Hear ye this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel. The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise: she is forsaken upon her land; there is none to raise her up.... For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live: But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought.... Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.* (Amos 5:1, 2, 4, 5, 14, 15)
 - d. Israel is being punished by God, not actively, but withdrawing His presence and protection (*forsaking* Israel). (see Lesson 1, Section IV.3.i & j, and notes 11 & 12 in relation to the “permissive sense” in Amos 3:6)
 - e. However, Israel is given an opportunity to turn this whole thing around by seeking and Him. If they return to Him then He will protect them.
 - f. God is the source of life (John 14:6; Acts 3:15; 1 John 1:1-2). His withdrawal means that Israel be open to death and its consequent destruction. Lack of life means death. Therefore, Israel is encouraged to turn back to the source of life.

- g. Notice the mercy of the Lord as shown in these passages: He does not do anything to Israel (the evil or disaster that He permits as a cause of their rebellion) without first warning them through His prophets, thus giving them a chance to repent.
 - h. He gives Israel a chance to turn back to Him so that He can be gracious to them and offer His hand of protection in spite of how they have treated Him. ***What a loving and gracious God!!!***
3. Example 3: *“Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, **I frame evil against you**, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.”* (Jer. 18:11)
- a. In the context of Jeremiah 18, God offers to refrain from “bringing” evil if the people would just repent. This shows that it is not the will or desire of God that people suffer evil in any form:
 - b. *At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, **I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.** And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.* (Jer. 18:7-10)
 - c. This is seen in other portions of Jeremiah as well:
 - d. *If so be they will hearken, and **turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil**, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings.* (Jer. 26:3)
 - e. *Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you.* (Jer. 26:13)
 - f. In other passages in Jeremiah we see what God is actually saying when He says that He will “frame” evil against them:

- g. *Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; **for the LORD hath rejected and forsaken** the generation of his wrath. For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the LORD: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; **which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart.** (Jer. 7:29-31)*
- h. *I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies. (Jer. 12:7)*
- i. *For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the LORD: **it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.** (Jer. 21:10)*
- j. God “frames evil” by removing His protection. However, it is actually due to God’s people removing themselves from under His protection:
- k. *For my people have committed two evils; **they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.** (Jer. 2:13)*
- l. ***Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, when he led thee by the way?** (Jer. 2:17)*
- m. ***Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee:** know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, **that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.** (Jer. 2:19)*
- n. *A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because **they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.** (Jer. 17:12-13)*
- o. Hence, we see that the “evil” that God is “framing” against the people is to remove His protection from them and allow them to reap what they have sown in a morally ordered universe.

4. Example 4: *“Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.”* (Job 2:9-10)
- a. It is not the purpose of this particular lesson to understand why Job suffered as he did but we will explore this in future lessons. In this lesson we simply want to examine the source of Job’s suffering.
 - b. The context: *“But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.”* (Job. 2:5-7)
 - c. As we move over to Job, we see who the true malignant spirit is behind the evil that is in the world. The Hebrews often attributed Satan’s works to God.
 - d. “The Jews before the Babylonish Captivity were accustomed to speak of God as the immediate author of all things good and bad; but after that, they believed that the world was governed by the intervention of angels, and especially that evil angels exerted their powers to the destruction of men.”¹ - Johann August Dathe
 - e. “Old Testament scholars help us by pointing out that attributing violent and destructive acts to God can be partly explained by the fact that the ancient Israelites had no concept of Satan until after the Baylonian exile. As a consequence of their strict monotheism, they attributed all things--life and death, sickness and health, blessing and cursing--to the intentional will and direct action of the sovereign Lord.”² – C. S. Cowles
 - f. How did Satan get access to Job? God removed His hand of protection from Job (for reasons that we will explore later):
 - g. *“Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that*

¹ Dathe, *translation of the Historical Books, Hals, 1784, 8vo*. As quoted in Twopeny, Richard **Dissertations on Some Parts of the Old and New Testaments which have been Supposed Unsuitable to the Divine Attributes** (London: C & J Riverton, 1824), p. 83

² Cowles, *Who is God?*, p. 46

he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.” (Job 1:10-12)

- h. Yet God is said to have been the direct cause of the evils that Job suffered: *“Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him **over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him**: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold.” (Job 42:11)*
- i. Here we see one of the best examples of how to interpret Scriptures that attribute any type evil to God. Scripture should always be understood as God *permitting* evil rather than *causing* it. The Bible always explains itself rather than contradicts itself. ***What some claim to be a contradiction is actually an explanation.***
- j. God is not the direct-active cause of any type of evil. He is only said to bring evil upon a person when He has lifted His hand of protection from them. We see from Job that Satan is the cause of evil, to include disaster, calamity, and sickness.

