

June 10, 2007 by Steve Brandon



Not Our Ways: Evil in the World

(Various)

On May 24th, 1970, after several years of preparation, the former Soviet Union began a massive, scientific drilling project on the Kola Peninsula, just off Finland. Their goal was to drill a hole as deep as possible into the Earth's crust. They had originally targeted to drill 15,000 meters (9.3 miles) into the earth. Thirteen years later, in 1983, the engineers had reached 7.5 miles into the earth, when they encountered some major physical problems—a huge section of their boring pipes tore off. Finally, in 1990, more than 20 years after they had begun digging, they reached their goal of drilling 9.3 miles into the earth. Soon afterwards, they stopped, due to the technical difficulties that they encountered deep into the earth.

This project has come to be known as the Kola Superdeep Borehole. To this day, the drilling site remains the deepest hole on the planet. In my research of this hole, it seems like all that I have read about are the surprises that these scientists have discovered in digging such a deep hole. [\[1\]](#)

1. First of all, the scientists predicted temperatures to be somewhere around 100 degrees Celsius (at which point water boils) when they were 9.3 miles down. Instead, the temperatures were 180 degrees Celsius, which is more like oven temperatures.
2. The scientists were also surprised to find so much water beneath the surface of the earth. They didn't expect this at all. They expected this water to have boiled up to the surface of the earth.
3. They were also surprised to discover the incredibly large quantity of hydrogen gas. The mud that flowed out of the hole was described as "boiling" with hydrogen.
4. Furthermore, they were surprised to discover some things about seismic velocities (the speed of sound in the rock), which was different than they had expected. Seismic velocities measure the speed of sound in rocks. It is one way that scientist use to map out the sub-terranean landscape. If some of their assumptions aren't correct, then it brings into question what lies further beneath the surface.

We might think that we know so much about the earth upon which we live, but even the deepest, most expensive dig in the history of mankind has penetrated less than a quarter of one percent of the way to the center of the earth. To put it in basic terms, if the earth were an apple, we haven't yet broken the skin!

Now, these Soviet scientists weren't dummies. They were highly intelligent. They were up to date on the latest and greatest scientific geological theories. They knew what the theory had predicted that they would find. And yet, when faced with the actual data that arose out of such a dig, they encountered many things that their theories never expected.

This hole in the ground is a great illustration of the topical sermon series that we are beginning this morning entitled, "Not Our Ways." The seed thought of these sermons are coming from a sermon preached by Edward Payson, nearly 200 years ago, entitled, "God's Ways Above Men's." Throughout his message, Payson describes the many ways in which the ways of God are far beyond our ways. We can only begin to grasp them. I would encourage you to read his sermon. [\[2\]](#) It may not be the easiest reading, as it was written in a style that you may not be used to, but it will be well worth your effort in taking the time necessary to go through it.

What has impacted me about this sermon is the way in which we really need to accept what God says in His word, rather than fight what He says in His word. His Ways are far above and beyond ours. Consider the following excerpt from Payson's sermon. He says,

God's ways and thoughts must be far above ours, because in situation and office he is exalted far above us. God is in heaven, and we upon earth. We occupy the footstool, and he the throne. As the Creator and Preserver, he is of course, the rightful Governor of the universe. All worlds, creatures and events are subject to his control, and he is under a blessed necessity of overruling and conducting all things in such a manner, as to promote, in the highest possible degree, his own glory and the universal good. In forming and executing his purposes therefore, he must take into view not only the present, but past and future circumstances and events; not the concerns of a single individual only; but those of the whole race of beings in heaven, earth, and all the worlds around us. Now consider a moment, the extent and duration of Jehovah's kingdom. Think of the innumerable armies of heaven; the perhaps scarcely less numerous hosts of hell; the multitudes of the human race, who have existed, who now exist, and will hereafter exist on earth before the end of time. Then raise your eyes to the numerous suns and worlds around us. Borrow the telescope of the astronomer, and penetrating far into unfathomable recesses of the ethereal regions, see new suns, new worlds still rising into view. Consider that all we can discover is perhaps but a speck, a single sand on the shore, in comparison with what remains undiscovered; ... that God's plan of government for this boundless empire must embrace eternity; consider these things, and then say whether God's purposes, thoughts, and ways, must not necessarily be high above ours, as the heavens are above the earth, or as his

sphere of action exceeds ours. Must not the thoughts and ways of a powerful earthly monarch be far above those of one of his subjects, who is employed in manufacturing a pin, or cultivating a few acres of ground? Can such a subject be competent to judge of his sovereign's designs, or even to comprehend them? How far then must the thoughts and ways of the eternal monarch of heaven, the King of kings, and LORD of lords, exceed ours; and how little able are we to judge of them, farther than the revelation which he has been pleased to give, enables us. [\[3\]](#)

