

## Does God punish and are there different degrees of punishment for the wicked? What about unbelievers who live a good life?

Before we dive into the above questions, we must first answer the question, “Does God kill?”

Some have suggested that God does not kill, that His wrath is passive or indirect. In other words, it is the result of Him pulling away from His creation, never directly destroying unrepentant sinners.

However, there are many examples in the Bible of God’s active destruction:

- The flood (deep water to destroy all but Noah’s family)
- Sodom and Gomorrah (fire from heaven for immorality)
- Firstborn in Egypt (10<sup>th</sup> plague)
- Dathan, Abiram, and others (ground opened up; fire due to rebellion)
- Priests Nadab and Abihu (dropped dead for offering profane fire)
- Uzzah (dropped dead for touching ark)
- Herod struck (died from worms for defying God)
- Ananias and Sapphira (dropped dead for lying to God)

*(Genesis 6:6–7) And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. <sup>7</sup> So the Lord said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”*

*(Exodus 22:22–24) “You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. <sup>23</sup> If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; <sup>24</sup> and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.”*

NOTE: The Lord uses both His people and His enemies to carry out the work of destruction. The Bible often describes retributive judgments as coming from God Himself, even though others may carry it out.

Listen to God taking ownership for the destruction the wicked:

*(Deuteronomy 32:39–43) <sup>39</sup> “Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand. <sup>40</sup> For I raise My hand to heaven, and say, ‘As I live forever, <sup>41</sup> If I whet My glittering sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to My enemies, and repay those who hate Me. <sup>42</sup> I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and My sword shall devour flesh, with the blood of the slain and the captives, from the heads of the leaders of the enemy.”*

*(Isaiah 66:15–16) For behold, the Lord will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. <sup>16</sup> For by fire and by His sword the Lord will judge all flesh; and the slain of the Lord shall be many.*

NOTE: Even if God were to administer His wrath by stepping back and allowing natural consequences to destroy the wicked, He would still be active in their destruction. He knows very well that without His sustaining power they will die.

*(Jeremiah 30:23–24) <sup>23</sup> Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord—goes forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind; it will fall violently on the head of the wicked. <sup>24</sup> The fierce anger of the Lord will not return until He has done it, and until He has performed the intents of His heart. In the latter days you will consider it.*

*(Ezekiel 38:19, 22–23) <sup>19</sup> “For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: ... <sup>22</sup> And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. <sup>23</sup> Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.”*

While the Bible shows God withdrawing His sustaining life as one of His methods of executing judgment, it should be noted that this mechanism only occurs during mankind’s probationary time when Satan is active. This mechanism obviously cannot function after the reign of Satan has terminated.

### **Will God punish the wicked and what does the Bible say about it?**

Some that believe God will not actively destroy the wicked, also think His judgments are not punitive.

What does the Bible say about God repaying the wicked for their evil deeds?

*(Isaiah 13:11) “I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.*

*(Isaiah 26:21) For behold, the LORD comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth will also disclose her blood, and will no more cover her slain.*

*(Isaiah 28:21) For the Lord will rise up as at Mount Perazim, He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon—that He may do His work, His awesome work, and bring to pass His act, His unusual [“strange” KJV] act.*

*(2 Thessalonians 1:6–10) <sup>6</sup> since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, <sup>7</sup> and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, <sup>10</sup> when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.*

*(The Great Controversy, p. 627) To our merciful God the act of punishment is a strange act.*

*(Signs of the Times, August 24, 1882) Again, the divine message comes to Ezekiel: “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” The very fact of God’s unwillingness to punish sinners shows the enormity of the sins that call forth his judgments (plural). And yet to every transgressor of his holy law is addressed that earnest, pleading call, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?”*

*(The Review and Herald, Mar. 10, 1904) It is the glory of God to be merciful, full of forbearance, kindness, goodness, and truth. But the justice shown in punishing the sinner is as verily the glory of the Lord as is the manifestation of His mercy.*

*(Matthew 13:41–42) The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness,<sup>42</sup> and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

- Angels will cast the wicked into the fire.

*(Revelation 20:9–10) They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.<sup>10</sup> The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

- Fire comes down from heaven, not from the earth where Satan resides at this time.

*(The Great Controversy, p. 540) God has given in His word decisive evidence that He will punish the transgressors of His law. Those who flatter themselves that He is too merciful to execute justice upon the sinner, have only to look to the cross of Calvary. ... All this sacrifice was made that sinners might be redeemed. In no other way could man be freed from the penalty of sin. And every soul that refuses to become a partaker of the atonement provided at such a cost must bear in his own person the guilt and punishment of transgression.*

*(Gospel Workers, p. 264) Soon God is to rise out of His place to shake terribly the earth, and to punish the wicked for their iniquity. Then He will stand up in behalf of His people, and will give them His protecting care. He will throw His everlasting arms about them, to shield them from all harm.*

NOTE: This takes place during the time of trouble while God's people still reside on the earth.

*(Revelation 16:1) Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."*

*(Zephaniah 1:14–18)<sup>14</sup> The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out.<sup>15</sup> That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,<sup>16</sup> a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers.<sup>17</sup> "I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse."<sup>18</sup> Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.*

### **Will all the wicked receive the same punishment or to different degrees?**

*(Luke 12:47–48) And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.<sup>48</sup> But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.*

*(Isaiah 59:17–18) He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.<sup>18</sup> According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; the coastlands He will fully repay.*

- The wicked will be punished the wicked according to their deeds, meaning that they will not all receive the same sentence.

*(Revelation 14:9–10) Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, <sup>10</sup> he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.*

- The wrath of God is described in the Bible as something that God pours out without mercy. *(Psalm 21:9) You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of Your anger; the LORD shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them.*
- The first will do its work in the “presence of the holy angels” and “the Lamb” meaning that they will be there through the duration.

*(Early Writings, p. 274) Satan rushes into the midst of his followers and tries to stir up the multitude to action. But fire from God out of heaven is rained upon them, and the great men, and mighty men, the noble, the poor and miserable, are all consumed together. I saw that some were quickly destroyed, while others suffered longer. They were punished according to the deeds done in the body. Some were many days consuming, and just as long as there was a portion of them unconsumed, all the sense of suffering remained. ... Satan and his angels suffered long. Satan bore not only the weight and punishment of his own sins, but also of the sins of the redeemed host, which had been placed upon him; and he must also suffer for the ruin of souls which he had caused.*