

Chris: Tim, John, thanks for all you guys do. This is Chris from Park City, Utah. Just trying to

figure out the connection between how we see Jesus laying down his life and giving up his life in order to defeat evil in the New Testament not giving into that promise of evil. But that same God in the Old Testament seems to bring plagues in one nation up against another nation where there's a battle or death. That just seems like it kind of contradicts those two things, and I wondered if you could help me connect those dots. Thanks so much.

Tim: Great question, Chris.

Jon: Yeah, thanks, Chris.

Tim: Totally. We got a number of questions, which are great, about the nature of violence.

So nonviolence in Jesus' whole mission, and then nonviolent confrontation. Jesus was anything but passive. The word pacifist comes with too many other things that aren't helpful for understanding Jesus' use of nonviolence.

Jesus was very confrontational but he clearly rejected violence as a means of doing what he was doing. And so, then, there are implications you have to think through in light of that. Backwards, how then do I think about divine violence?

Jon: Because you can't get around the fact that there are many stories about people dying because they did something wrong, right?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Being turned to stone, being zapped down in the tabernacle.

Tim: Totally. People dying.

Jon: People get worked over, that is violence.

Tim: Because of divine violence.

Jon: Divine violence?

Tim: You haven't mentioned God yet. So the reason why all the stories are about a person

or people who die because of actions attributed to God, divine violence. So it's backwards. How do portraits of divine violence in the first three-quarters of the Christian Bible relate to Jesus who not only chooses, advocates, and demand nonviolent to his disciples, but actually says that how he is, reflects the heart of God? "Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful and gracious and kind to ungrateful and evil men." Compare that to "show the Canaanites no mercy." So was God merciful, or does God shows his enemies no mercy? There's a surface level tension there backwards.

And then there's a tension forwards with, which model do you think God's going to use to defeat evil at the combination of history?

Jon: Zap people.

Tim: The Old Testament divine violence model or the Jesus style? I'm not saying I'm even

happy with that way of setting up the question, but that's how it appears to us. And so typically, people will either just say, "Well, sometimes, God chops people's heads off as an act of judgment. And he's God, he can do that. When Jesus came, he didn't take that route and God's merciful." And so God can do both.

Jon: Well, I think this is where God's wrath coming on Jesus solve the problem for people.

So you have a God who needs to show His wrath, and has been doing that, and then you Jesus, who doesn't deserve it, takes it.

And so, now, you have an opportunity. It's like this moment in time where you can opt out of God's wrath. But at one point in the future, that's going to be off the table again, and then God's going to unleash more wrath. So that's the logic.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. That is the logic. There's a handful of problems with that way of framing things. All of those problems have to do with the Bible. The Bible itself poses some interesting challenges and doesn't quite say exactly that logical train of thought. You have to take some things out of context and string them together into a new thing.

But all of our attempts, they usually, we're not intentionally trying to distort the Bible, but we often inevitably do so.

Jon: We're trying to make sense of it.

Tim: We're trying to make sense of it and tie things together. So there are a few things. First, just in terms of the wrath, you won't find a sentence in the Bible that says God punished Jesus, whether Jesus suffered the wrath of God.

You actually won't...And trust me. I promise you. I held that view for a long time until I read the Bible a lot and then I intentionally went on the search and I couldn't find that.

What you find is statements about God handing Jesus over. The father hands over the son. The most clear statement you get of not that - but the people often mistake it as the Father punishing the son or God punishing Jesus - is in Romans 8:1-4, where Paul the Apostle says that God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful human existence flesh so that He could condemn sin in the flesh of Jesus.

So what God is punishing is not Jesus. He's punishing evil in Jesus. How? And of this,

at least as far as I can tell, it goes back to that conversation we had in the podcast about consequence versus punishment. This is really what so much of this conversation is rooted in, is how does God punish people? What is the nature of God's wrath?

And what do you discover is that the Old Testament specifically, has a really sophisticated way of talking about God's punishment. And most often, by most often, 8 out of 10, which is 4 out of 5, and 16 out of 20, it's God handing people over.

In fact, this is the phrase, "to give over." In Hebrew is the verb natan to give people over to the consequences of their decisions. So we talked about this in the podcast.

What was God's punishment on Jerusalem for centuries of Covenant unfaithfulness?

