

God Utilizes The Enemy

by Don Rogers

Why does God permit Satan and evil spirits to continue their work?

In His sovereignty, God chose to give both the angels and mankind free wills to make choices. Both angels and mankind fell when they chose their own will instead of God's will. God knew the risks of entrusting freedom to His creatures, but He also knew that relationships and love could only exist through the freedom of the will. Love is a choice.

Unfortunately, freedom allowed sin to enter the picture and produce suffering and death. Sin also gives Satan an opportunity in peoples' lives. Sin allows Satan to rule for the time being upon the earth. But sin and Satan cannot stop God's will from being accomplished. In fact, the Lord can take anything and use it to accomplish His purposes. We see in the scriptures how the Lord uses sin and its consequences to demonstrate to mankind their need to have God in their lives. He uses our enemy to get our attention as well. Satan may think that he is working out his own agenda, but he and his hosts accomplish God's purposes in spite of their lies and rebellion.

The scriptures give us a number of instances where God permits an evil spirit to work in a person's life. We are going to examine three ways God uses their activity. Let us examine the first reason:

I. God uses evil spirits to dispense JUDGMENT.

They are permitted to work in the lives of those who have brought condemnation upon themselves.

A. Abimelech – Judges 9:23 – He was the son of Gideon's concubine. When Gideon died, he had an opportunity to ascend to power and rule Israel. He convinced the men of Shechem to support him in getting rid of 70 brothers. Only Jothan, the youngest brother survived. Jothan later pronounced what could be called a prophetic curse upon

Abimelech and the town of Shechem. After Abimelech had reigned three years, God permitted an evil spirit to start stirring up hatred between Abimelech and the people of Shechem. A man named Gaal convinced the people that they should not serve Abimelech. So, Abimelech attacked the city of Shechem and eventually killed the people and destroyed the city and its tower. Then Abimelech went to the city of Thebez and encamped against it. Many of the people of that city also fled to their tower for safety. As Abimelech approached the tower to burn it, as he had done in Shechem, a woman dropped a millstone down upon his head and crushed his skull. Rather than have it said he was killed by a woman, he had his armor bearer kill him with a sword.

"Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal." (Judg 9:56-57)

b. King Ahab – 1 Kings 22:22-23 – He was a wicked king of Israel. Ahab asked Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah to go with him and fight at Ramoth Gilead to free the city from Syria's control. Jehoshaphat asked Ahab to inquire of the Lord, to seek His will. Ahab called together 400 prophets and asked them if he should fight for Ramoth Gilead. All the prophets responded, *"Go up, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king."*

Jehoshaphat was not satisfied with the 400 prophets. He said, *"Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him?"* Micaiah was summoned and he told the king, *"I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd."* King Ahab was not happy with his response, because it was not what he wanted to hear.

Then Micaiah, the prophet, spoke and said what the Lord had shown him in a vision. He saw the Lord sitting on his throne asking the question, *"Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?"* There were a few responses, 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 the spirit 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."*

The king had Micaiah put in prison and proceed to go to battle against the king of Syria. Even though he was disguised, a random arrow struck the king between his armor and he bled to death in his chariot on the battlefield. So, King Ahab was brought to judgment because God permitted an evil spirit to work in the circumstance.

"They washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria (where the prostitutes bathed), and the dogs licked up his blood, as the word of the Lord had declared." (1 Kings 22:38)

2. God uses evil spirits to administer CHASTISEMENT.

God chastises those who are sinning, that they might recognize their sin and turn their lives over to Him. Of course Satan is seeking a different outcome.

a. **King Saul** – 1 Samuel – chapters 13-31 Saul was a very secular person who relied upon his own understanding and abilities, rather than God. God reprimanded him through the prophet Samuel on different occasions, because of his disobedience. First, he was informed that his kingdom would not endure, because God had sought out a man after His own heart (13:14). Next, he was told the Lord had rejected him as king over Israel (15:26). Then when the Lord had David anointed and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power, the Lord removed His Spirit from King Saul and permitted an evil spirit to torment him (16:14)

I believe the Lord was still trying to salvage the man, by getting his attention through the work of the evil spirit. He suffered depression, but still leaned on his own understanding and abilities. Often, when we are in mental, emotional or physical pain, we turn to Go for help. But Saul did not seek the Lord. Instead his life began to plummet. He became a very angry man, exhibited jealousy and fear because of David (18:18-19). The evil spirit was evidently exerting his influence in Saul's life. He made repeated attempts to kill David.

Finally, when the Philistines had gathered their forces to fight against Israel, King Saul was overcome with fear and terror. He decided to inquire of the Lord for guidance, but the Lord did not answer him. So, Saul asked his attendants to find him a medium that he might inquire of Samuel. King Saul did not get the answer sought. Instead, the Lord caused the prophet Samuel to be manifested to the medium in a vision. Samuel told Saul that he had become the Lord's enemy. The Lord was going to hand both Israel and Saul over to the Philistines and both he and his sons would be with the Lord the following day. Shortly thereafter, when the Philistines fought Israel, Saul's three sons were killed and Saul was critically wounded. Saul commanded his armor bearer to kill him with his sword. Thus, Saul and his sons died on the same day.

