

Interpreting Hebrew Causative Verbs Permissively

The Key to Vindicate God's Character of Love, Righteousness, and Holiness

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*So this is what the Eternal Lord continued to say: Eternal One: I am going to restore the fortunes of Jacob and have compassion upon all My people Israel, for **I am eager to defend My reputation** and to protect My holy name. (Ezekiel 39:25; the VOICE)*

Due to the lies and misrepresentations of God's character that Satan has successfully spread over the past several centuries, it has been no easy task to vindicate God and to proclaim the truth that He is not the way that others have made Him out to be. One of the major challenges in overcoming false ideas about God is the language that the Word of God itself uses to describe God's actions.

Overcoming Bible Language Obstacles

The impression that the King James Version has left on our minds has been one of the greatest obstacles in relation to proclaiming the truth about God's character. In the KJV God is said to inflict sickness, natural disasters, influence and motivate evil nations to cruelly punish and kill His people, to make wild animals hurt and kill, harden hearts, move His own people to sin and then punish them for it, to impart lying spirits and other evil spirits into men in order to torment them, to personally deceive and to commit numerous other reprehensible acts.

How do we understand those passages in the Bible that make God appear to be the cause of things that detract from the truth that He is a God of love? One ray of light has been the discovery of many scholars and Bible commentaries who have affirmed the truth that in the Ancient Near East, where the Bible was written over the centuries, there is an idiom that was adopted by the Hebrews in which God is said to do that which He merely allowed or permitted. Much of this has been explained in my book, [*God is Said to do that which He Only Permits.*](#)

There is no doubt that when we embrace this truth we will get a better picture of God. He will be more trustworthy to us. Furthermore, we will see that it is sin and Satan that destroys though God often took responsibility for the consequences of sin. After writing and publishing my book I felt I was done with this subject. Yet God showed me that there was another ray of light. He led me to research other English Bible translations outside of the KJV and look at how they interpret the many KJV *causative* verbs (as they relate to God) into a *permissive* verb.

Most of my research will be found in an upcoming book titled, "*The Permissive Sense: Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation that Vindicates God's Character of Lovc.*" But you will not

have to wait until this publication is complete. In this essay, I will target a number of passages in the KJV that tell us that God was the cause of some evil event and show you how this is interpreted *permissively* in other English Bible translations.

God Causing Animals to Hurt People

When we interpret certain acts of God correctly then we are able to see what a loving God He is while continuing to value the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). In the first examples we will look at a couple of times where God said that He would cause animals to do harm to His people. In Ezekiel 32:4 in the King James Version we read:

*Then will I leave thee upon the land, I will cast thee forth upon the open field, and will **cause** all the fowls of the heaven to remain upon thee, and I will fill the beasts of the whole earth with thee.*

In the KJV, God says that He will *cause* the fowls of Heaven to remain upon His people as punishment for their rebellion. He also says that He will *make* the beasts of the earth eat them. Sounds pretty vindictive, doesn't it? Now, let's read this in some other translations:

*And I will **let** you be stretched on the land; I will send you out violently into the open field; I will **let** all the birds of heaven come to rest on you and will **make** the beasts of all the earth full of you. (Bible in Basic English)*

*Then I will drop you on the dry ground. I will throw you down in the field. I will **let** all the birds come and eat you. I will **let** wild animals from every place come and eat you until they are full. (Easy to Read Version)*

*Then I will throw you on the land. I will toss you into the open field. I will **let** the birds of the sky rest on you. And I will **let** the animals of the earth eat you until they are full. (International Children's Bible)*

*I will leave you on the ground, I will fling you on the open field, I will **allow** all the birds of the sky to settle on you, and I will **permit** all the wild animals to gorge themselves on you. (New English Translation)*

In the KJV God is the *direct cause* of the birds and beasts bringing divine retribution upon His people for their sins. Sort of like a father *causing* his pit bull to kill his children for misbehaving. On the other hand if his grown children will continue to do dangerous things that he warns them not to do then at a certain point he is unable to protect them from the consequences of their behavior. This is the meaning here when God says that He will *let* these things happen. It means that He will not protect His people.