Payson's main point here is that God's thoughts must be far beyond ours, because God is taking all things into account, not just your brief life during your stay upon the earth. God takes into account all the planets and stars ever created. God takes into account all who have ever lived. God takes into account all who ever will live. God takes into account His eternal desires. God works it all out according to His own sovereign pleasure.

At the heart of Edward Payson's sermon, he gives eight illustrations of the ways in which God has done things in this world that are different than we may have done then, should we have been God. In fact, it's these eight points that are going to form the launching pad for each of my messages these next eight weeks. My aim in these messages will be to show you again and again how God's ways are not our ways, which would ultimately lead you to adore your God with a greater heart and passion than ever before. Constrained to our own natural thinking, we would never think of creating a world the way that God has created it. But, it is clear that He did.

For our message this morning, we will be addressing the issue of the existence of evil. Concerning this, Payson said in his sermon, ...

In permitting the introduction and continued existence of natural and moral evil, God's ways and thoughts are very different from ours. Why he should permit angels or men to fall, we cannot tell. That he did permit them to fall, is certain; because had he thought proper, he could doubtless have prevented their apostasy. It is also certain that he still permits the existence of natural and moral evil; because if he chose, all things considered, to banish it from the universe, he could easily do it. But if we had been consulted, we should have decided that it was best that sin and its consequences should never enter the world; or if they must enter, that they should be immediately banished. In this particular therefore, God's thoughts and ways are evidently not like ours. [\[4\]](#)

Of course, the manner of how sin came to the human race comes in Genesis chapter 3. When God created the world, it was perfect. Throughout the creation narrative, the comment comes, "God saw that it was good" (1:10, 12, 18, 21). The crowning comment was that it was "very good" (1:31). But, in chapter 3, we see things turn very bad. Adam and Eve disobeyed and brought a curse upon us all.

Genesis 3:1-7

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'"

The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

Why did God allow this? He could have stopped it, but He didn't. If we could have stopped it, we probably would have. But, that's the point. God's ways are not our ways!

When we encounter such strange things, we all have a dilemma. Are we going to embrace what we think should be right and logical in our sight? Or, will we submit ourselves to God's word and believe what God says? Sadly, many people trust in their own logic and intelligence, rather than relying upon the truth of God's word.

For instance, I remember encountering a long-time friend of mine, over this very issue. He and I were fairly good friends in high school, who were exposed to many of the same things in our younger years. We went to the same schools. We had several classes together. We played baseball together. Through high school, we both attended church faithfully.

When we graduated, we both went off to college, and this is where our paths diverged. Through my college experience, I was compelled to go on to seminary to study the Bible. But, through my friend's college experience, he left his faith. He was a philosophy major and had encountered the various worldly philosophies that exist, and found their arguments more compelling than the arguments of the Bible.

About 15 years ago, I had just graduated from seminary, and moved back to my hometown. This friend of mine from high school discovered that I was in town and tracked me down. He set up a specific appointment with me to have a talk with me. Little did I know at the time, but, his aim was to disprove the Bible.

After our small talk had finished, he said something to the effect of this. "You know Steve, we both grew up in religious homes. But, I have discovered some things that I just can't understand about the Bible."

He continued, "First of all, I was taught that God was an all-powerful God. He created the universe. He created all of us. He has seated

Himself in the heavens and is strong and powerful enough to do whatever He pleases. Nothing comes to pass apart from His will. Do you believe this?" I said, "Sure, I believe it."

Then, he continued, "I was also taught that God was a good and loving God. The angels that surround the throne of God constantly say to one another, 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts.' This means that God is righteous and pure in all of His ways. He can't do evil, because it isn't in His nature. Do you believe this?" I said, "Yeah."

