

But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul

by William MacDonald

Transcript

“But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.” (1 Sam. 16:14)

There are verses in the Bible that seem to assign evil actions to God. For example, when Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, “God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem” (Judg. 9:23). In the days of Ahab, Micaiah said to the wicked king, “The Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets” (1 King 22:23). Job attributed his losses to the Lord when he said, “What? shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10). Then again the Lord Himself says in Isaiah 45:7, “I make peace, and create evil.”

Yet we know that because God is holy, He can neither originate evil nor condone it. No sin, sickness, suffering or death come from the Lord. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). It is unthinkable that He should be the cause of anything that is contrary to His own moral perfection.

It is clear from other scriptures that Satan is the author of disease, suffering, tragedy and destruction. Job’s losses and intense pain were caused by the Devil. Jesus said that the woman who was bent double had been bound by Satan for eighteen long years (Lu. 13:16). Paul spoke of his thorn in the flesh as “the messenger of Satan” (2 Cor. 12:7). Satan is the culprit behind all the troubles of mankind.

But how then do we reconcile this with the verses that picture God as creating evil? The explanation is simply this: in the Bible God is often said to do what He permits to be done. It is the difference between His directive will and His permissive will. He often allows His people to go through experiences that He never would have chosen for them in the first place. He allowed Israel to wander forty years in the wilderness whereas His directive will, if it had been accepted, would have brought them into the Promised Land by a shorter route.

Even in permitting the evil of demons and of man, God always has the last word. He overrules it for His own glory and for the blessing of those who are exercised by it.

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