Ezekiel provides us with another example of God *causing* wild animals to punish His people for their rebellion. In Ezekiel 14:15 in the KJV we read:

*If **I cause** noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts*

In the KJV God threatens to *cause* noisome beasts to pass through the land. However, this is interpreted *permissively* in some other English translations:

*If a mischievous wild beast, **I suffer** to pass through the land, and that beast bereave it, so that it become too desolate for any man to pass through, by reason of the wild beast (Emphasized Bible)*

*Or suppose **I allow** wild animals to roam through the land, and it becomes so wild that no one can live there or even travel through it on account of the wild animals. (Complete English Bible)*

The Emphasized Bible, which is an older translation by J. B. Rotherham, had as one of its goals to remove the denigration of God's character so prevalent in the translations of his day. He used the archaic word "suffer" in the place of "cause". In older English the word "suffer" simply means "allow" or "permit". The Complete English Bible is much clearer in this regard. But both help to alleviate the idea that God personally causes wild beasts to make a land desolate.

God's Protection Withdrawn is the Real Cause

These warnings about animal violence and such certainly came to pass because Israel would not fear God or walk after the manner of the Lord (2 Kings 17:25-26). However, we must learn to interpret the language properly so that it does not denigrate God's character. It is God who is *protecting* His people from wild animals that surround them:

You will subdue a lion and a snake; you will trample underfoot a young lion and a serpent. The Lord says, "Because he is devoted to me, I will deliver him; **I will protect him** because he is loyal to me. (Psalm 91:13-14; New English Translation)

Moses reminded the Israelites that it was God, "*Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions*" (Deut. 8:15). In Leviticus Moses again relates to God's people His promise of protection from animal violence. God told the Israelites to, "*Faithfully obey my laws*" (Leviticus 26:3; Contemporary English Version). He then follows this up with a series of promises that include protection from dangerous animals:

You will eat and be satisfied, and you will live in safety. I will bless your country with peace, and you will rest without fear. I will wipe out the dangerous animals and protect you from enemy attacks. (Leviticus 26:5b-6; Contemporary English Version)

God was the one who protected His people from dangerous animals. God's preferred activity is to protect His people from wild beasts:

*And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will **cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land**: and **they shall dwell safely** in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.... And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, **neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely**, and none shall make them afraid (Eze. 34:25, 28; KJV)*

Therefore, God's method of punishment is not to directly make animals hurt and destroy but to remove His protection that prevented the animals from causing harm: *"I will take away the hedge around it, break down the wall that protects it, and let wild animals eat it and trample it down."* (Isaiah 5:5b; Good New Translation).

God's preference is to protect Israel from wild animals that would devour its people. That protection is forfeited when God's people choose to forsake God and worship false gods. God asks Israel, *"Do you think you can steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and **chase after other gods and still expect Me to protect you?**"* (Jer. 7:9; The VOICE).

Therefore, passages rendered in a *causative* sense in the KJV and other English translations should be understood in a *permissive* sense when it speaks of God as the source and origin of some horrendous evil. God does not steal, kill, and destroy. This is the work of His enemy and ours, Satan.