Then, he proceeded ask about the evil that is in the world, "I was taught that sin is in this world, (which we obviously can't deny) Crime is a problem in every city. People are murdered every day. Sickness affects us all. Eventually, every single one of us will die. Do you believe that sin is in the world?" I said, "Of course."

Finally, he proceeded to ask me the big question, "So, how do you account for the evil that exists in the world? If God were a good and loving God, certainly He would never want sin to come into the world. Perhaps He tried to keep it out, but was simply unable to stop it from coming in, which shows that He isn't all-powerful, as you thought. Or, If God is an all-powerful God and could have prevented sin from coming into the world, why didn't He? Perhaps He isn't as good as you think that He is. Perhaps God has some evil intent in Him that brought evil into the world. Steve, it seems to me that the presence of sin in this world compels us to sacrifice one of these things. Either God is not all-powerful. Or, God is not all-good."

This is the sort of question that drew my friend away from his faith. I attempted to respond as best as I could to him, explaining how the Bible taught these things and that we needed to accept them. But, I couldn't convince Him that God is good and God is all-powerful.

My friend didn't come up with this dilemma on his own. Nor is it only when the people in our generation began to think about these things that they found difficulty in harmonizing the sovereignty of God with the goodness of God with the presence of evil.

Throughout the entire history of the church, this has been acknowledged by many as a difficulty. John Calvin dedicated nine pages (an entire chapter) of his Institutes of the Christian Religion to this issue. [\[5\]](#)

Other great theologians have thought long and hard about these things. This difficulty has been thought about so much that it even has a name. It's often referred to at "the problem of evil."

Getting back to my friend, I trust that it is clear to you the path that he took to ultimately deny his faith. At the end of the day, he was trusting in His own logic, above what the Scriptures teach. Since he wasn't able to harmonize the truth of the Scripture with his thinking abilities, he trusted in his own intelligence, rather than in God's unchanging truth. Doing so is foolish, because God's ways are "Not Our Ways." Who are we, as His puny creatures to exalt our logic above His wisdom?

Again, I want to quote from Edward Payson's sermon to bring this issue of the wisdom of God into crystal clarity. He says,

God's thoughts and ways must be infinitely above ours, because his nature and perfections raise him infinitely above us. He is a self-existent, independent, all-sufficient, infinite, eternal, pure, and perfect intelligence. We are dependent, finite, imperfect, frail, dying creatures, fettered by gross, heavy bodies, and exposed to the influence of innumerable infirmities, temptations and prejudices, which bias and blind our reason. But more particularly, God is infinitely superior to us in wisdom. He is the all-wise God. Even the foolishness of God, says the apostle, is wiser than men; and the angels, who are far above us in wisdom, are in comparison with him, chargeable with folly. He must therefore, be able to devise a thousand plans and expedients, and to bring good out of evil in numberless ways, of which we never could have conceived, and of which we are by no means competent to judge, even after they are revealed to us. If the ways and thoughts of a wise man are above those of a fool, how much more must the ways and thoughts of the all-wise God exceed ours. [\[6\]](#)

God's ways are "Not Our Ways." The fact remains, God is omnipotent, and God is benevolent, and God has created a world where evil has come to reign. My call to you today is to trust the ways of God with the details of how and why God created a world like this. His wisdom is far above ours. Now, I'm not calling you to disengage your mind and not attempt to think about these things. I'm not calling you to merely accept these things with a blind faith. But, you do need to be careful, lest you deny the clear Scriptural truths in your thinking. At this point, Richard Veith has put it far better than I ever could.

Believers are trapped in a dilemma. If they seek an explanation for the apparent incompatibility of God and evil, then it seems that they are trying to take heaven by storm. Yet if they rest their case in mystery, they run the risk of naïve credulity, or even of believing self-contradictory nonsense. There really is no escape from this predicament, so we must be content with trying to 'muddle through,' as the British so aptly put it. There are no final answers, but surely some answers are better than others. So we seek the best answers we can find, all the while acknowledging the ... mystery. [\[7\]](#)

This morning, we will deal with, "the problem of evil." My message is entitled, "Evil in the World." So, let's begin to "muddle through" these things.

1. God is omnipotent.

First of all, we affirm strongly that God is omnipotent. That is, He is all-powerful. Nothing is outside of His power or authority. He is sovereign over the universe and He reigns and rules over all. The number of Scriptures that affirm this are many. We will consider only a few.

