www.ShepherdServe.org
You are welcome to distribute printed copies of this document, or copy and paste this document to distribute via email, as long as the document is unaltered and kept in its *entirety* (including copyright notices), and is not sold for profit. However, if you wish to post this material on your website or anywhere else online, you must first contact us to get permission. ©2007 by David Servant

God's Tests
By David Servant

TEN
Satan—Tool of God's Judgment

Let's take one more look at the subject of God's restraining power over Satan. Through this chapter I want to help you understand how God uses Satan to bring about His discipline or judgment in the lives of the disobedient.

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 three hundred men. You may not remember that Gideon became the father of seventy-two 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 home town (Shechem), formed a conspiracy and massacred seventy 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 forty years of peace for Israel. The Bible says that God is not mocked, and whatever a man sows that shall he also reap (see Gal 6:7). God guarantees it. Read then how God brought His guarantee to pass 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? No, not from heaven, but He does have sovereign control over Satan and his demons. As a result, He can sovereignly permit an evil spirit to gender strife between two parties in order to bring judgment upon them. 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.

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 having "a kingdom that would endure" (1 Sam. 13:14).

Thereafter, King Saul's attitude and actions decayed, and he disobeyed God again. When it became clear to him that David, the young giant-slayer, was going to be his replacement, Saul grew jealous. Consequently, the Bible states 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? 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 order to bring him to repentance. God also demonstrated His mercy toward Saul by giving young David an ability to play anointed music that would bring 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."

From these two Old Testament examples, we can see how God 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 step-mother. Yet he was still attending church, and nobody was doing anything about it. Paul instructs 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 delivered the man over to *Satan* for the destruction of his flesh. Satan is often credited as being the one behind sickness (see Acts 10:38). Also notice that the purpose behind the disciplinary action was so that the man's spirit would "be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Hopefully, when the man found his body being assailed with sickness, he would come to his senses and repent of his sin.[1]

Once more we see God using Satan as a tool of His discipline upon a disobedient person. God is sovereign.

If sickness assails us, should we immediately conclude that God is trying to discipline us? No, sickness can occur for reasons other than God's judgment. 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.

---

[1] A similar example is found in 1 Tim. 1:19-20.

Opening the Door to Satan?

Is it scriptural to say that we "open the door to the devil through disobedience"? Is it scriptural to say that "when we disobey, it puts us out in the devil's territory where the devil can afflict us"? Both of these sayings are frequently used by those who want to emphasize the goodness of God. Unfortunately, they have now been taken to an extreme, to the point where God's discipline and judgment have been annulled in some people's minds.

People who take those ideas even further will begin to proclaim that "God doesn't send anyone to hell—they send themselves." They will laugh at the idea that a hurricane or a drought might be judgment from God. I hope you can see, from a scriptural standpoint, that such a "hyper-loving" understanding of God at the neglect of His holiness and judgment is unbalanced.

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 begins. The Bible says 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).

Does God discipline and judge sinful people, or do they "open the door to the devil" (apart from God's sovereignty)? Let's look 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 here about the devil destroying anyone. Paul said, "*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 comes because of God's judgment.

Speaking of the 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).

Once again, notice that Jesus takes the credit for the killing of her children (I assume her "spiritual children,"—her band of disciples).

Speaking of King Herod, which we have mentioned previously, the Scripture says:

> 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. The only way to try to wriggle out of this scripture is to say that it refers to the devil—that he is the one who kills and casts into hell. If that's the case, then we must believe that God wants us to fear the devil, even though we are instructed to resist him by faith, the opposite of fear (see 1 Pet. 5:9). Besides that, the Bible is clear that God is the One who casts people into hell, not the devil (see Rev. 19:20; 20:10,14).

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).

Is it possible that some have emphasized the saving mercy of God to the extreme of negating His destroying wrath? From a biblical standpoint, you really can't believe in one without the other, because God's wrath is what we are saved from:

> 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).

You may also want to also examine 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 for further proof that the God of the New Testament actively judges the disobedient.

We could look at hundreds of other scriptures that prove that God is a God of judgment, but I'm sure you're convinced. Yet 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 for His own divine purposes. God is sovereign. I think that you see it! Good!

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