

My Notes:

Through the Passage

⁵“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.



^{6a} For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans

^{6b} that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own. ⁷They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. ⁸Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour. ⁹They all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand. ¹⁰At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it. ¹¹Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!”

Sovereignty and Providence

Sovereignty –

Providence –

Answering Objections

- *God is not a monkey*
- *We are not his puppets*

Implications of What God Says to Judah

He is Sovereign Over History

He is Sovereign Over Our Lives

He is Sovereign Over Good and Evil

What does this mean for our lives?



Habakkuk 1:5-11 ESV

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Key Lessons for the Night

- **God is at Work in Ways Which we May not Believe**

God is always at work in his world at many times and in many ways. Sometimes his ways are contrary to our own thinking about Him. The Scriptures however reveal God as who he is, including the ways in which he works. Our preconceived notions of God need to be challenged and give way to the beauty, terror, wonder, awe, love and grace of God's self revelation in Scripture.

- **God is Sovereign over History and Providentially Acts to Accomplish His Purposes**

Although it brings both questions and comfort to our hearts and minds, the Scripture reveals God as the sovereign ruler of the universe. There is no authority or power greater than his own. As such he uses events, creation, the lives of people and nations to weave life into a complex fabric to bring about his purposes. This god is God—not simply a more powerful version of ourselves.

- **His Ways Include Using both our Good and our Evil towards his Good Ends**

Though it is hard to understand and remains very much a mystery, God uses both good and evil to work his purposes in our lives. He himself takes no delight in wickedness and sin, but he also uses all things together in wisdom to bring people to himself in order to give them the highest and most enduring joy.



Who are the Chaldeans?

The people mentioned as the coming judgment upon Judah were known to the Hebrew people as the *Kasdim* which is translated “The Chaldeans” or at times “The Babylonians.” They came from an area known as Chaldea which was southeast from modern day Baghdad. The empire rose very quickly to power and prominence in the ancient near east conquering the vast Assyrian empire by 612 BC. The Chaldeans are sometimes called the Neo-Babylonian empire which was founded under a dude named Nabopolassar (626-605). The empire grew and found its high point under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar (605-562), a person many are familiar with from history. The first part of the book of Daniel is set in Babylon under the rule of this great Babylonian king. R.L. Smith wrote the following about the Chaldeans:

*Kaldo was a country situated along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers between the Persian Gulf and the southernmost cities of Babylonia. It was a region of swamps, canebrakes and lakes with few urban areas. The inhabits seem to have relied on fishing, hunting, small-scale agriculture and some cattle-breeding for their livelihood. The region was divided into tribal areas. The people lived in loosely organized tribal groups and were fiercely independent of each other and especially of the major cities of the north, such as Babylon and Nineveh.*¹

So these were country folks that had shot-guns and didn't like “the man” of the big city empires messing with them. So they would just raid, pillage, and destroy all that got in their way. Then as a result of their “success” they became that which they despised. Then almost as fast as they grew to prominence on the near eastern stage, they exited being conquered and over run by the Persians under the leadership of Cyrus in 539 BC. Both the fast ascent to power and the subsequent decline of the Babylonians achieved God's purposes. First, to bring judgment on the nation of Judah which was in a state of chaos. Second, to fulfill the words of Jeremiah who prophesied that Judah would return to the land a mere 70 years after its exile (Jeremiah 29:10). The Persians were to issue the decrees to repopulate and rebuild Jerusalem and send the people of God back to the land.



Sovereignty and Providence

You may have heard the words *Sovereignty* and *Providence* thrown around from time to time and wondered what the terms mean. To be honest sometimes the two ideas get a bit jumbled together. Though the terms are certainly related they actually refer to slightly different emphases in the teachings of Scripture. Let's look at both ideas and see how they are related. When we speak of the *Sovereignty of God* we are referring to the Bible's basic teaching that God's dominion or rule in the world is total: he wills as he chooses and carries out all that he wills, and none can stay his hand or thwart his plans.² In other words when we speak of God as Sovereign, we declare that there is no other power or authority higher than his. He is the supreme ruler extending over human governments, spiritual beings, and each individual life. In looking at Providence, Dr. Bruce Ware provides a concise and helpful definition for the concept that captures the Bible's teaching.

*God continually oversees and directs all things pertaining to the created order in such a way that 1) he preserves in existence and provides for the creation he has brought into being, and 2) he governs and reigns supremely over the entirety of the whole creation in order to fulfill all of his intoned purposes in and through it.*³

The two concepts to keep in mind are preservation and governance—Providences involves God's sustaining and governing all things. When we speak of God's providence we think of the ways in which God is involved with creation, in directing all things to accomplish his purposes for the world. Now lets put these two together. In the Bible we see that God is the supreme sovereign authority in the world who works things out in and through creation through providence. Sovereignty tells us who is in charge, providence describes the ways in which God does his thing in the world. Many, many scriptures describe God's sovereign providence, I will list some here for your further study.

- God's rule in the actions of people and nations history (Daniel 2:20-23, Isaiah 46:8-11)
- God's rule in our lives (Acts 14:16-18; 17:24-28 Matthew 6:25-34; 10:26-33)
- God's rule over both good and evil – each with its own purpose (Story of Joseph Genesis 48-50; specifically Gen 50:18-21; Isaiah 45:5-7; Acts 2:22-23. I will expound on these in a second on the following page.