- Psalm 93:1, "The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty; The LORD has clothed and girded Himself with strength; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved."
- Psalm 97:1 - "The LORD reigns."
- Psalm 99:1 - "The LORD reigns."
- Psalm 115:3, "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases."
- Isaiah 46:10, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."
- Ephesians 1:11, "[he] works all things after the counsel of His own will."
- Daniel 4:34-35, "His dominion is an everlasting dominion. And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"

The implications of this last verse are clear and vast. His rule knows no interruptions (it is everlasting). His rule encompasses all who have lived (from generation to generation). No other creature has significance before Him (all are accounted as nothing) The LORD moves the heavens. The LORD moves the earth No one can stop Him (no one can ward off His hand). No one can question Him (saying, 'What have you done.')

These are but a few of the vast number of verses that we could bring up that speak of the absolute sovereignty of God. I quote them to demonstrate the fact that the Bible isn't fuzzy on the extent of God's power at all. The Bible clearly speaks of God and the all-powerful, sovereign LORD of the universe, who does as He pleases, and nobody can stop Him. In fact, never does the Bible give us any hint at all that His sovereignty is less than absolute.

As many of you know, I broke my elbow a few weeks ago. It's really feeling pretty good. But, there are some things that I just can't quite do yet. I can't lift really heavy things with my left arm. I can't twist it very easily. I still can't touch my shoulder with my left arm. And so, today, there are limitations to the things that I can and cannot do. But, when the Scripture is describing God, we never get a hint that there are things that He wants to do, but simply can't do. God does whatever He pleases, whenever He pleases, however He pleases. Psalm 135:6, "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in the deeps."

2. God is good.

Now, the Bible is just as clear regarding His goodness. Again, let me give you a few verses from the Bible that teach this.

- Psalm 100:5, "The LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations."
- Psalm 106:1, "Give thanks to the LORD for He is good" (see also 107:1; 118:1; 136:1).

Indeed, He is the standard of goodness. Jesus said, "No one is good except God alone" (Luke 18:19). He is the standard of all goodness, kindness, and love. 1 John 4:8, "God is love." God is the source of all good. James 1:17, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." Psalm 119:68, "You are good and do good."

His kindness is vast, extending to all. He is the one who gives "rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). His goodness even extends to the wicked. Jesus said that God "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and send rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45).

To be in God's presence, you need to be purified of your sins. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that without holiness "no one will see the LORD." This is the point of Isaiah 6. The pure and holy angels fly around the throne, never ceasing to say, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory" (Is. 6:3).

There is no evil with God at all. Psalm 5:4, "You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You." 1 John 1:5, "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." Daniel 4:37, "All His works are true and His ways just."

This is our God. He is omnipotent. He is benevolent. And, to put the third piece of the equation together,

3. Our world is filled with sin.

All you need to do is to look around us. Everywhere, you will see the deeds of the flesh, "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, and carousing" (Gal. 5:19-21). It is all over the place.

With these things being said, the question comes from the unbelieving skeptic, "If God is omnipotent and allows all this suffering, then he is not benevolent, he is not a kind-hearted God, he is not loving. And if he's loving to the whole world and allows all this suffering, then he's certainly not omnipotent. And given the fact of evil, or the fact of suffering, we can never conclude that God is both omnipotent and benevolent." [\[8\]](#)

Now, when many professing Bible believers deal with this question, they feel the need to defend God against these accusations. Rather than affirming the omnipotence of God and the benevolence of God, they seek to tweak what the Bible says about them, so as to explain the presence of evil in this world. When given a choice, most professing believers will sacrifice the sovereignty of God.

1. Some say that God is not sovereign in knowledge.

They say that He doesn't know of the suffering that will take place. In this way, God can't be accused of the evil that He didn't stop. If He didn't know the evil that would come because of sin, then He cannot be held culpable for not stopping it. This is the impetus behind the recent movement in theology known as Open Theism, which really has come about in an effort to solve the problem of evil.

Those who hold this view claim that God doesn't know the entire future. He has created a world, which can go down many different paths, and God doesn't quite know which path it will go down. It all depends upon the choices that we, as His free creatures, make.

