

Golden Nuggets from Really Old Books:

Really Old Books that Confirm the Permissive Sense of Isaiah 45:7

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. (Isaiah 45:7; King James Version)

A couple of days ago I posted a meme on several social media sites comparing the opening passage above to the translation (or *paraphrase*) below:

“He [God] who forms light and creates the dark, Who makes peace and lets evil happen; I am the Maryah who did all these things.” (Isaiah 45:7; Book of Isaiah: Translated from the Aramaic Scriptures by Victor Alexander)

Isaiah 45:7 is used by some groups to claim that God literally created evil (to include *moral evil*) and by others to teach that God “creates” disastrous punishments. I intentionally underscored “lets” in Alexander’s “translation” to contrast it with the “create” in the KJV. My purpose, to no one’s surprise, was to show that God does not directly afflict evil (“troubles” or “disasters”) on people but that He *allows* them to happen when people remove themselves from under His protection (Deut. 31:16-18).

I took a beating from a number of people: Calvinists, Arminians, and a few in between. The challenges ranged from the idea that “since a number of places in the Bible attributes natural disasters to God, how can you claim that He only *permits* these things” to questioning the legitimacy of Alexander’s “translation”.

I and others have written a sufficient amount of material to demonstrate how Bible passages that ascribe disastrous events to God can be understood in a permissive sense with even more material planned and on the way. However, since questions have risen concerning the authenticity of Victor Alexander’s rendering of Isaiah 45:7 in the “permissive sense” I thought that this would be a good time to use my “golden nuggets from really old books” series to deal with this issue. So below I will quote five publications from the 1800s that affirm the belief that Isaiah 45:7 can (and *should*) be understood from the permissive sense:

We find in the 45th chapter of Isaiah, that the Lord determined to raise up Cyrus to be the instrument of restoring the Jews from their captivity in Babylon; and though it was nearly two hundred years before Cyrus was born, he addressed him, as though he were present, and called him by name. The religion of his native country contained the belief, that there were two co-eternal Beings, the one the author of all good; the other the author of all evil: and that these were continually opposing each other. These absurd opinions, according to Lowth and Scott on the passage, were the special reason why Jehovah should have spoken of himself, at

that time, in the following manner: “I am the Lord, and there is none else; there is no God beside me. I form the light; I create darkness; I make peace; I create evil; I the Lord do all these things.” That Jehovah is the direct source of all good no one disputes. **When he is said to create evil, we may understand that it is agreeable to the Hebrew language, in which the Old Testament was written, to ascribe directly to God, that which he permits to be done.** Thus we often read of the Lord's hardening the heart, which may mean simply, that he permits sinners to go on in their own chosen ways. (Emphasis mine)

“*The Independence of God Vindicated*” in **The Evangelical Magazine, Volume 2** (Hartford: Peter R. Gleason & Co., 1834), p. 309

In Isaiah, God says, “I create evil.” At the same time we know, from the whole tenor of Holy Writ, that God is not the author of evil. Yet Isaiah's expression is correct and idiomatic. Whatever is done by an agent, is said to be done by the power restraining and directing that agent. **In like manner, it is usual in Scripture to attribute to the Supreme Power, acts which are virtually those of his instruments, and which he merely permits,** in order to overrule and evolve good from them. There are diversities of agents at work, but one God; and there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. All acts are primarily those of God, from whom all powers and permission of acting proceed; secondarily, those of his agents. (Emphasis mine)

Fraser-Tytler, Charles Edward **New View of the Apocalypse: or, The Plagues of Egypt and of Europe Identical** (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1852), p. 66

The 1st. Aorist Passive has generally a reflex sense, when intransitive almost always so. **This is according to the Hebrew phraseology which attributes to God, the actions he permits to be done,** “I make peace and I create evil—I the Lord do all these things (Isaiah xlv. 7.) Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord have not done it (Amos iii. 6) which can only be interpreted like the present of *permissive agency*. (Emphasis mine)

Houghton, William **Calvinism Scripturally Examined, and Shewn to be Inconsistent with the Statements and Totally Opposed to the General Tenor of the Word of God** (London: C. J. G. and F. Rivington, 1836), p. 37

But how does God “create evil”? By a special exercise of power, such as he put forth when he created the world? Or is he said to *cause*, to *create*, that which comes to pass in the regular course of his providence, and which he puts forth no special effort to prevent? It is in this latter sense, undoubtedly, that God is sometimes said in the Scriptures to *harden* the hearts of men, and to *create evil*. Pursuing the courses they do, men's hearts *become hard under the providence of*

God, and nothing but a miracle could prevent it. **Another phraseology, however, is very often used in the Bible, implying a *sufferance of evil*, a *permission of it*, rather than a direct causation.** “Who in times past *suffered* all nations to walk in their own way” (Acts xiv. 16). “I *gave them up* to their own hearts’ lusts” (Ps. lxxxii. 12). He “*gave them over* to a reprobate mind” (Rom. i. 28). (Emphasis mine)

Pond, Enoch **Lectures on Christian Theology** (Boston: Congregational Board of Education, 1867), p. 343

It can scarcely be necessary to insist that such expressions as represent God as the author of evil, the most remarkable of which is perhaps found in Isaiah—“I make peace, and create evil”— **must be understood in the sense either of permission or of punishment.** (Emphasis mine)

Dox, H. L. “The Power of Darkness” in **The Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 8** (Gettysburg: J. A. Wible Printer, 1878), p. 574

More statements from classic books can be cited on this point but I believe the above is sufficient to demonstrate that understanding Isaiah 45:7 in a “permissive sense” is not a new or novel idea. On the contrary, Church father Hippolytus of Rome (170 – 235 AD) rendered it this way several centuries ago when he wrote, “...the word of Isaiah, I, the Lord, make peace, and create evil; meaning by that, I maintain peace, and permit war.”¹

Whether Victor Alexander is giving us a literal translation from the Aramaic or if he is merely paraphrasing the passage, he has done nothing blasphemous or illegitimate concerning God’s Word. He is conveying the actual thought and intent expressed through the cultural idioms and language of the people of that time, at least according to these *really old books*. Blessings.

=====

For more Biblical teachings visit our web pages below:

Visit our church’s web page: <http://www.cvbibleteachingcenter.org>

Visit our ministry web page: <http://www.vindicatinggod.org>

¹ MacMahon, J. H. (Translator) "On Psalm LXXVII" in *The Refutation of All Heresies by Hippolytus* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1868), p. 429