Well, you read Ezekiel, and he's first-person speech in the mouth of God, "I'm going to bring the sword after you. I'm going to strike you. I'm going to..."

So God's taking responsibility for what's about to happen to Jerusalem. But what is it that actually happened to Jerusalem? The divine lightning didn't strike it from the sky. Babylonian armies came and sack the city. Why did they do that? Well, just read Ezekiel or read Jeremiah.

King Zedekiah had made a treaty with the king of Babylon. He broke the treaty and was forming secret alliances with other nations planning to rebel. King

Nebuchadnezzar finds out about it, and he won't tolerate it. So what's the explanation for why Jerusalem fell?

Well, in one sense, it was just really bad politics on the part of the kings of Judah.

But the prophets interpret that and speak on God's behalf and say, "That is my

punishment on you."

Jon: "That's me bringing a sword."

Tim: It's me. What's that saying? The kings of Judah rejecting the God of Israel and choosing to form military alliances with their neighbors, instead of trusting that God would keep his people safe, even if it means the Babylonians come. But because they rejected trusting the God of Israel, he's giving them over to the consequences of their decisions.

And the prophets don't view the consequence and punishment as separate things.

They're the same thing. And that's right through. It goes all the way back to the garden. "The day that you eat of the tree, Adam and Eve, you will die." And then they eat of the tree, and what happens? I mean, every reader going back to ancient times has noticed what doesn't happen.

Jon: Yeah, they don't die.

Tim: Well, they don't die, but what they do, get banished. They forfeit their opportunity at the first partnership, business partnership, and they're banished from the temple, the garden, which means they're not separated from close proximity to the author of life. And so they die eventually. And so, the consequence is the punishment. That goes just right through the whole testament.

And so, when Paul says, "God handed Jesus over to death," who's perpetrating the violence against Jesus? Roman soldiers, as a result of a rigged trial pulled by the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem.

So, in one sense, it's human violence perpetrated against Jesus, but God takes responsibility for it. God handed Jesus over to die for our sins, and to be raised for

our justification like Paul says in Romans 4. And so you see this pattern where God punishes evil by handing humans over to the consequences of their decision.

And what's happening in the story of Jesus is the Father handing over his son. And Jesus is not going on willingly. He hands himself over. Read the gospel narratives. He's like, "I'm the one in power here."

Remember what he says the Pilate? "You have no power over me, except what's been given to you, and I give over my life willingly." So Jesus hands himself over, Jesus becomes the place where God punishes sin by handing himself over to our evil and to let our evil do it's...

[crosstalk 00:26:58]

Jon: By bearing the consequences.

Tim: Yeah. So Jesus is bearing the wrath of God. And what's the wrath of God? It's handing a human over to the consequences of human evil, except that human is God Himself embodied in the person of Jesus. So our categories of separating out punishment and consequence don't help us understand what's going on in the cross. That's one layer of the question.

When you go back and you look at the Old Testament narratives, portraits of divine violence, I said, eight out of 10, so 4 out of 5, portrait of divine violence, God takes responsibility for it. But if you read the actual narrative of the violence, it's humans committing the violence.

In other words, it's very rare to find a narrative, where, in the narrative, God is directly doing the violence. Even the ones that you assume, you think for sure you already know our God doing it, there's so interesting. There are little details there

that show that the biblical authors themselves are deflecting, or trying to show you some deeper truth.

For example, in the final plague in Egypt, the death of the firstborn, Pharaoh kills the firstborn of the Israelites. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, right? In Exodus 12, "I'm going to strike the firstborn. I'll pass through, I'll strike." But you read Exodus, you read the narrative, and then God says, "I'm going to pass through and I will give the destroyer to kill the firstborn."

The person who actually does the killing or the entity doing the killing is all of a sudden in Exodus 12...Well, I'll just read it to you. It's so fascinating. The whole chapter. You're like, 'Oh, God's going to kill babies.' He says it.

Jon: It's gnarly.

Tim: It's so gnarly. Exodus 12:12, "I will go through the land, I will strike down the firstborn of Egypt. The blood will be assigned to you in the houses where you live. When I see the blood, I will pass over you." I, I, I, I.

Then you actually read the narrative, verse 23, "For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians. He'll see the blood and won't allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you."

Jon: Who's the destroyer?

Tim: Exactly. So Dude, are you ready?

Jon: I'm ready.

