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## God's Tests

By David Servant

### TEN

## Satan—Tool of God's Judgment

In this chapter, let's take one final look at the subject of God's restraining power over Satan. It's very important that we understand how God sometimes uses Satan to bring about His discipline or judgment upon the disobedient—a concept which Scripture affirms.

Let's first consider two interesting Old Testament examples. The first one is found in Judges 9 and 10.

You perhaps remember the story of Gideon, and how God used him to defeat the Midianites with an army of only 300 men. You may not remember that Gideon became the father of 72 sons by several wives and at least one concubine. After Gideon died, his concubine's son, named Abimelech, along with the full support of the people of his hometown (Shechem), formed a conspiracy and massacred 70 of Gideon's sons. Only Jotham, Gideon's youngest, escaped.

God, of course, was not pleased with Abimelech's and the Shechemite's treatment of Gideon's sons, especially since Gideon had fought on their behalf against the Midianites, resulting in 40 years of peace for Israel. Scripture says that God is not mocked, and whatever a man sows that shall he also reap (see Gal 6:7). God guarantees it. Let's read then how God fulfilled His guarantee in this situation:

Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years. Then *God sent an evil spirit* between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, in order that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubball [Gideon] might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers (Judg. 9:22-24, emphasis added).

The end of the story is that Abimelech slaughtered all the people of Shechem and shortly thereafter he himself was killed in battle—all because of an “evil spirit,” which “God sent.”

The question is, does God have evil spirits to send? Apparently, yes, because that is what the Bible says. Keep in mind, however, that the Bible didn't say that God sent an evil spirit

who was His friend and who lived with Him in heaven. No, if we consider the entire context of Scripture, it would seem safer to conclude that God, who possesses sovereign control over Satan and his demons, permitted an evil spirit to gender strife between two parties in order to bring judgment upon them. And why does Scripture say this evil spirit was sent *by God*? Because the evil spirit came as a direct result of God's sovereign will to judge a group of wicked people. God used an evil spirit to execute His judgment.

### Saul's Evil Spirit

Another incident illustrating God's use of Satan as a tool of His judgment had to do with Saul. As the first king of Israel, he was hand-picked by God and assumed his duties with humility and sincerity. Soon, however, Saul committed some serious sins, which disqualified him for enjoying "a kingdom that would endure" (1 Sam. 13:14).

Thereafter, King Saul's attitude and actions degenerated, and he disobeyed God again. When it became clear to him that David, the young giant-slayer, would be his replacement, he grew jealous. Consequently, we read that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and then an *evil spirit from God*" began to terrorize him (1 Sam. 16:14, emphasis added).

Was that evil spirit actually a spirit from God? Again, in light of the rest of Scripture, it seems more reasonable to conclude that it was one of Satan's evil spirits, permitted by God to afflict Saul in hopes of bringing him to repentance.

Note that God also demonstrated His mercy toward Saul by giving young David an ability to play anointed music that would bring temporary deliverance to Saul's tormented mind. Scripture says, "Whenever the evil spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him" (1 Sam. 16:23). God was in effect saying to Saul, "I love you and want you to be free from torment, but you must repent of your selfish jealousy."

In any case, from these two Old Testament examples we can see how God sometimes uses Satan as a tool of His discipline or judgment upon the disobedient.

### A New Testament Example

One New Testament example that reveals this same principle is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In the church in Corinth, a man was living in an immoral relationship with his stepmother. He was still being welcomed by the church, however. Paul instructed the Corinthian believers:

In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus...*deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved* in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:4-5, emphasis added).

Notice that they were to deliver the man over to *Satan* for the destruction of his flesh. Scripture often credits Satan as being the one behind sickness (see, for example, Acts 10:38). Also notice, however, that the purpose behind the disciplinary action was so that the man's spirit would "be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." That is, when the man found his body being assailed with sickness, he would hopefully come to his senses and repent of his sin.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A similar example is found in 1 Tim. 1:19-20.

Once again we see that God used Satan as a tool of His discipline upon a disobedient person.

