

Will The Real God Please Stand Up!

Who done it — Egypt's Gods or Israel's God?

Who killed the firstborn of Egypt? How did the plagues come about? Who hardened Pharaoh's heart? Who was the "destroyer?" On closer examination we will discover that things are not always as they appear. As we explore God's involvement in the plagues of Egypt, we must apply Biblical principles of interpretation to correctly answer these questions, contextually applying those principles that govern God's interaction with man and the adversary's government. Three such principles are applied in this study, which are much more extensively validated in our study "The Bible Must Be Allowed To Interpret Itself." (See <http://propheciesoflove.com>)

PRINCIPLE: God's ways and thoughts are not the same as ours. Therefore when interpreting Scripture we cannot safely impute to God definitions and motives as they are commonly applied to man. Scripture must be allowed to interpret Scripture.

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. 8) For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. 9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

The Lord reveals to Abraham the bondage of His children in Egypt.

Genesis 15:13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; 14) And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

As the time draws near for the deliverance of Israel, knowing it is God's will that he should deliver Israel, Moses sets about to do so in his own way. But Moses' ways are not God's ways and his plan backfires.

In the stories of Abraham and Jacob we find that they also set about to accomplish God's will in their own ways, and their plans backfired. If God's will is for us to come into harmony with His laws, then His laws cannot be broken to accomplish His will. For example, Moses murdered, Abraham committed adultery, and Jacob lied, all presuming to accomplish God's will their way. "Let the wicked forsake his way. . . neither are your ways my ways."

Exodus 1:11 And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. 12) And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. 13) And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? 14) And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known.

God, who has heard the cry of His people, finds in the humble shepherd a meekness qualified to lead His "sheep" out of Egypt.

Exodus 3:9 Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. 10) Come now

therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

In conversing with Moses, notice God's accommodating condescension to meet Moses' lack of implicit trust in Him. No longer self-trusting, Moses has yet another lesson in learning to fully trust God.

Exodus 3:11 And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

God reassures that He'll be with him.

Exodus 3:12 And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

Moses still argues, doubting he'll be believed by the children of Israel.

Exodus 3:13 And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them?

God responds again.

Exodus 3:14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

The Word of God emphasizes over and over that He alone is the only one who has the authority and the power not only to deliver from bondage to Egypt but from sin itself.

Isaiah 43:11 I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.

Hosea 13:4 Yet I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me.

Even though God has just revealed His authority as the One who can deliver, Moses still lacks implicit trust, presenting another argument.

Exodus 4:1 And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee.

Reassuringly, the Lord reveals His power by first turning the rod into a serpent and then back into the rod. Next, He causes Moses's hand to become leprous and then heals it. You would think by this time Moses would have full confidence in the Lord. He still doesn't. His focus on self-deficiencies eclipsed God's all-sufficient power.

Exodus 4:10 And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

The Lord in His mercy and condescension, reasons with Moses.

Exodus 4:11, 12 Who hath made man's mouth . . .? Now therefore go and I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say.

What does Moses reply?

Exodus 4:13 O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send.

NIV But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

PRINCIPLE: God “meets us where we are,” respecting our freedom of choice by accommodating and adapting to our choices. Though they’re not in keeping with His perfect will, he works within our self-imposed limitations as much as we allow.

Here is an example of this key principle through which God deals with His erring children. God disapprovingly honors the request of Moses, “meeting him where he is” given his lack of faith, and suggests that Aaron be his mouthpiece.

Exodus 4:14 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart.

The Hebrew word rendered in this verse as “anger,” is elsewhere rendered as “long-suffering” or “forebearing.” This perfectly represents God’s dealing with His servant. He does everything He can to encourage us to do His will but when we choose our own way, He does not leave us but works with us as much as we will let Him. This is not God’s perfect will but His permissive will. Sadly, we find later that Aaron was partially responsible for the worshipping of the golden calf on Mt. Sinai.

In sending Moses to Pharaoh, God purposed three things.

- 1) He would release Israel from bondage
- 2) He would reveal to all generations His power to save
- 3) He would attempt to save Egypt from the results of their trusting in their gods

The Lord sends Moses to Pharaoh with the message, “Let my people go.” Moses is to show him the signs and wonders which the Lord had revealed to him.

Exodus 4:21 And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go. 22) And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: 23) And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.

If we read this passage superficially, it seems to say, “Go tell Pharaoh to let my firstborn go, but I will harden his heart so he won’t let Israel go. Therefore I will slay his firstborn.”

There are two ways this can be interpreted.

- 1) God planned to harden Pharaoh’s heart and slay his firstborn, or
- 2) God foresaw that Pharaoh would harden his own heart in not hearkening, and He mercifully warned him at the outset of the consequential loss of his firstborn.

God hardens Pharaoh’s heart that His signs and wonders might be known.

Exodus 7:3 And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. 4) But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. 5) And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them.

Again, this could be interpreted two different ways.

- 1) God would harden Pharaoh’s heart so that He might save His people and destroy the Egyptians, proving who indeed was in control, or

- 2) God foresaw Pharaoh would harden his own heart and consequently remove his nation from the protection of the only God who could save them. The truth that God is the only one who can save would be made known through His ability to protect those people who put their trust in Him.