God Causing Enemy Armies to Defeat Israel

God is a protector of His people. However, His people can forsake Him, worship other gods, and thereby forfeit that protection:

*All the strength of Israel vanishes beneath his fierce anger. **The Lord has withdrawn his protection as the enemy attacks**. He consumes the whole land of Israel like a raging fire. (Lamentations 2:3; New Living Translation)*

The consequences of losing His protection are many and varied but one of the most recurring themes in Scripture is that His people were constantly defeated by the surrounding pagan nations that God had previously protected them from. When these things happen then God is said to have

personally caused it Himself. For example, look at one of the results of the curse that comes from disobeying God:

The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. (Deuteronomy 28:25 King James Version)

In the King James Version God says that He will cause Israel to be smitten by their enemies. A number of other English translations render this in a *permissive* sense: “*The Lord will **allow** you to be struck down before your enemies*” (New English Version); “*The Lord will **let** your enemies defeat you*” (God’s Word); “*The Lord will **let** you be overcome by your haters*” (Bible in Basic English); “*The Lord will **let** your enemies defeat you*” (International Children’s Bible); “*The Lord will **let** you be defeated by your enemies*” (Contemporary English Version); “*Yahweh will **let** your enemies defeat you*” (Names of God Version)

This language is consistent with all of the symptoms of the curse listed in Deuteronomy 28. God does not personally inflict the curse of sickness, disease, poverty, defeat, etc. He only “causes” these things by removing His protection. God, concerning the curses, further explains: “*I’ll be furious with them and abandon them. I won’t look on them when they pray. **I won’t protect them, and they’ll be eaten alive***” (Deut. 31:17; The VOICE).

There are many other places in King James Version where God is said to have caused Israel’s enemies to hurt and defeat them. In Psalm 66:12 we read:

Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.

The Easy to Read Version renders verses 11 and 12 in the permissive sense:

*God, you **let** us be trapped. You put heavy burdens on us. You **let** our enemies walk on us. You dragged us through fire and water. But you brought us to a safe place.*

The ERV renders the passage in a way that allows us to see that God, Israel’s protector, removed His protection when the people forsook Him. The result was to allow their enemies to conquer them. Other translations besides the ERV also render the *causative* verb in a more *permissive* sense: “*You **allowed** us to be conquered and **let** our enemies run over us*” (The VOICE); “*You **allowed** men to ride over our heads*” (New English Translation); “*You have **allowed** people to ride over our heads*” (Modern English Version) “*You **let** our enemies trample us*” (Good News Translation); “*Thou didst **let** men ride at our head*” (Emphasized Bible)

Again we see that God only “causes” anything by removing His protection and *allowing* these things to take place. Another example is found in Jeremiah 19:7:

*And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and **I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies**, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcasses will I give to be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. (KJV)*

However rather than making God the direct cause the Easy to Read Version says, “**And I will let** the people of Judah be killed with swords in this place.” The New Living Translation renders it, “**I will allow** the people to be slaughtered by invading armies” and the Contemporary English Version reads, “**I’ll let** your enemies kill you.”

Not only does God *cause* Israel’s enemies to kill them according to the KJV but He even causes them to rejoice over their misfortune:

*The Lord hath done that which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old: he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied: and **he hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee**, he hath set up the horn of thine adversaries. (Lamentations 2:17 King James Version)*

In Proverbs we read, “*Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth*” (Prov. 24:17). Is God the cause of people doing something that violates one of His divine principles? This would seem impossible since God Himself is grieved when His people are afflicted and He suffers with them (Isa. 63:9; Hosea 11:8-9).

This is another good reason to interpret Scriptures such as Lamentations 2:17 in a permissive sense. The New International version renders it, “*He has let your enemies laugh at you.*” The New Century Version says, “*...he has let your enemies laugh at you.*” The International Standard Version says, “*He let the enemy boast about you.*” The Emphasized Bible reads, “*Thus hath he let the enemy rejoice over thee*” The Contemporary English Version says, “*...let your enemies boast about their powerful forces.*” Finally, the Holman Christian Standard Bible says, “*letting the enemy gloat over you.*”

Interpreting Causative Language Permissively

The examples we have provided thus far can be multiplied, which is why we will be presenting more evidence on this issue in our upcoming book titled, “*The Permissive Sense: Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation that Vindicates God’s Character of Love.*” However, let’s look at a

few more passages in this essay where the King James Version places God as the *cause* of something terrible and see how other translators viewed such actions:

Jeremiah 15:8:

*Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas: I have brought upon them against the mother of the young men a spoiler at noonday: I have **caused** him to fall upon it suddenly, and terrors upon the city. (KJV)*

*Their widows have become multiplied to me, beyond the sand of the seas, I have brought against them - upon the mother of young men - the spoiler in the broad noon, - I have **let** fall upon her suddenly, excitement and terrors. (Rotherham's Emphasized Bible)*

Jeremiah 17:4:

*And thou, even thyself, shalt discontinue from thine heritage that I gave thee; and **I will cause thee to serve thine enemies** in the land which thou knowest not: for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever. (KJV)*

*You will lose the land I gave you. **I will let your enemies take you to be their slaves**. Why? Because I am very angry. My anger is like a hot fire, and you will be burned forever. (Easy to Read)*

Jeremiah 19:9:

*And I will **cause** them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend in the siege and straitness, wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straiten them. (KJV)*

*And I will **suffer** them to eat the flesh of their sons, and the flesh of their daughters, yea every one - the flesh of his friend, will they eat, - in the siege and in the straitness, wherewith, their enemies, and they who seek their lives, will straiten them. (Emphasized Bible)*

Jeremiah 29:4:

*Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom **I have caused to be carried away** from Jerusalem unto Babylon (KJV)*

*The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those people **whom he allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take away** as prisoners from Jerusalem to Babylonia (Good News Translation)*

*Thus, saith Yahweh of hosts, God of Israel, Unto all the captivity whom **I have suffered to be carried away** captive from Jerusalem to Babylon (Emphasized Bible)*

Jeremiah 49:37:

*For **I will cause** Elam to be dismayed before their enemies, and before them that seek their life: and I will bring evil upon them, even my fierce anger, saith the LORD; and I will send the sword after them, till I have consumed them: (KJV)*

*And **I will let** Elam be broken before their haters, and before those who are making designs against their lives: I will send evil on them, even my burning wrath, says the Lord; and I will send the sword after them till I have put an end to them: (Bible in Basic English)*

Ezekiel 32:12:

*By the swords of the mighty will **I cause thy multitude to fall**, the terrible of the nations, all of them: and they shall spoil the pomp of Egypt, and all the multitude thereof shall be destroyed. (KJV)*

*I will **let the swords of the strong be the cause of the fall of your people**; all of them men to be feared among the nations: and they will make waste the pride of Egypt, and all its people will come to destruction. (Bible in Basic English)*

Ezekiel 32:32:

*For I have **caused** my terror in the land of the living: and he shall be laid in the midst of the uncircumcised with them that are slain with the sword, even Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord GOD. (KJV)*

*For I have **suffered** his terror to be in the land of the living, Therefore shall be laid low In the midst of the uncircumcised With them who were thrust through by the sword, Pharaoh and all his multitude! Declareth My Lord, Yahweh.*
(Emphasized Bible)

Ezekiel 36:15:

*Neither will I **cause** men to hear in thee the shame of the heathen any more, neither shalt thou bear the reproach of the people any more, neither shalt thou cause thy nations to fall any more, saith the Lord God. (KJV)*

*And I will not **suffer** to be heard against thee any more, the insult of the nations, And the reproach of the peoples, shalt thou not bear any more,- And thy nations, shalt thou not cause to stumble any more, Declareth My Lord Yahweh.*
(Emphasized Bible)