They say that God created a perfect world without sin, not fully knowing what would happen. In the course of time, however, we made sinful choices and brought sin and suffering into the world. Thus, the plan of bringing Christ into the world to rescue us from the problem that we have caused becomes more of an after thought. This is the view of Open Theism. And you need to know that fundamentally, those who advocate this view are seeking to solve the problem of evil. These people hold so tenaciously to the goodness of God, that they have willingly sacrificed the sovereignty of God by explaining that God didn't know that evil would come into the world.

However, there are many Scriptural passages that tell about the omniscience of God. Psalm 139:3-4, "You ... are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all." Psalm 139:16, "Your eyes have seen my unformed substance" (in other words, God know what was yet to be formed in David, while he was yet in the womb). "And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them."

In Isaiah 44:6-8, the LORD is demonstrating why He is God: He knows the future, when nobody else does.

"I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.
'Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it;
Yes, let him recount it to Me in order,
From the time that I established the ancient nation.
And let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place.
' Do not tremble and do not be afraid;
Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it?
And you are My witnesses Is there any God besides Me,
Or is there any other Rock? I know of none."

On top of this, there are a handful of texts in the New Testament which speaks of God, "foreknowing" those He would ransom in Christ (Romans 8:29; 11:2; Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:2, 20). This view of God not knowing the future has a very difficult time reconciling with Scripture. [\[9\]](#)

2. Some say that God is not sovereign over the choices we make.

These people claim that God creates us, but He has created us with the freedom to do as we please. He knows the future in the sense that He knows the choices we will make, but He will not interfere with any of them. In that case, the entrance of sin and suffering and evil into the world is easy. Evil has come because Satan chose to rebel against the LORD. Through Satan's means, he seduced Adam and Eve into sinning as well. The rest, so to speak, is history. Everything that we see in the world is our fault, and comes because of us.

To a great extent, this is absolutely true. Sin and suffering exist in this world because of our sinful choices. But, the difficulty with this view is that the Bible speaks about His sovereignty over the entire universe. Not only does God know the future, but God causes the future. As the Westminster Confessions says, "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." [\[10\]](#)

Consider the following verses. Proverbs 16:33, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." When football players are standing in the middle of the field and the referee flips a coin to make a decision about a matter, God determines whether it ends up heads or whether it ends up tails. "The decision comes from the LORD."

In Isaiah 46:10, we read that God is "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'" In other words, God decrees whatever will happen, from the beginning of time until the end of time. Then, He insures that His decrees come to pass. "I will accomplish all My good pleasure." Again, we see the hand of God in the affairs of men, not merely the knowledge of God. His purposes will be established.

Romans 8:28 is another verse that says these things. "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Since many of the things that happen to us are the direct result of the actions of people, the only way for God to "cause all things to work together for good" is to exert His sovereignty over the wills of men. There is no other way for God to make such a sweeping promise, unless He is sovereign over the affairs of men, causing the future to take place.

Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." God takes the heart of the ruler and moves it to make decisions that will affect millions. If God moves the hearts of kings, can He not also move the hearts of anybody? Certainly, He can. Certainly, He does. So, you can't say that God merely knows the future. Rather, more accurate is that He causes the future.

I believe that attempting to solve the problem of evil by sacrificing God's sovereignty is a bad plan. The better approach is to keep the sovereignty of God in full tact and consider what the Bible teaches in regards to God's conduct with respect to evil. And it's at this point that you may be challenged in your thinking. "God's ways are not our ways."

Before continuing, let's affirm once again the absolute goodness of God. Psalm 5:4, "You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You." 1 John 1:5, "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."

But, there are many passages in Scripture which describe God using evil to accomplish His purposes. In doing so, He certainly keeps Himself free from sin. How He does so, I'm not quite sure (here is the mystery, where God's ways are not our ways), but, He does.

For instance, here are a few. Amos 3:6, "If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?" So, think about it. A tornado sweeps through a city, destroying many of the homes that were there, killing many along its path. What happened? Was it merely a series of natural events that took place? Did a warm front just happen to come into contact with a cold front, to create a swirling wind, which just happened to cause all of this damage? Or, is Psalm 135:6-7 true?

Psalm 135:6-7

Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. He causes vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain, Who brings forth the wind from His treasures.

God forms the tornado and ordains its path. In the book of Jonah, it was the LORD who brought the storm that caused the sailors to fear. Amos 3:6, "If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?"

