

God Destroys Those Who Destroy His Temple

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

Recently I was asked by someone to explain this passage in the light of the Biblical truth advocated by our ministry that God, due to His divine nature of harmless love (1 John 4:16; Rom. 13:8-10; Heb. 7:26; John 10:10; 1 Pet. 5:7-10), does not *literally* or *directly* (by the use of His omnipotent power) bring destruction upon anyone.

We are to always keep in mind that the Bible is the inspired and infallible written Word of God. Nevertheless, because it comes to us from a time and culture far removed from our own then much of it requires explanation and interpretation (Prov. 1:6; Luke 24:25-27; Acts 8:27-34; 2 Pet. 1:20).

God chose to have His Word communicated via men who were part of an ancient Hebrew culture. All cultures, both past and present, have *idioms*. Idioms words that are unique to a particular language, culture and group of people. The ancient Hebrew people were no exception. Therefore, it is important to understand the unique idioms that were present among the culture and expressed through the writings of God's servants. One of the numerous idioms among the Hebrews was the *permissive idiom*. The late Hebrew scholar, Robert Young, described this particular idiom while Commenting on 2 Chron. 25:16. He explained that the passage is, "...agreeably to the well-known scripture idiom whereby what God allows he is said to do."¹

Though God spoke through the language and idioms of an ancient culture He also took into consideration the fact that His message would someday be studied by numerous languages and cultures in different ages that might not be familiar with ancient Hebraism. Therefore He always ensured that His meanings were explained in other portions of Scripture.

For example, God complains to Satan concerning Job, "...*thou movedst me against him, to **destroy him** without cause*" (Job 2:3b). However, the careful reader understands that it was Satan who actually brought the destruction upon Job (Job 1:10-12). While the divinely inspired writer of Job rendered God's statement to Satan in the permissive idiom of the Hebrews, the context of Job makes understanding the truth that His statement was *permissive* rather than *causative*. He is merely said to do that which He *permitted* Satan to do.

A study of the Bible shows us that God is only said to destroy when He removes His protective presence from the recipient of destruction (Psalm 145:20; Isa. 64:6-7; 43:25-28; 2 Kings 13:22-

¹ Young, Robert **A Commentary on the Holy Bible, as Literally and Idiomatically Translated out of the Original Languages** (New York: Fullarton, McNab & Co., 1868), p. 315

23; Prov. 1:24-28; Hosea 5:6). He is said to destroy when He “gives people up” and allows their enemies to destroy them (Isa. 34:2; 2 Chron. 12:5-7; Hosea 11:8-9; Eze. 21:31). Therefore, when reading any Bible passage, especially in the Old Testament, that appears to teach that God personally engaged in destructive behavior, it is best to interpret it in the *permissive* rather than in the *causative*.

Thankfully some Bible translators recognize this truth and render certain passages to reflect it. For example, in Isaiah 64:7 we read, “.... *for thou hast hid thy face from us, and **hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.***” Isaiah complains that God has *consumed them*. However, Isaiah also complain that God “hid His face.” The “hiding” of God’s face is defined in Scripture as **the removal of His divine protection**, thus allowing whatever forces of evil already poised to destroy to have their way (Num. 6:24-27; Deut. 31:16-18; Isa. 59:1-2). Therefore, the New Century Version is correct in rendering Isa. 64:7 as, “.... *That is because you have turned away from us and have **let our sins destroy us.***”

The Hebrew Idioms Carry Over into the New Testament

Many Bible students believe that gaining knowledge of the original Greek language is sufficient for interpreting and understanding the New Testament. Yet, though the New Testament is written in the Greek rather than the Hebrew, it was still written from a *Hebraic* perspective. Thus all of the cultural idioms found in the Old Testament carry over into the New.

Ignorance of this truth has led to grave misunderstandings of God’s character and actions. One of several scholars have noted that,

“.... the idiom of the New Testament not unfrequently departs from classical Greek, and follows the Hebrew. An interpreter who neglects this will fall into great difficulties, and commit many surprising and almost ridiculous mistakes.”²

I would add to the above statement that such surprising and difficult mistakes often lead one to mischaracterize God and paint a false picture of Him. In order to avoid misrepresenting God as a harsh destroyer, one needs to recognize that the permissive idiom (or “idiom of permission” as others refer to it) is just as frequent in the New Testament as well as in the Old.

