

The Hidden Face of God

Numbers 6:23-27

*Tell Aaron and his sons: You will bless the Israelites as follows. Say to them: **The Lord bless you and protect you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his face to you and grant you peace. They will place my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them** (Numbers 6:23-27; Common English Bible)*

Introduction: In Scripture God is said to have done some pretty horrible things that, frankly speaking, are not consistent with the picture of Him that Jesus gives us nor are they consistent with the Biblical understanding of love. God is said to have killed people, sent against His own people cruel pagan enemies, sickness, natural disasters, etc.

1. God is often said to do that which happens to us when we lose His protection:
 - a. The shining of God's face was a metaphor symbolizing His favor, blessing, and protection over His people:
 - b. Psalm 67:1; 80:3, 7, 19; Daniel 9:17
 - c. God's face was the only way that they knew that they could be helped
 - d. Psalm 27:9
 - e. The shining of God's face was His answering of prayer. The hiding of God's face was when He refused to answer prayer:
 - f. Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 Pet. 3:12
 - g. God was very reluctant to turn His face from His people. He only asked for their repentance:
 - h. 2 Chronicles 30:7-9
 - i. Note that God's hidden face is synonymous with giving His people up, or removing His protection and allowing their enemies to have their way.

2. Quite often, the things that God is credited to have done in Scripture was nothing more than the hiding of His face:

- a. Note the horrible curses that God is said to inflict upon His disobedient people:
- b. Deut. 28:20
- c. Curses - *unfruitfulness, insufficiency, frustration, failure, defeat, bondage, poverty, fear, and all kinds of sickness and disease.*
- d. However, several chapters later, we learn that God will only inflict these things by “hiding His face”:
- e. Deut. 31:16-18
- f. When they do, I’ll be furious with them and abandon them. I won’t look on them when they pray. I won’t protect them, and they’ll be eaten alive. They’ll be in so much trouble and distress then that they’ll say, “We must be in all this trouble because our God isn’t with us anymore!” (Deut. 31:17; The VOICE)
- g. “I will surely hide my approbation and my protection. This is the general meaning of the word in Scripture.” – Clarke, Adam The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments (New York: G. Lane and F. F. Sandford, 1843), p. 820
- h. In Jeremiah 44 God says that He is going to punish by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. The context demonstrates that God’s punishment is to *hide His face* or remove His protective presence:
- i. Jer. 44:11-13

3. In Scripture the “hidden face of God” is how He is said to “kill”:

- a. Jer. 33:5
- b. Alternate understanding: “... I will kill in my anger and my wrath. That will happen because I have decided to turn my back on this city” (New English Translation)
- c. God is said to “kill” or “have slain,” not by personally striking a blow, but by “hiding His face” or “turning His back”.

- d. Ezekiel 39:23
- e. Foreign nations will realize that the Israelites were forced to leave their own land because they sinned against me. I turned my back on my people and let enemies attack and kill them. (Eze. 39:23; Contemporary English Version)
- f. and all the nations will know the people of Israel were exiled because they acted wickedly and willfully turned their backs on Me. This is why I turned My back on them and allowed their enemies to do with them as they pleased. As a result, all of them fell by the sword. (The VOICE)
- g. God says that He “kills” – Deut. 32:38-39
- h. However, the context of Deuteronomy shows how He does this – Deut. 32:20, 35
- i. and said, “You are unfaithful and can’t be trusted. So I won’t answer your prayers; I’ll just watch and see what happens to you. (Contemporary English Version)
- j. And the Lord said, I shall hide my face from them, and then I shall see what will happen to them; for this is a wayward generation, they be unfaithful children. (Wycliffe Translation)
- k. The devil is the real killer – John 10:10

Conclusion: The lesson we learn is that when we obey God we will receive His favor, blessings, and protection. When we choose to persistently rebel against Him we can expect Him to sooner or later hide His face from us, thus losing His blessing and protection and suffering the inevitable consequences of our sin. But we should recognize in all of this that God is not the author or direct distributor of the things that we suffer.