Or, suppose a handful of Muslim extremists fly a few planes into a few buildings, reducing them to rubble. What happened? Did these men simply come up with this plan all by themselves? Or, did the LORD send an evil spirit to trouble these men and incite them to carry out their wicked schemes? In 1 Samuel 16:14, we read, "The Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD **terrorized** him." Here in the Bible, we see an evil Spirit being sent from the LORD to stir Saul's heart in wicked ways. Lest you think that this was a misprint, several other times in the same context we read of how this evil spirit was sent by God, Himself. "Saul's servants ... said to him, 'Behold now an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you'" (1 Sam. 16:15; see also 16:23).

A few chapters later, we read of what that evil spirit did to Saul. It enraged him to attempt to kill an innocent man, David. "Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing the harp with his hand, as usual; and a spear was in Saul's hand. Saul hurled the spear for he thought, 'I will pin David to the wall.' But David escaped from his presence twice." (1 Samuel 18:10-11). I have to believe that the events that took place on 9/11 were within the sovereign control of the LORD. Amos 3:6, "If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?"

Throughout the Scriptures we see the LORD bringing affliction and calamity upon people. The LORD allowed Satan to afflict Job. He took away all of his wealth (his 7,000 seep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys). He killed Job's seven sons and three daughters. And yet, at the end of the day, Job didn't say that Satan did it. He said that the LORD did it. He said, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job. 1:21). It was ultimately the LORD who brought these disasters upon Job. Lest you think that Job spoke wrongly in attributing the work of Satan to the LORD, we read in the next verse (Job 1:22), "Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God."

In speaking of the plagues that came upon the Egyptians, the LORD takes full responsibility for what took place.

Psalm 105:26-36

He sent Moses His servant, and Aaron, whom He had chosen.
They performed His wondrous acts among them, and miracles in the land of Ham.
He sent darkness and made it dark; and they did not rebel against His words.
He turned their waters into blood and caused their fish to die.
Their land swarmed with frogs even in the chambers of their kings.
He spoke, and there came a swarm of flies and gnats in all their territory.
He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land.
He struck down their vines also and their fig trees, and shattered the trees of their territory.
He spoke, and locusts came, and young locusts, even without number,
And ate up all vegetation in their land, and ate up the fruit of their ground.
He also struck down all the firstborn in their land, the first fruits of all their vigor.

Think about it! The LORD brought hail upon the land, which destroyed many of the Egyptian men and beasts who didn't take cover. The LORD brought the locusts to eat the vegetation, which may have caused a hunger shortage. The LORD struck down the firstborn throughout all of Egypt. Listen to what the LORD said to Moses, "One more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt. ... About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the firstborn of the cattle as well" (Exodus 11:1, 4-5). The LORD Himself claimed full responsibility for the murders that took place that night.

Perhaps you remember when Absalom defiled all of David's concubines on the roof of David's house (1 Samuel 16:22). Years earlier the LORD had told David of the consequences of his sin. "I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun" (2 Sam. 12:11-12). The LORD made it very clear that He was the one who was going to bring the sin, which Absalom eventually committed.

When Assyrian came and destroyed all of Israel, the LORD said, "Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hands in My indignation. I send it against a godless nation and commission it against the people of My fury, to capture booty and to seize plunder, and to

trample them down like mud in the streets" (Is. 10:5-6). To be sure, Assyria was the one who conquered over Israel, and yet the LORD said that He had sent them to bring the suffering.

When the Babylonians came and ransacked Jerusalem and took away many in Judah as prisoners, Jeremiah repeatedly ascribes it as God's work.

- Jeremiah 1:15, "'Behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north' declares the LORD; 'and they will come and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about and against all the cities of Judah.'"
- Jeremiah 7:14-15, "I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim."
- Jeremiah 50:25, "The LORD has opened His armory and has brought forth the weapons of His indignation. For it is a work of the Lord GOD of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans."

The LORD called Nebuchadnezzar, the king who brought all of these judgments "My servant" (Jer. 25:9), that is, the one who accomplishes His tasks.

In Lamentation 3:37-38, we receive the following truth, "Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, unless the LORD has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?" Though God doesn't sin, He sends forth calamity.