We read that God raised up Pharaoh for this very reason—that His power might be made known.

Exodus 9:12 And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses. 13) And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. 14) For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; **that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth.** 15) For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. 16) **And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power;** and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.

Is God's intent to reveal His power to destroy all those who do not obey Him, or is His intent to prove that He alone has the power to save, not the gods in whom the Egyptians trusted? Does God need to reveal that He is all powerful? Is there any question of His might? Imagine a bully declaring, "I can save you from my fist if you do what I say." Does God similarly send plagues to destroy, then offer to save from them at the same time?

The language of the Bible seems to speak plainly, God hardened Pharaoh's heart so He could slay the Egyptians.

Joshua 11:20 For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that He might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Would God raise up Pharaoh for the purpose of hardening his heart, smiting the Egyptians and killing his firstborn in order that His greatness and power to destroy might be shown in all the earth? Did He harden Pharaoh's heart? Did He slay his firstborn? Or is there another principle of interpretation brought out in this story?

PRINCIPLE: The Bible credits God for doing that which He allows when we refuse His protection in favor of other gods. This is a principle of interpretation that will repeatedly help us understand His involvement when we discover passages apparently inconsistent with the revelation of God's character in Jesus Christ.

For example, though we've read that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, we also can read in more than one passage that Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

Exodus 9:34 And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and **hardened his heart,** he and his servants. 35) And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken by Moses.

So which is true? Who hardened Pharaoh's heart, God or Pharaoh?

Consider another example. God takes credit for slaying all the firstborn of Egypt.

Exodus 12:12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.

God executed judgment. The first born were slain. Yet in this next verse, we are told it is the destroyer that smites.

Exodus 12:23 For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and **will not suffer [allow] the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.**

So which is true? Who smote the firstborn, God or the destroyer?

In both of the above examples, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the slaying of the firstborn, the Bible language seemingly contradicts itself. However, by applying the principal that God is credited for that which He allows, the Scriptures emerge perfectly consistent.

The truth is that God's involvement is to allow circumstances to come about that cause us to make decisions for or against Him. This is how God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Some claim that Savior *is* also the destroyer, but where are the scriptures to validate this supposition? Revelation pointedly reveals the one who is the destroyer, identifying Satan with two corroborating names.

Revelation 9:11 And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

Strong's Greek #3. Abaddwn Abaddon ab-ad-dohn'; of Hebrew origin [011]; a destroying angel:-- Abaddon.

Strong's Greek # 623. Apolluwn Apolluon ap-ol-loo'-ohn; active participle of 622; a destroyer (i.e. Satan):-- Apollyon.

Is Exodus 12:23 the only place that reveals how the firstborn died? No. Psalm 78 gives us an account of the plagues and Israel in the Exodus, clarifying that the slaying of the firstborn was done by evil angels.

Psalm 78:49 He cast upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, **by sending evil angels among them.** 50) He made a way to His anger; He **spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over** to the pestilence; 51) And **smote all the firstborn in Egypt;** the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham:

What does it mean that He "gave their life over to the pestilence?" He allowed them to choose in whom they would put their trust and they chose to put their trust in the gods of Egypt. They therefore limited His protection and He had no choice but with intense passion, (anger), surrendered them up to the evil angels who destroyed them. Because the foundation of His government is love, and the foundation of love is free choice, He could not spare or save them from the impending death.

Who were these plagues against? They were "against all the gods of Egypt." History reveals that the different plagues that fell upon the Egyptians represented the gods whom they worshipped, such as, the Nile River, the frogs, the flies, etc. God wanted all to realize that those gods whom they worshipped were not able to protect them. He is the one and only true God. All these false gods actually represent Satan who has claimed to be the true god. The great controversy between Christ and Satan can be stated as, WILL THE REAL GOD PLEASE STAND UP!

Exodus 12:12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and **against all the gods of Egypt** I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.

It is in the ten commandments that God warns against worshipping other gods before Him.

Exodus 20:2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3) Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 4) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5) Thou shalt not bow

down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; 6) And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

As we read these words we must remember that God's ways and thoughts are not like ours. His jealousy then is not like ours. We read in Hosea why God is jealous.

Hosea 13:4 Yet I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: **for there is no saviour beside me.**

Moses tells us why the judgments are against the gods and not against those who reject Him. God is jealous for the salvation of man. He alone can save them.

Deuteronomy 32:35 To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; **their foot shall slide in due time:** for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. 36) For the LORD shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left. 37) And He shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, 38) Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? **let them rise up and help you, and be your protection.** 39) See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.

God spoke to Moses of Israel's repeated transgression in looking to other gods for their life and protection.

Deuteronomy 31:16 And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. 17) Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and **I will hide my face** from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, **because our God is not among us?** 18) And I will surely **hide my face** in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.

Deuteronomy 32:16 They provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they Him to anger. 17) They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. 18) Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. 19) And when the LORD saw it, He abhorred them, because of the provoking of His sons, and of His daughters. 20) And he said, **I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be:** for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.

