

Surprised by God's Answer to Your Prayers?

In C.S. Lewis' classic tale, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lucy discovers that Aslan, the 'savior' of Narnia is actually a lion. In her fear of meeting him, she asks Mr. Beaver, "Is he quite safe?" Mr. Beaver replies, "Safe, who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you!" It's been said that from one point of view the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5) doesn't offer the kind of security that we would choose for ourselves. Also, we don't have the ability to tame or domesticate him. But he is *good* and he is the *King* and he always does what is right!

To say that God is King is to say that he is the One and only Sovereign over all of his creation. Nothing happens in this world apart from his Kingship and yet we're all responsible for our words and actions. Throughout scripture we're taught that God is Sovereign and men are responsible (e.g., Ps. 115:3; Dan. 4:35; Acts 2:22-23; Eph. 1:11). And yet, it must be acknowledged that there's *mystery* in this important biblical doctrine. We see this truth taught in the story of Joseph who was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers who acted out of their own wickedness. And yet, when we come to the end of the story in Genesis 50, it's Joseph himself who says to his brothers, "As for you, *you meant evil* against me, but *God meant it for good*, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

There's a good purpose that God intends in all of the evil that his people experience in this sin-cursed world. Even when we bring God's discipline on *ourselves* by our own sinful choices God—out of his perfect love—is ultimately working everything for our good and his glory (Romans 8:28). As we proceed in Habakkuk, we'll see that God's people *will be punished* for their ongoing, unrepentant sin, but God's intended *good* shines through as well. In my previous article we looked specifically at how the people of Judah were willing to follow the wicked examples of their leaders. Today I want to begin to look at God's answer to Habakkuk's questions of why the sins of Judah seemingly go unpunished.

God's answer to Habakkuk begins as follows: "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work *in your days* that you would not believe if told. For I am raising up the Chaldeans..." (Habakkuk 1:5-6). The Chaldeans were a group of pagan peoples who inhabited an area around the southern part of ancient Babylon. Thus they're also referred to in scripture as the 'Babylonians' and we see them listed a number of times in the prophecy of Jeremiah (21:4; 22:25). This is the wicked nation that God,

himself, is *'raising up'* to punish Judah. God is *sovereignly* in control even though the Babylonians are acting out of their own sinful nature.

The rest of the verses from 6b-11 describe the Babylonians in fearful detail: they're *'bitter and hasty'* (vs. 6b) or we could say *'impetuous'* i.e., they're marked by running on impulsive, violent emotions and passions rather than being rational and deliberate. They "seize" what they want (vs. 6). "They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves" (vs. 7) i.e., the right or wrong of what they do, *they decide* based on their evil desires. In verses 8-11 we have a listing of their ability to war with other peoples: their horses are swift and fierce; their horsemen are proud; they all come for violence and march resolutely forward ("all their faces forward" vs. 9a). "They gather captives like sand" (too numerous to count) and they *'scoff'* and *'laugh'* at kings and rulers of those whom they're warring with; that is to say, there is absolutely no respect for them.

In addition to what we read in Habakkuk, there's another description of the wickedness of the Babylonians given in 2 Kings 25. This passage records the last days prior to the completion of the capture of Judah. The Temple is burned to the ground (vs. 9); the Babylonians slaughtered the sons of King Zedekiah and then they gouged out the king's eyes so that the murder of his sons was the last thing he would ever see in this life (vss. 6-7). Habakkuk prayed for God to punish the people of Judah but he could never have imagined how devastating the punishment would be. We're learning that the answer to our prayers may sometimes come as a surprise. Although God the King is in complete control of his creation, he doesn't always do things the way we might have expected.

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