For example, our Lord Jesus taught us to pray, “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*” (Matt. 6:13). But does God actually lead people into temptation? James tells us, “.... *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*” (James 1:13b). God’s Word **never** contradicts itself. Therefore, the only explanation is that our Lord taught using the idiomatic expressions of the Jews. As one scholar stated, “Lead us not, in the Hebrew idiom, signifies ‘Suffer or abandon us not.’”³ Another commentator writes, “A Hebraism, according to which God is said to do that which he permits to be done. The meaning is, preserve us from

² Stuart, Moses **Elements of Biblical criticism and interpretation** (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1827), p. 99

³ Davidson, David **The Comprehensive Pocket Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments with Explanatory Notes by David Davidson** (Edinburgh: James Brydone, 1848), p. 619

temptation; permit us not to fall into temptation.”⁴ Hence, this is ample proof that the Greek New Testament requires knowledge of Hebrew idioms in order to fully comprehend it.

“Him God Shall Destroy”

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

In the Old Testament God said concerning His house, or temple, “... *and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight*” (2 Chron. 7:20b). The **Contemporary English Version** renders it, “*I will desert this temple where I said I would be worshiped*” and the **Good News Translation** reads, “*I will abandon this Temple that I have consecrated as the place where I am to be worshiped.*”

When God forsakes or abandons His temple then that is the removal of His protection, to which He permits those enemies already poised to destroy to have their way:

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

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

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

Again other translations make the permissive sense of these passages clearer: “*The Lord rejected his altar and deserted his holy Temple; He **allowed** the enemy to tear down its walls*” (Good News Translation); “*The Lord abandoned his altar and his temple; he **let** Zion's enemies capture her fortresses*” (Contemporary English Version); “*He has **allowed** our enemies to tear down the walls of our temple and our palaces*” (Unlocked Dynamic Version).

This same pattern by which God is said to destroy, which is by the loss of His protection over the sinning one rather than to directly inflict, continues into the New Testament. While the Old Testament Jews built an external temple, the New Testament reveals that God's temple are the

⁴ Paige, Lucious Robinson **A Commentary on the New Testament, Volume 1** (Boston: Benjamin B. Mussey, 1849) p. 77

physical bodies of those who follow and serve Christ (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:14-16; Eph. 2:21-22; John 2:19-22). In the same epistle in which we are warned that God would destroy those who destroy His temple we learn how church rebels are disciplined:

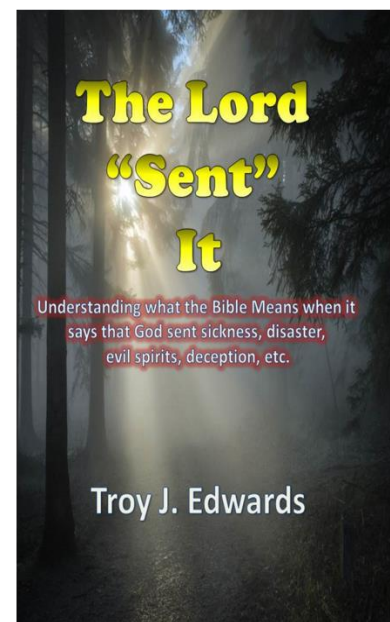
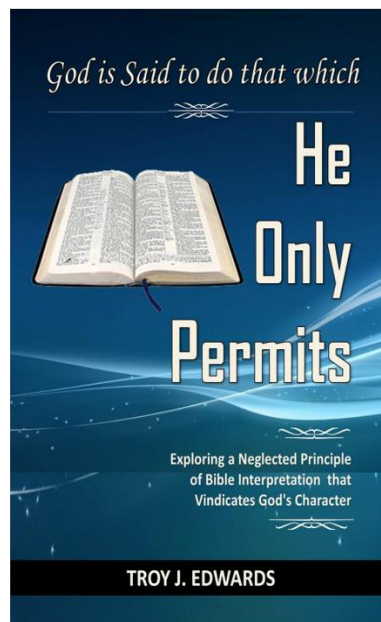
To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Cor. 5:5)

Just as we see in the Old Testament that God does not destroy directly but by no longer protecting the offender and allowing their enemies to kill them, the same principle applies to the New Testament temple defilers. God will no longer protect them from the consequences of their own destructive behavior (see Rom. 1:24-28). The “Unlocked Dynamic Bible” interpretation of 1 Cor. 3:17 brings this out:

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

Therefore, with all such passages, always keep in mind that God’s primary method of destruction is “permissive” and not “causative” in the sense that He will no longer protect a person and will allow them to suffer the inevitable consequences of their sin.

For a greater understanding of this subject we highly recommend the following books:



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