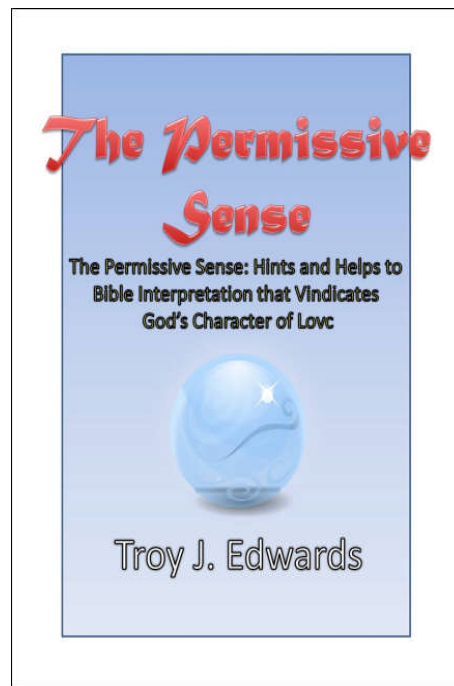
From these different examples we can conclude that God is only said to be the cause of an evil action that is harmful to His people by removing His protective presence and then allowing the forces of evil to have their way. God does not directly or personally cause harm because hurting others is not a part of His character or nature.

This also reminds us that sin and disobedience is very dangerous. The worse thing that can happen to us is for God to abandon us and leave us in the hands of the forces of evil. However, if we choose to follow and live in evil and we reject God's constant pleadings to repent and return to Him then what choice is He left with but to abandon us to the evil forces that He previously protected us from?

It is important that God is not presented to the world as the author of sin or its harmful effects. We must proclaim the loving character of God if we want to see Him embraced by those who hate Him. The truth about God's love, when fully understood, does a better job of persuading men to leave their sin than the threats of an angry capricious God can do.

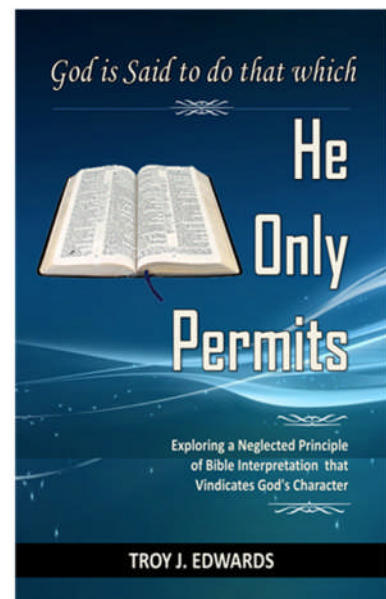
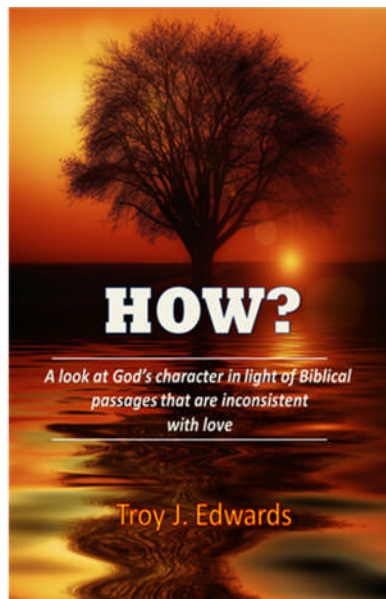
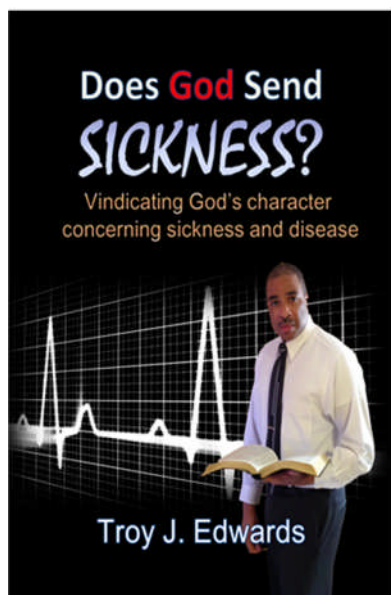
I hope that this essay has blessed you and helped you to understand some difficult passages in the light of God's loving character.

For more Information see our upcoming book, *“The Permissive Sense: Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation that Vindicates God’s Character of Love.”*



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