Tim: Chris, this is way more than you asked for, but it's really fascinating. The destroyer is

an evil being who appears in a handful of narratives where you see plagues spreading, like the strike of a plague. It happens in 2 Samuel 24, where David does

this military census of the people of Israel and God's really angry at him. And so God says, "Pick your punishment," and David chooses plague on his people instead of a number of other punishments.

Then God says, "I'm going to bring this on you." And then who appears in angelic being bringing destruction called the destroyer? This one's even more fascinating. In the grumbling narratives in the wilderness where God opens like the earthquake that opens up and swallows up that guy, Korah, and his whole crew. There are snakes that come and bite people and kill them. So you read the stories and it just seems like direct divine violence.

In the New Testament, if you go to 1 Corinthians 10, where Paul's warning the Corinthians of how they're taking the Lord's Supper in a way that's dishonoring the poor people and the rest, he says, "You have to stop that. It's a really bad idea. You're going to shame poor people in the name of Jesus. Don't mess with the poor in Jesus name. He doesn't like that."

And then he warns them. He says, "Don't be like the Israelites who grumbled. Don't grumble like some of the Israelites did and were destroyed by the destroyer." And you will read the book of Numbers, all seven of the grumbling narratives, and the destroyer does not appear once.

So what Paul has done is he's developed, based on that, appearance of the destroyer. In the Exodus story, he's formed a method of interpreting divine violence. And where he sees God doing direct divine violence, he assumes that that divine violence was God giving people over to some destructive force, that is this thing that killed them. In this case, the plague. The destroyer refers to a plague in almost all the

cases where it occurs.

So modern Westerners, we think, "Oh, well, it was just a plague happened?" And then the biblical authors were like, "That was God."

Jon: Right.

Tim: But that's so foreign to the biblical mindset. This is a deep rabbit hole.

Jon: This is great. Keep going.

Tim: Okay. So flood story. Let's take the flood story, for example. There's direct divine violence.

Jon: Totally. Just taking over the whole world.

Tim: Okay. So God says, "The heart of humanity is only evil all the time. I regret making humanity on the Earth." This is the introduction to the flood story in Genesis 6. "And so I'm going to wipe the earth clean." So God takes responsibility. In all these cases, God takes responsibility, but what I'm saying is—

Jon: When you say that He's not saying, "I'm the one who is at fault," not that kind of responsibility. He's saying responsibility in that, "I'm going to solve this. I'm going to be the one that brings a conclusion to this?"

Tim: Yeah. I mean, I like the phrase—

Jon: What do you mean when you say, "take responsibility?"

Tim: Well, what I like about the phrase "God's taking responsibility," is in these narratives,

the face value reading is God saying, "I'm doing this. I'm responsible."

Jon: "I'm going to do this. I'm responsible for this."

Tim: But then you read story, and it's God—

Jon: "I'm not responsible for how the humans are acting. I'm going to be responsible for

what I'm going to do." You're throwing up your hands in the air."

Tim: Yeah, I am. Just be patient with me. Right? Be patient. So for God take responsibility,

one, just read the narratives where God judges people. Four times out of 5, 8 out of 10, 16 out of 20, it's God handing people over to what humans would see as just the natural...Let's not use that word. Just the consequences - not natural consequences - the consequences of a bad, stupid, selfish, sinful decision.

Jon: Yeah, cause-effect.

Tim: Causing effect. And God takes responsibility for that and says, "I did that to you." So

we're into the worldview of Proverbs here of the moral universe and cause and effect and so on. So there's that.

Then there are other narratives where it doesn't seem like there's any huge agent.

There's no Babylonian Second Jerusalem that God can say, "I did it." So the Exodus.

But then, when you think that's God directly, there are these little textual details that say, the destroyer it's some kind of malevolent something...

Jon: Something gnarly.

Tim: That is called by a phrase you think refers to some sort of evil spiritual being, but then in other narratives, the destroyer is identified, like in Second Samuel 24, as a plague. And therefore, when Paul reads other narratives of divine violence, he inserts some other agent into the story.

Jon: He just assumes that must be what happens.

Tim: That's right. That's very important for what I'm saying right now, is you can see Paul

doing this. He's making an interpretive—

Jon: Yeah. But what does Paul know?

