

DOES GOD “CREATE” EVIL?

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In Isaiah 45:7, the prophet wrote of God: “I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am Jehovah, that doeth all these things.” On occasion, unbelievers appeal to this verse in an attempt to involve the Bible in a moral difficulty, since the text seems to suggest that God “created” evil. How should a Christian respond to such a charge?

First of all, the verse can have no reference to moral evil (wickedness) for such is opposed to the infinitely holy nature of God (Isaiah 6:3). Jehovah is a “God of faithfulness and without iniquity” (Deuteronomy 32:4). He is “not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness” (Psalm 5:4). Nor can it be supposed that this verse has to do with Jehovah’s original creation, for at the termination of the creation week, the Lord saw “everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good...” (Genesis 1:31).

The context of Isaiah 45:7, along with several passages of similar import, reveals the truth of the matter. Jehovah—through the prophet Isaiah—prophetically announced to King Cyrus of Persia (a century and a half before the monarch’s birth!) His intention of using this pagan king as an instrument of His holy will. Within Isaiah 45:1-7 is a majestic affirmation of the universal sovereignty of the Almighty God; indeed, there is none like Him (vs. 5). He thus affirms: “I form light, and create darkness [i.e., control nature]; I make peace, and create evil [i.e., exercise control over the nations]; I am Jehovah that doeth all these things.”

Note how the word “evil” is used in obvious contrast to “peace.” Isaiah simply was stating that Jehovah has the power to cause peaceful conditions to exist, or to bring about evil (i.e., destruction). Consider another verse. God warned the Israelites

that if they made an alliance with Egypt, He would bring evil upon them [i.e., punishment (cf. Isaiah 31:1-2)]. Again, in describing the coming judgment upon ancient Babylon, the prophet declared: “Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know the dawning thereof and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it away; and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou knoweth not” (Isaiah 47:11). Thus, the **evil** that God sent was a **desolation**—a desolation due on account of their wickedness!

Scholars have observed that “evil” can be used with a purely secular meaning to denote physical injury (Jeremiah 39:12), or times of distress (Amos 6:3)—which is its significance in Isaiah 45:7 (see Harris, et al., 1980, 2:855).

REFERENCES

Harris, R.L. G.L. Archer, and B.K. Waltke, (1980), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody).

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