

Can the Bible's Description of God's "Smiting" be Understood Permissively

In a discussion on a blog in which we were discussing the "permissive sense" of the Bible where some of the horrendous acts attributed to God can be understood in a permissive sense, a question was posed:

Is there no literal way of saying in Hebrew "The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten..."? Or "The Lord shall allow thee to be smitten..."?

I found the question interesting and fun to answer since I have been studying this truth extensively in the past few years. I thought the readers of my own blog would benefit from my answer. Below is my response:

I believe that Mr. _____ is partially quoting Deuteronomy 28:25 which says, "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."

First, I deal with the Bible's teaching of God "smiting" people in chapter 10 of my book titled, **"How: A look at God's character in light of Biblical passages that are inconsistent with love"**. You can get it from Amazon.com:

https://www.amazon.com/How-character-Biblical-passages-inconsistent/dp/1530460727/ref=sr_1_28?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1488638558&sr=1-28&keywords=Troy+Edwards

When we are attempting to understand God, we must always interpret His actions in the light of the revelation that Jesus gave us concerning Him (2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:1-3; John 14:8-11; Acts 10:38; Matt. 7:7-11). Jesus never taught a God who is vindictive and One who uses His power to get retribution upon those who rebel against Him, but He taught us about a God of love who seeks to win His enemies. However, Jesus also taught us that God will not force His love upon us and if we choose to reject Him, He will allow us to suffer the severe consequences of our choices (Matt. 23:37-38). It is always best to understand Old Testament passages such as Deut. 28:25 in this light.

Strangely enough, the word "cause" in Deuteronomy 28:25 is from the Hebrew word "Nathan" which is translated in most places in the KJV as "suffer (archaic word meaning 'allow' or 'permit'), deliver, give up, give over." In other words, this is a *permissive verb*. Some literal translations recognize this fact and have translated the verb properly:

Jehovah **will give thee up smitten** before thine enemies; thou shalt go out against them one way, and by seven ways shalt thou flee before them; and thou shalt be driven hither and thither into all the kingdoms of the earth. (Darby)

Yahweh **will give thee up to be routed** before thine enemies, one way, shalt thou go out against them, and, seven ways, shalt thou flee before them,—and thou shalt become a terror unto all the kingdoms of the earth. (Rotherham's Emphasized Bible)

May the Lord **deliver thee up to slaughter** before thine enemies, so that thou mayst go out one way to meet them, and flee seven ways from before them; and be a dispersion among all the kingdoms of the earth (Charles Thomson Translation)

Jehovah **giveth thee smitten** before thine enemies; in one way thou goest out unto them, and in seven ways dost flee before them, and thou hast been for a trembling to all kingdoms of the earth; (Young's Literal Translation)

And Jehovah **will give thee smitten** before thine enemies: in one way thou shalt go forth against him, and in seven ways shalt thou flee before his face; and thou wert for a shaking to all the kingdoms of the earth. (Julia Smith Translation)

The Lord **give thee (to) falling** before thine enemies; by one way go thou [out] against them, and by seven ways flee thou from them, and be thou scattered by all the realms of [the] earth (Wycliffe Translation)

This is consistent with the teaching in the KJV where God's method of "smiting" is explained:

He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, **but gave their life over to the pestilence; And smote all the firstborn in Egypt;** the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham: (Psalm 78:50-51)

The psalmist says that God "smote" the people, not by directly doing anything to them through divine power, but by "giving them over" to the evil forces surrounding them. This is why the Common English Bible, a more modern translation, is a more consistent translation:

The Lord **will hand you over defeated** to your enemies. You will go out against them by one direction, but you will run for your life away from them in seven different directions. All the earth's kingdoms will be horrified by you. (Common English Bible)

Seeing that God “gives them up” or “hands them over” means that He removes His protection, thus allowing their enemies to have their way with them. Hence, a number of other modern translations brings out a more permissive understanding of the passage:

“The Lord **will allow you to be struck down** before your enemies; you will attack them from one direction but flee from them in seven directions and will become an object of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. (New English Translation)

The Lord **will let you be defeated** by your enemies, and you will scatter in all directions. You will be a horrible sight for the other nations to see, (Contemporary English Version)

“The Lord **will let your enemies defeat you**. You will go to fight against your enemies one way, but you will run away from them seven different ways. The bad things that happen to you will make all the people on earth afraid. (Easy to Read Version)

The Lord **will let your enemies defeat you**. You will attack them from one direction but run away from them in seven directions. You will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms in the world. (God's Word Translation)

The Lord **will let you be overcome** by your haters: you will go out against them one way, and you will go in flight before them seven ways: you will be the cause of fear among all the kingdoms of the earth. (Bible in Basic English)

The Lord **will let you be beaten down** before your enemies; though you advance against them from one direction, you will flee before them in seven, so that you will become an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. (New American Bible (Revised Edition))

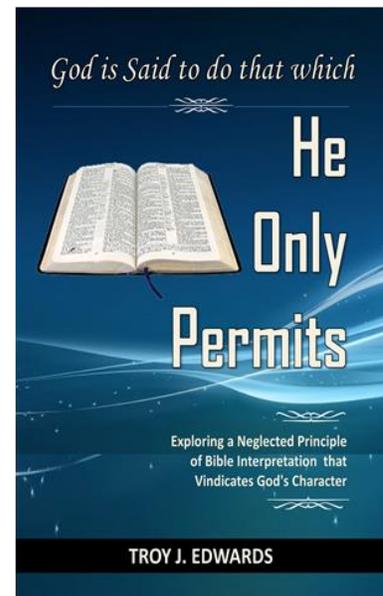
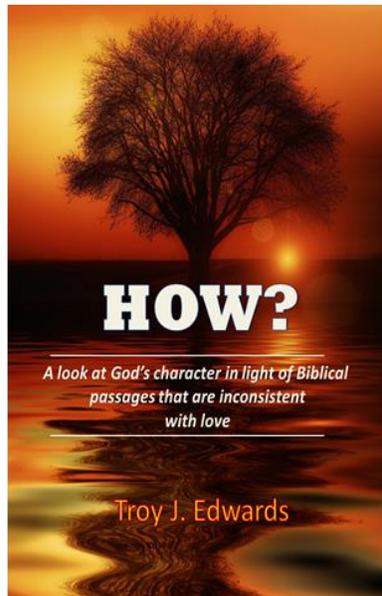
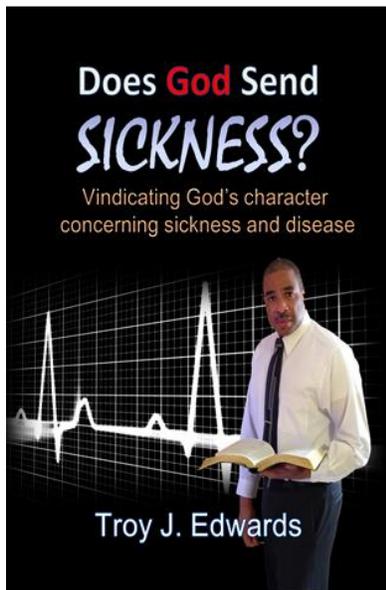
Yahweh **will let your enemies defeat you**. You will attack them from one direction but run away from them in seven directions. You will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms in the world. (Names of God Version)

In conclusion, I believe that a proper translation of the word “*nathan*” can bring out a literal understanding that says, “The Lord shall allow thee to be smitten...” I believe that many other passages in Scripture. For more understanding of how "causative" verbs can be understood "permissively" then check out our blog, "Interpreting Hebrew Causative Verbs Permissively:"

<http://vindicatinggod.blogspot.com/2016/07/interpreting-hebrew-causative-verbs.html>

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