

# Jeremiah 32:35

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Vincent,

Warm greetings to you.

Yesterday I saw this from a Christian forum:

Now, if you're so convinced that the most Holy God is ultimately behind all sin and evil, care to explain why He unequivocally states the exact opposite concerning idolatry in Jeremiah 32:35?

*"And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin."*

God is plainly stating that this is not His doing. If it did not enter into His mind that they should offer their children to idols, then how can you say He in fact decreed it before the world began?

What can you say about his statement?

This is such a naïve and irresponsible abuse of Scripture that it has never entered my mind that it would be used against the biblical doctrine of God's sovereignty over all things, that is, the doctrine that God is God. It is a good example of a person who is ignorant of theology, and refusing to acknowledge the context of the verse – not only the verses around the verse, but the words around an expression within the verse – he distorts a biblical passage to prove an unbiblical point.

In response, first we reaffirm the biblical distinction between divine decree and divine precept. As I have explained and defended this elsewhere, I will offer only a summary here. A divine decree is what God has decided to cause. A divine precept, on the other hand, has nothing to do with causation. It is God's definition of what is of truth and righteousness. It is his definition of man's moral obligation. And it often comes in the form of a command.

The verse says that God never commanded them to sacrifice their children to Molech. This provides the context to understand the expression that comes right after. The idea that "it never entered my mind" corresponds to "I never commanded." It emphasizes how far this practice was removed from the commands of God. The verse is completely irrelevant to whether God decrees or causes evil. This teaching is affirmed in many other biblical passages, but it is not affirmed or denied here.

Some translations recognize this and render the verse accordingly. For example, the NLT reads, "They have built pagan shrines to Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and there they sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech. I have never commanded such a horrible deed; *it never even crossed my mind to command* such a thing. What an incredible evil, causing Judah to sin so greatly!" The verse does not say that "it never crossed my mind" to cause the evil, but to command the evil. In fact, if God had commanded it as their moral obligation, it would have been a righteous thing to do.

I have answered this objection against the biblical doctrine, but this person is left with a serious problem.

For his objection to make sense, he must insist that the verse applies to God's decree, or his determination to cause. To him, then, the verse would mean either that it never crossed God's mind that *they would* perform such a thing, or that it never crossed God's mind that *he would* cause such a thing.

However, if the verse is interpreted to mean that it never crossed God's mind that *they would* do such a thing, then this amounts to a denial of God's foreknowledge. Now, my position is that God's foreknowledge and God's foreordination are two sides of the same coin. He knows all things because he causes all things, and he knows himself, thus he knows all that he would cause. But even if I were to adopt the false idea that foreknowledge is mere prescience, or a passive knowledge of future events, this concept of foreknowledge would still be denied by such an interpretation of the verse.

Then, if the verse is interpreted to mean that it never crossed God's mind that *he would* cause such a thing, it also amounts to a denial of God's foreknowledge, with the added blasphemy that God does not even know himself, since it would mean that he could not conceive of all the options possible for him – that he is incapable of hypothetical thought. But clearly to cause evil is conceivable to him (he can grasp the concept), since according to this interpretation, he interacts with the idea in this verse. This interpretation should alarm believers and invite great suspicion against anyone who advocates it as a refutation of the doctrine that God causes all things, including evil.

It appears that this person indeed assumes the second interpretation, since he writes, "God is plainly stating that *this is not His doing*." Therefore, not only does he fail to accomplish his goal of refuting the doctrine of God's sovereignty, but spiritually speaking, he has placed himself in a most dangerous position. Since his use of the verse amounts to an attack against God's nature, even his omniscience, it calls into question his profession of faith. This is more than an argument for him to win or lose, but it is a sinful distortion of Scripture for him to be repented of, lest he faces God's displeasure for his irreverence and blasphemy.