One of the great struggles we have as human beings is *perceiving God's work* in the mundane of every day life. It just looks to us that sometimes this world is out of God's control and that evil is triumphing amidst the silence of God. This is in fact what provoked Habakkuk's first question of God. As human beings we forget how narrow a view we have on life and history. We only see right before our faces. God is not like us in this regard. He sees end from beginning and wisely knows how to accomplish his purposes. Sometimes we need blessing and joy in our lives, other times we may need sorrow and suffering in order to see life properly. God is merciful and gracious to do whatever it takes to lead us to that which is life. We are not puppets of God, but we must remember that we are indeed creatures, not sovereigns. God is not the co-pilot of the world, he is the pilot and also the builder of the plane. He is not a passive God who waits to see what you tell him to do. He is God, high and exalted God. Yet the beauty of the gospel teaches us that God is not distant and aloof from us directing the affairs of his world from afar. On the contrary he calls us friends, leads us as his very own children, loves us enough to discipline us, and desires intimate relationship with us. In the Cross of Christ we see God himself dying for our sins. It is a statement of love in that God wants us to have himself and did all that was necessary to reconcile us to him.

Yet sovereignty and providence can also have a bitter edge for some of us. For indeed it places God right in the midst of our suffering. It also provokes questions: If God is all good and all loving, how does he use evil things as part of his plan? To this complex question we now turn.

God's Sovereignty over Good and Evil

If God is Sovereign, why do bad things happen? How Can God be good if he permits heinous evils to occur? Maybe God is only in control of the good things and not the bad? Maybe God is not in control at all? Maybe we are?

The questions pour out when thinking of the complex realities of good and evil in our world. Philosophers have discussed these issues for ages. Believers and unbelievers see the very same circumstances in very different lights. One man suffers immensely and meets God right there, while another curses God for the pain that he sees all around him. This week I am not going to answer what many have termed the “Problem of Evil” – perhaps we will touch this next week in the Lesson Notes. This week I am concerned with a different question, based on a conclusion. If we concluded that the Scriptures teach that God is sovereign and providentially “*works all things according to the counsel of his will*” (Ephesians 1:11) how does God use evil without being evil himself. I find the teaching of the Bible to be that God indeed is sovereign over both good and evil. We see this in the classic statement ending the narrative of Joseph's life in Genesis 50.

*His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” 19 But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 **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. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.***

Additionally in Isaiah 45:5-7 the prophet tells us that God makes both “well-being” and “calamity” (Hebrew word—Ra-which can be translated evil). Finally and most persuasively there are striking truths in the book of Acts describing God's using the sin of people to accomplish the most glorious act in all of human history—the crucifixion of the Son of God. The following is an excerpt of a sermon from Peter, one of Jesus' first followers.

*“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— 23 **this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.***

Why was Jesus crucified? It was the definite plan and foreknowledge of God! Shocking. How was this accomplished? He was murdered by the hands of lawless men. So my conclusion is that God uses both human good and human evil to accomplish his will in the world. Yet if this is so, how does God control evil without being the source of it? This is an important question. For it is clear that God is completely good and has in him no darkness at all. If this be the case, he cannot be the cause of evil even if he uses it for his ends. To help with our closing thoughts, I want to give a very brief (and no doubt insufficient) definition of what I mean by evil. As God is the source of all goodness, all that is a direct turning away from God and his will would be deemed evil. All that reflects or accords with his nature is seen as good.

Many see the following as helpful to understanding God's providential relationship to good and evil.⁴

- **Direct Causative** – God has a direct causative relationship to all things good. God brings about all good things in the world and everything that is good reflects something of who he is and what he desires for the world. James teaches us that every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights (James 1:17).
- **Indirect Permissive** – God has an indirect permissive relationship to evil. The evil that we do comes from the inclination of our desires to live apart from and turn away from God and his commands. God is not the direct cause of this, we are. Yet God guides human sin to his greater ends in order to accomplish his purposes. He is not the source of the sin, but he chooses in some cases to allow it.

These questions are perhaps some of the deepest in all of Scripture, but let me close on a more personal note. Many would say that God has no control, no say, no active role in our pain. I think those who say this want to make it easier for us to approach God, that we know it is not his fault. As I think about all the wrongs I have done and all the wrong which has been done to me is it better to think “God had nothing to do with it?” I know these are immensely painful questions. Over the years as I have watched the suffering in the world—both mine and those close to me—I have slowly begun to believe that it is all ordered by a loving God. I have embraced that I do not understand everything, but I cherish his presence in my pain. I have realized that it just might be the case that redemption is seen in a world with both great good and great evils. That it just might be the case that God is transforming situations that begin hellish and tragic to bring people into joy, hope and peace with him. Adoniram Judson, the first missionary from the United States once said something about his own immense suffering⁵ which offers me perpetual hope. He once recounted “*If I had not felt certain that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings.*” God indeed is near to the broken-hearted and he has not abandoned his children. All suffering will one day have served its purpose and it too will end. We live in hope, we live under his loving care, and we embrace the path of Jesus, even suffering for others in his name.

The Lord be with you,

Notes:

1. Quoted in David Prior, *The Message of Joel, Micah, and Habakkuk* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1998) 215
2. J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology : A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1995, c1993).
3. Bruce Ware, *God's Greater Glory—The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway Books 2004) 17.
4. The best work today on God's Providence is the aforementioned work *God's Greater Glory* by Dr. Bruce Ware. These concepts are expanded on in this work on pages 105-109. The book is a bit technical but I recommend it highly for all struggling with the ideas of Sovereignty and Providence.
5. Judson buried three wives, 7 of his children, and underwent unspeakable physical pain living in foreign lands.
6. Quoted in *Giants of the Missionary Trail*, (Chicago: Scripture Press Foundation, 1954), 73.