The Lord is a Saviour, but He *cannot* save those who hang on to their rebellion.

Isaiah 59:1 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 2) **But your iniquities have separated** between you and your God, and **your sins have hid His face from you,** that He will not hear.

The New Testament gives an account of some of the events where destruction came to the Israelites because of their disobedience.

1 Corinthians 10:5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. 6) Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

Here we have a record of the worship of the golden calf found in Exodus 32.

1 Corinthians 10:7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Next follows a record of Israel joining themselves to Baal-peor (Numbers 25).

1 Corinthians 10:8 Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

The story of the fiery serpents follows. (Numbers 21)

1 Corinthians 10:9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

Lastly note the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. (Numbers 16)

1 Corinthians 10:10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

Did you notice who destroyed them? The DESTROYER.

1 Corinthians 10: 11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Not just once, but twice we are admonished that these events were to be examples for us. (1 Corinthians 10:6 &11). Will we heed the admonishment to study deeply these experiences and not be guilty of a superficial reading that tends to leave wrong interpretations?

In the book of Revelation we read of the seven last plagues which fall on the wicked who worship the beast, a god who cannot save them, nor desires to save them. Who sends the plagues?

Revelation 15:1 And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

The wrath of God is described in the seven last plagues.

Revelation 16:1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. 2) And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.

Revelation speaks of those who are saved from these plagues.

Revelation 6:17 For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Revelation 7:1 And after these things I saw **four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.** 2) And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to **the four angels, to whom it was given to**

hurt the earth and the sea, 3) Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

The Scriptures clearly state that the plagues are God's wrath and are sent by angels. But, it also says that there are four angels preventing the winds from blowing and bringing destruction until God's servants are sealed securely under His protection. Christ established that a "house divided against itself cannot stand." Matthew 12:25 We need to ask ourselves, "Are these angels on the same side? Are God's protecting angels holding back God's destroying angels bent on destruction, or are the winds from the destroyer only awaiting divine withdrawal, "the hiding of His face," "the giving them over to reap the consequences of their choice?"

This paradoxical language is not unlike Exodus 12:23, which in the same verse first identifies God as the one who smites, then the destroyer as the one.

Exodus 12:23 For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer [allow] the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.

As we confront the paradoxical language identified in this study, each of us inevitably makes a decision. Will we dismiss the apparently inconsistent and contradicting Scriptural language about God's involvement in man's affairs as a recurring, irreconcilable perplexity that challenges the credibility of Scripture, or will we allow that the apparent inconsistencies of raw, literal language can be rendered perfectly consistent when biblically-derived principles of interpretation are applied to the language?

The tipping point of decision pivots on acknowledgement of principles presented, in summary 1) Biblical language about God does not always mean what it commonly means when applied to man. 2) God's permissive adaptation to our self-limiting, God-limiting choices cannot be correctly construed as His perfect will which, as in Aaron's compromised leadership, is often far removed from the course along which God accommodately redirects us. 3) Scripture not infrequently, when God cannot secure our cooperation, credits God as the initiator of consequences which, in deference to our choices, He must respectfully allow, but does not induce, whether those consequences are a succession of natural consequences of sin no longer mitigated by divine intervention or the direct exercise of the destroyer's rightful claim to rule over and ultimately destroy those who reject God's intervention.

We become what we behold and rise no higher than our conceptions of God character. If we know God as the One who longs to save us from ill consequences, and know sin as that which brings us ultimate death under the destroyer's government, we gain conviction to trust and obey God whatever our felt-limitations, while honoring as He does the choices of others. Whatever life's difficulties, we then place full confidence in a beneficent, harmless, protective God whose governing principles we can boldly embrace as worthy to live by.

Could it be we have been deceived about where sin, suffering and death originate? How long will disasters be classed "Acts of God?" How long will man continue to blame God for the resultant consequences of rejecting His government, His intervention, and His power to heal and save from the destructive government of His adversary? — perhaps only as long as we doubt His enabling power, as at first Moses did, only as long as we entertain popular accusations against God originating with one who desired to be worshipped as god, one who deceived mankind with subtle lies that reverse the restorative liberties found in God with the destructive bondage in sin.

As children learn their native language and reproduce their parents' character traits, so functions a universal law that we become what we behold unless we consciously reject it by choosing to behold another standard. Accordingly, we cannot reflect God's true nature unless we escape the prevailing misapprehension of a destructive God through careful study that beholds His true nature.

Through study we ascertain that sin (misuse of God's laws of life and love) always subjects us to the government of the destroyer, producing ultimate death, while God's offer of divine guidance "under the blood" leads all who will follow to an eternal, sinless promise land, to which Exodus even the mixed multitude of Egypt were welcomed.

As Moses learned implicit trust, it was recorded of him, " Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." Numbers 12:3 Will we discover the freedom that follows implicit trust in God's appeal to a righteousness that delivers from the yet mercifully withheld plagues to follow Earth's rejection of His protection, as it was rejected by most in Egypt's plagues? Though much maligned, its still true. God is love!