Tim: You know what I'm saying? He inserts some other agent doing the actual violence to

people in the wilderness narratives in Numbers. So, all the way back to the flood, which is a different kind of example. The violence and the undoing, the cause of the death of humans in the flood it's not lightning; it's the windows of the heavens starts raining.

Jon: The Rakia?

Tim: Yeah. And the springs of the deep burst. Now, this goes all the way back to Genesis

1. You can go through the way that the description of the rain starts. It's item by item, a disintegration of what God brought into order in Genesis 1. Sky, land, sea, the types of creatures that Noah brings on the boat, the types of creatures that then die. And this is not just me. This is people have noticed this for a very long time. The flood story is depicted in the language of the undoing of the order that God brought about. It's decreation. So God is giving the earth over back to *tohu wa-bohu* and chaos. And so, even in that example, chaos is always crashing at your doors, just like the ocean waves.

Jon: Second Law of Thermodynamics.

Tim: Totally, yeah. We will translate another category. But why is the sea identified with chaos? Well, man, you go to the beach.

Jon: Oh, it's coming at you.

Tim: It's just like, it's always coming at you, but God set a boundary for it like he says in Job. He says, "Here your proud waves halt no more." So the land is the place of

order except the desert, right?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's an ancient way of viewing the world that the flood is God...

Jon: Letting the waters take over.

Tim: ...releasing His imposition of order on to creation and giving creation back over to the forces of chaos that are always crashing at the beach.

Jon: Yeah, okay. It's a giving over.

Tim: It's another handing over.

Jon: In Genesis 1, it's Him imposing order, and that he has to sustain that.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: And then, in Genesis 6, it's Him letting go of that and giving it over? That's the chaos?

Tim: That is why in so many of the creation poems, later poems, like Psalm 74, where God

creating is depicted in His battle of crushing the seven-headed dragon in Psalm 74.

It's also not just creation; its creation in order, because he says, "Sun and moon, stars and seasons."

The fact that the world has ordered rather than disordered, is because of God's constant sustaining presence. But the moment that He hides his face, which is a common Old Testament phrase for judgment, "and hands people over," or "hands creation over," and "withdraws his presence," chaos descends. So whether that's the flood, whether that plague, or whether that malevolent evil forces, or whether that's giving evil humans over to other evil humans.

And so, all of this is one thing in the mind of the biblical authors. And so when God

hands Jesus over, this is God handing himself over to our evil, and simultaneously taking responsibility for it at the same time. That's why I like the phrase "taking responsibility." Because on the cross, God takes responsibility for human evil. He allows it to determine his death sentence. You know what I'm saying?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's so paradoxical if you get your mind around this. But it's God takes responsibility and takes upon Himself the death sentence.

Jon: So if he would have handed over humanity in the way we've been talking, it would have been death for humans?

Tim: Yes. That's page 3 of Genesis, right?

Jon: Yeah, you'll die. Jesus' death on the cross is God handing him so over? Instead of handing us over, He said, "I'll hand myself over. I will take that."

Tim: "Myself" being the Trinitarian self. The father handing over the son, and the son's empowered by the Spirit to do so, and that kind of thing.

Jon: And that will be my wrath and my judgment and that is me defeating evil? That's a separate thing.

Tim: Well, I think where we landed was we liked the phrase "robbing evil of its power." But, man, the New Testament authors don't mix their words. They call it a victory. A decisive victory.

Remember, Paul, he made a public humiliation spectacle of the powers of evil, human and spiritual when he triumphed over them on the cross. Or the whole Book of Revelation is about the victory of the Lamb and the conquering of the Lamb and his follows through dying.

So the New Testament authors describe it as God's Day of the Lord victory, but stage 1, that will be completed when Jesus returns. And so, this is why ultimately, I think the readings of the final Day of the Lord and the culmination of history that understand Jesus' coming back and exerting divine violence, chopping people's heads off and this kind of thing, in my mind it's like whiplash at the end of the story, because that is in no way consistent with how this God has been portrayed.

Jon: Because you've already been saying, "Okay, humans have been deserving of death

and retribution, I suppose, as a consequence."

Tim: Yeah, because we unleash that on each other.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: And what you actually see is a lot of God being really generous in spite of that. I mean, even in the Cain and Abel story, like Cain kill his brother, and then God marks him and says—

Tim: But notice the punishment there is banishment. God withdraws Himself from Cain and his evil.