II. The Mystery of Evil Revealed

- 1. If we would stop looking to God as the source or responsible agent for evil then the “mystery” disappears. Theologians and philosophers have spent centuries wrestling with this “mystery”, but God has already revealed it to us:
 - a. *And now ye know **what withholdeth** that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he **who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way**. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of **Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders**, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (2 Thess. 2:6-10)*
 - b. *The **secret of evil** (lawlessness) is even now at work. But there is one who restrains the evil till he is taken out of the way. (2 Thess. 2:7; New Simplified Bible)*
 - c. There is no need to wrestle with “mysteries” when God has placed the answer within our grasp. The Bible connects the “mystery” of evil to Satan, thus taking away the so called problem and mystery.

- d. God desires that everyone, especially His own people, have knowledge of these so-called mysteries.
2. God is the One restraining, or rather, holding back the full consequences of evil. The day will come when God will loosen the restraints and allow Satan and evil to have full reign.
 - a. But the so-called “mystery” concerning evil has been revealed to the Christian. God has nothing to do with it. He is at war with it. Satan is the one behind evil.
 - b. Some wonder why an all-powerful God cannot stop evil. 2 Thess. 2:6-10 shows that God, in His love and mercy, is restraining the full consequences of the evil that *man* invites into this world, showing He is more powerful than the evil one.
 - c. Through great power and tender mercy He does not presently allow the full consequences of evil. He cannot stop all evil because man, who God gave an irrevocable dominion over the earth, continually invites in evil through his sin and rebellion (Gen. 1:26-28; Psalm 8:6. See also Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21; Luke 4:6).
 3. God “sending” strong delusion?
 - a. *And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* (2 Thess. 2:11-12)
 - b. How does the God of Truth send strong delusions? By no longer restraining or holding back the devil, the one who will actually bring delusion: *For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.* (2 Thess. 2:7)
 - c. God does not actively send any evil, be it deception, sickness, poverty, etc. This is the work of Satan. God often restrains or holds back the full consequences of man's rebellion. However, when He finally removes the restraints and allows the devil to have his way, God takes full responsibility as if He is the One that does it.
 - d. In lesson 1, we examined Isa. 45:7. When Isa. 45:7 is understood in the light of the above truth then we are able to interpret this and other passages better. Satan is the actual agent of darkness (Luke 22:53; Acts 26:18; Col. 1:12-14; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; 6:14). He is also known as the “evil” or “wicked” one (Matt. 6:13; 13:19, 38; John 17:15; Eph. 6:16; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 John 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19). Therefore,

people suffer the consequences of darkness and evil when they have been “delivered unto Satan” (1 Cor. 5:5; see also Matt. 18:34).

- e. When men persist in wanting to do evil, after God has done everything He can in His love and mercy to get man to change his course of action, God has to finally allow man to receive what man himself has invited to come into his life:
- f. *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. 2:10-11)*
- g. Notice that men refused to receive the love of the truth. Men refused to be saved. This is man exercising his free will and the authority that God delegated to him.
- h. God, through His mercy and love, protects men from all that man himself invites into his life. But after man continually rejects the love of God, God has to finally honor the wishes of rebellious men and allow them to have what they want.
- i. “St Paul teaches that *God makes sin work out its own punishment*. In Rom. i. 24, 25, he represents the loathsome vice of the Pagan world as a Divine chastisement for its long continued idolatry: “*For this cause God sends effectual delusion*” is parallel to “*For this cause God gave them up to vile passions.*” In each case the result is inevitable, and comes about by what we now call a natural law. That persistent rejection of truth destroys the sense of truth and results in fatal error, is an ethical principle and a fact of experience as certain as any in the world. Now he who believes in God as the Moral Ruler of the Universe, knows that its laws are the expression of His will.”³
- j. Most of all, this passage demonstrates that God is not the originator of evil and does not want evil but is actually at war with evil and has a plan to destroy it.

Conclusion: All of these as well as other points will be further expounded upon as we delve further into the Scriptures concerning God’s war with evil. However, it should be noted that Satan, and not God, is the father of sin (John 8:44). As we begin to understand the true character of God and the true nature of Satan, we will begin to have a better understanding for the reason for evil and its existence in the universe.

³ Findlay, George Gillanders (editor) **The Epistles to the Thessalonians** (Cambridge: University Press, 1904), p. 152