If sickness assails us, should we immediately conclude that God is trying to discipline us? Not necessarily. Sickness can occur for reasons other than God's judgment, and we'll discuss those other reasons later on. It certainly is wise, however, to do a spiritual examination of our lives any time sickness strikes in order to make sure we have not opened the door to God's discipline by our disobedience.

### Opening the Door to Satan?

In regard to this subject, I've often heard Christians and preachers make the statement that we can "open the door to the devil through disobedience" or claim that, "when we disobey, it puts us out in the devil's territory where he can afflict us." Both of these phrases are frequently used by those who want to emphasize the goodness of God. Unfortunately, however, they have been taken to an extreme, to the point where in some people's minds, God's discipline and judgment have been annulled.

If you have any doubts that the God of the New Testament is every bit a holy Judge as the God of the Old (they are one and the same), just read the book of Revelation. Yes, God is good, merciful, full of compassion, and longsuffering, but when His mercy is repeatedly spurned, ultimately His judgment falls. The New Testament teaches that it is a *terrifying* thing to fall into the hands of the living God (see Heb. 10:31). The apostle Paul wrote, "Behold then the kindness *and severity* of God" (Rom. 11:22, emphasis added).

So does God actively discipline and judge sinful people, or do they only "open the door to the devil" (apart from God's sovereignty)? Let's look some more at what the Bible says, and just to pacify those who insist that we only use the New Testament, we will.

If any man destroys the temple of God, *God will destroy him*, for the temple of God is holy (1 Cor. 3:17, emphasis added).

Nothing is said about the devil destroying anyone. Paul wrote, "*God will destroy him.*" We know from other scriptures that God *might* destroy that person by allowing the devil to destroy him, but the point is that the destruction occurs because of God's judgment.

Speaking of a wicked woman whom He calls Jezebel, Jesus said in the book of Revelation:

And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, *I will cast her upon a bed*, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And *I will kill her children with pestilence*, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and the hearts; and I will give to each of you according to your deeds (Rev. 2:21-23, emphasis added).

Notice that Jesus takes the credit for the killing of her children (I assume her "spiritual children,"—her band of disciples). He declared, "I will kill her children."

Scripture says of King Herod, whom we have mentioned in an earlier chapter:

And immediately *an angel of the Lord* struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died (Acts 12:23, emphasis added).

The devil wasn't anywhere near this one. It was an angel of the Lord who struck Herod so that he died.

Jesus Himself said:

And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear; fear the One who after *He has killed* has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him (Luke 12:4-5, emphasis added)!

Notice it was *God* who killed and *God* who might cast someone into hell. Some actually claim that Jesus was speaking of the devil in this passage, affirming that Jesus' disciples should fear Satan because he kills and casts into hell! The Bible is quite clear, however, that God is the One who casts people into hell, not the devil (see Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14). Jesus was speaking of God, His Father, as the One to fear, because He is the One who kills and casts into hell.

James 4:12 warns:

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save *and to destroy* (Jas. 4:12, emphasis added).

All of this is to say that we need to be cautious that we don't emphasize the saving mercy of God to the extreme of negating His destroying wrath. From a biblical standpoint, one really can't believe in God's mercy without also believing in His wrath, because His wrath is the very thing from which we are saved:

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him (Rom. 5:9; see also 1 Thes. 1:10).

For further proof that the God of the New Testament actively judges the disobedient, see Acts 13:8-12; 2 Thes. 1:6; 1 Tim. 5:24; 2 Tim. 4:14; Heb. 13:4; 2 Pet. 2:1-9 and Jude 5.

We could look at hundreds of other scriptures which prove that God is a God of judgment, but I'm sure you're convinced. And there are no scriptures that speak of anyone "opening the door to the devil through disobedience." The truth is, people can open the door to God's discipline or judgment through disobedience, and God may use the devil to discipline or judge those persons.

God has used, is using, and will use Satan to accomplish His own divine purposes. He is indeed sovereign. Fear Him!

The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; and His *sovereignty rules over all* (Ps. 103:19, emphasis added).