If King Saul had responded differently to the chastisement that the Lord had permitted, his life and the lives of his sons might have been much different. Instead of turning to the Lord about his feelings towards David, he sought to eliminate his challenger on his terms. By trying to destroy God's chosen one, he was actually fighting against God and making himself God's enemy. Even the chastisement of the Lord did not bring about a change of heart in this man.

b. Parable of the Unmerciful Servant – Matt 18:21-35

This parable was given by Jesus in response to the question, *"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?"* The Lord responded with a story about a servant who owed the king ten thousand talents. As the servant was unable to pay what he owed, his master ordered that he and his wife and children, along with all they possessed, be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before the king and begged for his patience, so that he might have time to pay him back. His master surprised him by canceling his debt and letting them go.

But the story did not end there. The forgiven servant found one of his fellow servants who owed him money and began grabbing him and choking him. He demanded to be paid what was owed him. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, *"Be patient with me and I will pay you back."* But the forgiven servant would not forgive him but had the man thrown into prison until he would pay the debt. Other servants witnessed what happened and reported it to the master.

The master called the servant in and reprimanded him. *"You wicked servant, I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"* Then we are told, *"And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the 'tormentors,' till he should pay all that was due unto him."* (KJV)

The point I am trying to make is that we must remember this is a parable which is designed to convey a spiritual lesson to the listeners about the consequences of unforgiveness. I think the King James Version is a good translation that conveys the Lord's intent here. The Lord often turns sinners over to the enemy and permits him to torment them. It is through suffering the consequences of sin that a sinner repents and asks for mercy.

Look at Ephesians 4:26-31, where Paul says, *"Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."* (26,27) The context suggests to me that the various sins listed, in the passage, could each give the devil a foothold if practiced in a person's life. The sins mentioned are: stealing, unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander and malice, to mention a few. Unforgiveness is certainly implied.

3. God uses evil spirits to TEST the believer's faith and obedience.

a. **Job** – The Book of Job – Job was blameless, upright, feared God and shunned evil (1:1). He was the greatest man among all the people of the East (1:3). He offered up sacrifices to the Lord each morning in case any of his children had sinned against God (1:5). There was no one on earth like him (1:8).

It was the Lord who pointed out His righteous servant to Satan. What followed were a series of losses that would challenge Job's faith and obedience. First, he lost his family and possessions. Then his health was taken from him. Then he had to endure the judgmental attitudes of his friends. Job maintained that what he was suffering was not caused by sin. He did question why the Lord was allowing all this to happen to him. But he professed in chapt 13:15, *"Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him."* Job was tested by Satan, humbled, sifted, and in the end had a greater appreciation

of the greatness of God through his trials. The Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. The Lord gave him seven sons and three daughters. His daughters were the most beautiful in the land. Job lived a hundred and forty years and saw his children and their children to the fourth generation.

b. **The apostle Paul** – 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 – Paul had a wonderful heavenly vision which was so real that he was not sure whether actually caught up, physically, to heaven or not.

Following his heavenly vision, the Lord permitted an angelic messenger of Satan to give Paul a "thorn in the flesh," to torment him. Scholars have speculated as to the nature of the physical infirmity. Many think it was a problem with his eyes. In any case, Paul went to the Lord three times in prayer to seek release from his torment, but the Lord told him, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness"* (12:8).

Paul admitted that one of the reasons he had the "thorn in the flesh" was to keep him from becoming conceited or yielding to pride. Out of this experience he learned to boast in his weakness rather than his abilities, so that Christ's power could rest on him (12:9). He had learned to delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when he was weak, he was strong and the Lord received the glory.

Believers have often had questions as to why the Lord tolerates Satan's activities. Why does he permit Satan to continue to operate after Christ's victory on the cross? Why is he allowed to touch believers?

The prophet Habakkuk also had questions of this nature. He cried out to the Lord and complained.

1. *"Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted."* (1:3-4) The Lord answered him and said he was raising up a new force on the world scene, the ruthless and violent Chaldeans to sweep across the earth and conquer. (1:5-9)

2. *"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?"* (1:13) He couldn't understand why the Lord would use a people more wicked than His people to judge them. The Lord answered again and said, wicked men trust themselves alone [as these Chaldeans do], and fail; but the righteous man trusts in Me, and lives! (2:4) Then the Lord listed the five woes of those who trust in themselves, in plunder, in unjust gain, in bloodshed, in wicked pleasures or in idols. In other words, their judgment awaited them.

3. Habakkuk praised the Lord for answering his questions. He realized that evil will not triumph forever. **He could see that God was in control and could be trusted to vindicate those who are faithful to Him.** Habakkuk would wait on the Lord to fulfill His will not matter what trials had to be endured. He declared he would rejoice in the Lord, his Savior. He acknowledged the Sovereign Lord as his strength. (Chapter 3)

As **Andrew Murray** taught, the Lord does his greatest work in Christians in the School of Suffering.