

## God uses Satan and his servants, angels and men

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God is Sovereign over all and permits the evil in the world. I will comment on that later, but will begin with cases where God took the initiative and actively used the enemy. I will discuss them in chronological order.

### 1) Job: Job 1:6-8, 2:1-3.

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ So Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.’ Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?’”

“Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ So Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.’ Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause.’” [‘sons of God’ is a translation of the Hebrew phrase *‘bene haElohim’*, which wherever it is used in the Old Testament evidently refers to high-ranking angelic beings.]

It is clear that God took the initiative and provoked that contest with Satan, even though God Himself said that it was “without cause”: Job had not done anything to deserve what happened to him. Why God would do such a thing has puzzled and troubled God’s people ever since. I find the answer in Job’s own words: “I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You” (42:5).

By God’s own evaluation, Job was the best ‘pupil’ He had on earth. When you are the ‘best’ in any area, you tend to stagnate. There is no one from whom you may learn, in order to improve, you are at the top; it is up to others to learn from you. God saw that Job had the potential to grow, to climb spiritually, but he had stagnated, he was the ‘best’. It was Job’s theology, his doctrinal ‘package’, that was stopping his growth. It was a ‘package’ that was shared by his three friends. So God used Satan to smash that package. It was a dreadful process, and our tendency is to feel sorry for Job, but God’s purpose was vindicated. Job grew, he climbed spiritually! God moved Job up to a higher level of spiritual understanding, giving him a direct revelation of Himself.

(The three friends, plus Elihu, got in on the privilege. There is a principle here: what God teaches us we should share with others.) And God gave him twice what he had before.

## **2) Saul: 1 Samuel 16:14.**

“Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him” (AV).

The translation of the Jewish Publication Society agrees with “evil”, but changes “troubled” to ‘terrified’. The NKJV changes “evil” to ‘distressing’. The NIV keeps “evil”, but has a footnote suggesting ‘injurious’. The Hebrew word here can refer to both affliction and moral evil. In any case, it appears that over time Saul became demonized. When he ordered the massacre of 85 priests, 84 of which were innocent, he was clearly under demonic control (1 Samuel 22:18).

The question remains: why would God do something like that, the more so since He Himself had chosen Saul to be the first king of Israel? Chapters 13 and 15 (1 Samuel) give the reasons why God rejected Saul as king and why God’s Spirit left him. But why send the evil spirit? I can only guess, but I imagine that verses 16-23 (1 Samuel 14) provide the answer: God used that means to introduce David into Saul’s household; and I further imagine that the point of Saul’s reign was to prepare Israel for David. As to how an evil spirit could be in Heaven, please see **4)** below.

## **3) David: 2 Samuel 24:1, 1 Chronicles 21:1.**

“Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah.’”

“Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.”

So who was it; God, or Satan? Since God is sovereign, He evidently used Satan, just like He did with Job. In the context David told Joab to command the numbering, and Joab was not happy. He knew that it was a bad idea. “Nevertheless, the king’s word prevailed against Joab.” Since God’s purpose was to punish Israel, He gave David three options; he had to choose one of the three. He chose the third one, which was to have three days of plague. The Text says that God killed 70,000 men. Presumably they were men who had rebelled against God and were having a negative effect upon other people.

Before going on, I want to comment on a ‘problem’. With reference to the first option, we have an apparent discrepancy between 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. Samuel says “seven years of famine” while Chronicles says “three years of famine”. In Chronicles there is a parallelism: three years . . . three months . . . three days; in

Samuel the first 'three' becomes 'seven'. I invite attention to the precise wording of the Text. First, 2 Samuel 24: 13: "So Gad came to David and told him; and he said to him: 'Shall seven years of famine come to you . . . or shall you flee three months before your enemies . . . or shall there be three day's plague . . . ?'" Next, 1 Chronicles 21:11-12 "So Gad came to David and said to him, 'Thus says the LORD: "Choose for yourself, either three years of famine, or three months to be defeated by your foes . . . or else for three days . . . the plague . . . ."' " Chronicles says that the LORD said 'three years'. Samuel says that Gad said 'seven years'. I conclude that what the LORD said was indeed 'three' years. I suppose that Gad got carried away and imported the 'seven' from the famine in Egypt under Joseph.

#### 4) Ahab: 2 Chronicles 18:18-21.

"Then *Micaiah* said, 'Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing on His right hand and His left. And the LORD said, "Who will persuade Ahab king of Israel to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?" So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, "I will persuade him". The LORD said to him, "In what way?" So he said, "I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets". And *the LORD* said, "You shall persuade *him* and also prevail; go out and do so".'"

Here the LORD clearly used an evil spirit, but how could that evil spirit be in heaven before God's throne? And why does the Text refer to God's hands, right and left? How is that information relevant to the account? If God furnished that information to Micaiah, He did so for a reason. Did you know that God has a right hand and a left hand? And how can you sit on a throne without a body? When God said: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26), might that have included the body? However that may have been, I suggest that Matthew 25:31-33 give us the necessary clue.

"When the Son of the Man comes in His glory,<sup>1</sup> and all the holy angels with Him,<sup>2</sup> then He will sit on His throne of glory. And all the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And the sheep He will place on His right, but the goats on His left." [It is clear that the King is dealing with individuals here; nations are made up of people, and each person will be evaluated individually.]

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<sup>1</sup> The Lord Jesus uses "the coming of the Son of the Man" to refer to both the Rapture and the Second Advent.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps 4% of the Greek manuscripts omit "holy" (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.). From Revelation 5:11 it appears that the holy angels are well over 100 million.