What's particularly helpful about these verses in Lamentations 3 is that it is at this very point that Jeremiah finds His comfort. When God does these things, He doesn't do it willingly (Lam. 3:33). In other words, God finds no pleasure in bringing ill upon any man. But, He does it for His purpose. And, we can be assured that "The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him" (Lam. 3:25). Even if the godly man experiences the destruction and desolation of his city (Lam. 1:4). God is powerful enough to bring the calamity. He is good enough to bring the right amount of affliction upon us all. "The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23). This is the doctrine that will ultimately comfort you when you are suffering! God has brought it. When He deems best, He can remove the suffering. The suffering is not outside of His power.

Isaiah 45:7 sums it all up very well, "The one forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these."

There are people who will not accept the things that I have been saying today. They are fearful that in saying these things, that they might bring guilt upon God as being evil. But, that's making a conclusion that the Bible never makes. In our logic, these sorts of things may seem to demonstrate that God is evil. If you hire a hit man to knock off your business partner, you are guilty of attempted murder. But, somehow God does this without committing evil.

But, again, that's precisely where we need to understand that God's ways are not our ways. God is able to "use the works of the ungodly and so bend their minds to carry out His judgments, that He remains pure from every stain." ^[11] Again, the Westminster Catechism puts it this way, "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." ^[12]

I finish with a few thoughts on how central these things are to our faith with a few verses from Acts, chapter 4. In this chapter, we see the LORD appointing wicked men to do a wicked task for the most ultimate good that has every been accomplished.

In this chapter, we see Peter and John arrested for preaching the gospel. Peter had the opportunity to speak before the Sanhedrin and explain why it is that they were preaching. The counsel let them go, but ordered them not to preach any more in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). At their release, the early church had an impromptu prayer meeting, where they reflected upon what took place when Jesus was crucified. They pray, "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."

God had ordained the events surrounding the death of Christ. He ordained a traitor to arise (Acts 17:12), along with the price of betrayal (Matt. 27:9). He ordained the scattering of the disciples (Matthew 26:31). He ordained the Gentiles rising up against the LORD and against His Christ (Acts 4:26). He ordained that the very builders of the house would reject their cornerstone (Matt. 21:42). He ordained that the Messiah would be crucified (Psalm 22) and hang on a tree (Gal. 3:13) to become a curse for us.

Are not all of these things evil? To betray the Son of God with a kiss? Jesus said that such an act was so wicked that it would have been better for that one if he had never been born (Matt. 26:24). To rise up against the LORD? God promised swift and terrible judgment upon any who would do such a thing (Psalm 2:9). To crucify the LORD of glory? Had the rulers understood who they sentenced to day, "they would not have crucified the LORD of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8), because, even they would acknowledge the wickedness of such an action.

And yet, we read in Isaiah 53:10 that it was the LORD who ultimately killed Jesus upon the cross. Isaiah 53:10, "The LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief;" The LORD was pleased to ordain the evil of these men to crush His son, because He knew what it would bring about. It would bring about a ransomed people, who would forever sing the glories of the grace of God! (Eph. 2:7). And for this purpose, the LORD used the evil in the world for His sovereign purposes. And this was no accident.

From before time began, the LORD knew that such things would take place. He ordained them to take place. "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Before the world was created and before sin entered the world, God ordained that Christ Jesus would come and die for sins, and that we, through faith, would be in Him.

God's ways are not our ways.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 10, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] A great source of information about this hole can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kola_Superdeep_Borehole.

[2] The sermon is posted here: <http://www.rvbc.cc/ResourceLibrary/PaysonGodsWays/PaysonGodsWays.htm>

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, book 1, chapter 18.

[6] Payson, Ibid.

[7] Richard Vieth, Holy Power, Human Pain (Bloomington: Meyer-Stone, 1988), 55 as quoted by D. A. Carson, p. 200, How Long, O LORD?

[8] This is R. C. Sproul's summary of the problem, found in "Now That's a Good Question, p. 465.

[9] I preached an entire message on this topic on May 5, 2004, entitled, "Does God Know the Future." You can find the message here: <http://www.rvbc.cc/Sermons/2004/2004-05-23%20-%20Isaiah%2040-48.htm>.

[10] The Westminster Confession of Faith (3:1).

[11] John Calvin, Ibid.

[12] The Westminster Confession of Faith (3:1).