Jon: So, there's still a consequence. But in spite of the consequences, you find God constantly trying to like, you know, He's patient, slow to anger, loving and—

Tim: He's bearing people sin.

Jon: Yeah. You see that, and then you get to Jesus and you see his handing over in this now very remarkable and counterintuitive way. And then, that's tied to not only has he handled himself over instead of handing us over, it's also tied to his victory over evil.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: That poses some interesting questions because we still experience evil. So we've used the phrase "robbing evil of its power." There was some sort of victory that happened.

Tim: The victory is that death ultimately didn't maintain its hold on Jesus. I mean, the cross isn't a victory without the empty tomb.

Jon: Evil will not be able to keep its hold over us as well?

Tim: Evil was unable to keep its hold over Jesus. Therefore, he is offered God's ultimate blow.

Jon: It's like the antidote. It's like he came up with...

[crosstalk 00:42:33]

Tim: The Antidote. Yeah.

Jon: You know, no one had a way to combat evil. Evil always won. Evil's promise of power, the way that it snares you and then leads you to death, it's like this irreversible thing, like a virus. And then Jesus comes and says, "No, not anymore. It doesn't have to lead to death."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And the victory.

Tim: Yeah, that's the victory.

Jon: That's like a geneticist celebrating that he just came up with a new antidote.

Tim: Antidote.

Jon: I don't know if that's a good metaphor.

Tim: There are lots of good metaphors. I should say this all on the top my head because I

recently had to give a teaching on divine violence in the Old Testament. So I have a

recent stack of books in my head, that's why I can spell out all this.

Jon: Okay. You say it's whiplash because you get to then a discussion about the future of

creation and humanity, and how God's going to make things right.

Tim: How He'll deal and confront evil once and for all, ultimately.

Jon: Evil and us.

Tim: And us. Yes, that's right.

Jon: And intertwining of us with evil because evil is crouching at our doors and wants to have its way with us. It's whiplash because you're saying—

Tim: If all along, even though God has been taking responsibility for our evil, even though

He Himself in most of these narratives isn't perpetrating it, He's handing people over to the evil consequences and violence. But God takes responsibility for it in much of the Old Testament.

That's the same pattern that you see displayed in Jesus, is Jesus takes responsibility for the centuries of Covenant rebellion of Israel. Jesus dies as a violent revolutionary against Rome when he himself wasn't. He is bearing and taking responsibility for his people's evil and for human evil.

And what is the result? He eats the consequences. He's handed over to death. And that is God's wrath. That's the biblical pattern of how God punishes, is handing people over. But He hands him over.

Jon: So he did that with Jesus. But then the question becomes now in the future, when He still has to deal with the Babylon's we're creating and the systemic problems, and also just people, why can't He handover with plagues and fire and brimstone and

those kinds of things with the destroyer? Why can't this be the way it goes down in the end of times?

Tim: The only real depictions we have are a couple apocalyptic type passages in the New

Testament. Jesus offers one talking about the fall of Jerusalem in the gospels. Paul, in his letters to the Thessalonians, and then, of course, the book of Revelation.

But once again, if you read slowly and in context, reading these apocalyptic texts the way they're designed to be read, which is connecting all this imagery as imagery, the divine judgment on Babylon in the Book of Revelation is - we talked about this in the podcast - it's the 10 plagues put in a blender and with the volume turned up. Which doesn't actually answer the question of, "Okay, well, what do these images refer to?"

Jon: Sure.

Tim: Because, on one level, locusts and plagues and, you know, it's God handing creation

back over to disorder. It's God handing creation over to its own evil to self-destruct.

Jon: So that will still happen in certain ways. And it does today.

Tim: Yeah, it happens every day.

Jon: It's happening all the time. And if you want to say that's violence, divine violence, then divine violence is still happening.

Tim: It's God, allowing His creation to sink into chaos. Chaos that's caused...we would separate it out as modern Western people, natural chaos and human moral chaos.

But the biblical authors viewed all as one intertwined package.

Jon: One place that this really comes to a head talking about violence is in the Revelation.

You have the image of Jesus riding in on a white horse and he's got blood all over

his robes. Traditionally, you would think, "Okay, yeah, because Jesus is going to kick some butt, obviously, now he's bloody from battle." But when we talked about that, you made a point of that being his own blood. We actually have a good question from Robin Rumble about that.