Verse 34 makes clear that the sheep are God's servants, and they are on His right side. Verse 41 makes clear that the goats are Satan's servants, and they are on His left side. Going back to Micaiah, I conclude that Satan and his servants, other high-ranking fallen angels (remember Job), were on God's left side, and it was one of them who offered to do the dirty work.

**5) Habakkuk.** In 1:2-4 Habakkuk complains that evil is rampant in Judah, and God is doing nothing about it. In 1:6 God answers that "indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans", and they will punish Judah. But Habakkuk finds that to be difficult to understand; how can God use the Chaldeans who are worse even than Judah? The answer is that God uses evil to punish evil, that will be punished in its turn. I will say more about that presently.

God used Assyria to punish the northern kingdom of Israel. Then God used Babylon to punish Assyria and the southern kingdom of Judah. Then God used Medo-Persia to punish Babylon. Then God used Greece to punish Medo-Persia. Then God used Rome to punish Greece. That sort of thing, on a much smaller scale, happens all around the world, all the time.

**6) Judas Iscariot:** Luke 22:3-4, John 13:27,30.

"Then Satan entered Judas (the one surnamed Iscariot), who was numbered among the Twelve. So he went off and conferred with the chief priests and officers about how he might betray Him to them." [Note that Judas acted under satanic inspiration.]

"And after the sop, then Satan entered into him. Whereupon Jesus says to him, 'What you are doing, do quickly!' So having received the sop, immediately he went out. And it was night."

As we know from verse two (John 13), Satan had already planted the idea in Judas' head/heart, but at this point he enters the man—Judas wasn't just demonized, he was satanized! Evidently Satan required permission to do this, and giving the sop was the signal; Jesus gave him the go-ahead. Obviously Satan had to be there, in that upper room! (If he was in that upper room, why can't he be in your church? Any Judases in your church?) I take it that Satan entered Judas to make sure that he would carry through with the plan. Although to the disciples it would appear that Jesus was addressing Judas, I rather suspect that He was actually addressing Satan, since it was Satan who would now control the man's thoughts. He orders him to get on with it; that is right, Jesus gave Satan an order, and Satan obeyed.

In John 17:12, praying to the Father, Jesus said, “I protected those whom You gave me, and not one of them was lost except the son of perdition, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” If the Scripture was being fulfilled, then it was part of God’s Plan. God used Satan to make sure that Judas played his part.

In passing, in Hebrew usage (Jesus, a Jew among Jews, was presumably speaking Hebrew here) a ‘son’ of something is characterized by that something; so a ‘son of perdition’ is characterized by lostness; the Scripture in question would be part of the Old Testament and hence written long before the person was born. (I have not been able to locate a clear text to that effect, but there are indirect ones.)

## 7) The Beast: Revelation 13:5-8.

“And he was given a mouth speaking great things, that is, blasphemy; and he was given authority to make war forty-two months. So he opened that mouth of his in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, those who dwell in Heaven.<sup>1</sup> And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given him over every tribe and language and ethnic nation. All who dwell on the earth will do obeisance to him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slaughtered from the foundation of the world.

I take it that in verses 5 and 7 it is God who gives the authority—this is part of the Plan. Authority to conquer the saints has to come from God. About the slaughtered Lamb, 1 Peter 1:20 makes clear that it was actually before the foundation of the world. God knew what was going to happen before He created the human race, the terrible price He would have to pay, but He went ahead anyway.

Those are the cases where God took the initiative and actively used the enemy that have occurred to me. There may be others. As I said at the beginning, God is Sovereign over all and permits the evil in the world. So why does He do that? He uses evil to punish evil, but He also uses evil to restrain evil. Why do evil people not do even more evil than they do? Because they are afraid of the consequences; if there is more than one organized crime group in a given city, they each inhibit the crime that the other perpetrates. But the prior question remains: why does God permit evil at all? I offer the following possible explanation.

While the Sovereign Creator walked this earth in the body of Jesus, He declared that the Father is looking for people who will worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). The Father “is looking” for such people. It may be that we have here a window on the reason why God created a race such as ours—persons in His image with the capacity to choose. God “is looking” for something, which means that He

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<sup>1</sup> Compare 1 Corinthians 3:16. We are the ‘temple’ of God; those who dwell in Heaven are His tabernacle.

does not have it, at least not automatically, nor in sufficient quantity. I take it that He wants to be appreciated for who He is, but to have meaning such appreciation cannot come from robots—it has to be voluntary. So He created a type of being with that capacity, but He had to take the risk that such a being would choose not to appreciate Him. In passing, love that is not reciprocated is a frustrated love.

Unfortunately, most human beings make the negative choice, and with that negative choice come all sorts of negative consequences. **Attention please!** For God's purpose in creating such a race not to be frustrated, both He and we must live with the consequences of our choices. God must permit the consequences of our evil choices! The consequences of sin are like a two-way street: we spend our lives being victimized by the consequences of other people's sins, and victimizing them with the consequences of our sins. (I may complain that I receive far more than I give, but that does not change the fact.)

Ever since Adam, human beings are born with an inclination toward sin (in order to survive, a baby must be self-centered, and that characteristic turns us into sinners, since self is at the center of sin), so for someone to choose to appreciate God is definitely not automatic, nor even easy. No one can reasonably accuse God of having 'stacked the deck' in His own favor, of 'buying votes'—He seems to have done just the opposite. If a human being, against his natural inclination, chooses to appreciate God, then He receives what He is looking for. "In spirit and truth" presumably means that it cannot be faked, cannot be forced, cannot be merely physical, cannot be merely emotional (though both body and emotions can, and often will, be utilized). Please see Matthew 23:8-10, where Jesus prohibits any attempt to control someone else's spiritual life.