

END-TIMES ISSUES



#147 God brings good out of evil.

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO **BE READY.**

A N D B E Y O N D I

Ever since sin entered the world...

People have invented ways of doing EVIL.

... they invent ways of doing evil; ...
Romans 1:30b (NIV)

- ✓ It may be "evil" – something *not capable* of being good.
EXAMPLE: Creating an *image* of God.
- ✓ It may be "good" – but they twist and distort it into evil.
EXAMPLE: Doing good deeds, but for the wrong reasons.
- ✓ It may be "neutral" – capable of being used for good or evil.
EXAMPLES: a brick, a store, numbers, electricity, dynamite.

- The wicked are capable of taking *anything*, and turning it into something evil. Often, they will *invent* something specifically with the goal of doing evil (even if, theoretically, it could also be used for good).
- When things are evil or distorted, they may still look good – especially from the world's perspective. (This can be quite deceptive.)

When God changes people's hearts...

God's people make it their goal to pursue ways of doing GOOD.

- ✓ **Their goal:** to do all things for God's glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). This requires developing a "renewed mind" (Romans 12:2), so that they know how to do so.

CAUTION In this present life, people are inconsistent.

- God's people are still **growing** in their understanding of what is good, and how to apply the principles that Scripture teaches; and they may fail in many ways. Churches also contain *fakes* who claim to be saved, but who continue to do evil.
- The **wicked** (= *all* unsaved people) are often **restrained** in their sin – either by the influence of Scripture, or by the conscience that God has embedded within them. This can change if they *suppress* these influences.

When God acts in world history...

God's often takes what sinners do and turns it around, eventually causing it to accomplish good. (This does not excuse their sin; it just shows God's power.)

- ✓ This happens to **saved individuals** (when people sin against them). Romans 8:28 reminds us of this; but there are also examples of this throughout Scripture.
- ✓ This happens **on the global level**. God uses all things to accomplish his "plan for the ages" – directing all things toward his final goal: ① a new heaven and earth, the home of righteousness, and ② the complete destruction of evil in each and every form.
- We are going to see some examples of this – illustrated by the way God has prepared for the future King Jesus, *no matter what people (or the devil) may try to do*.

Since the day **sin** entered the world, } But **GOD** has been accomplishing good!

The Serpent attempts to destroy God's perfect plan.

- God created a perfect world, designed to reflect his glory.
 - ✓ God also created humans *in his image*, and gave them the task of ruling over creation, *under God*, the ultimate ruler.
 - » We could describe Adam as the human *king* over all creation.
 - ✓ Humans were to work with creation and use it in ways that brought honor and glory to God. (This is what the word "subdue" refers to.)
 - » We could also describe their task as doing things in ways that would be an expression of love for God and neighbor.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and **subdue** it; **rule** over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that crawls upon the earth."

Genesis 1:28 (BSB)

- The Serpent (= the spiritual entity that empowered the snake), using the humans' willing cooperation, **destroyed this perfect world**.
 - ✓ Now, the world is cursed, no longer able to reflect the glory of the Creator in the way it once did. (It still reflects it, but *imperfectly*.)
 - ✓ The humans are now sinners. By nature, and by choice, they fail to rule over creation in the way God intended. *Human rule over creation is now subjected to ongoing failure.*
 - » Even when they *try* to do things well, they do not fully succeed. Creation does not respond the way it used to.

... **cursed is the ground** because of you; through toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.
Both **thorns and thistles** it will yield for you, ...

Genesis 3:17b-18a (BSB)

For the creation was subjected to **futility**, ... bondage to **decay** ...

Romans 8:20a, 21b (BSB)

Today, we know the end of the story! All is not lost!

- ✓ The Serpent will be destroyed. The world will be restored... but made even *better*, with the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, and God dwelling *permanently* among humans.
- ✓ Jesus – God in human form – will rule as king over all creation. All of God's followers who have died will be brought back to life.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ...

"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and He will dwell with them.

They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God."

And the One seated on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

Revelation 21:2a, 3b, 5 (BSB)

A lot happens between the beginning and the end. It's an ongoing battle.

At this first attempt to destroy God's plans, God responds with a promise of a future reversal of the situation.

- ✓ At this point, it seemed that *God's plan for creation had failed*. The situation was: "God" vs. "all humanity and the Serpent" (referring to the spiritual entity that empowered the animal).
- ✓ God introduces a promise that would reverse the situation and would accomplish all that God had originally intended ... and more.
 - » The humans were already dead *spiritually*; but based on this promise, *physical* death could be delayed. They would still die, but the delay would allow the promise to be eventually fulfilled.
- ✓ The result of this promise: ① the woman (Eve) would no longer trust the Serpent; ② there would be two "seeds" (which turns out to be the righteous vs. "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, the wicked); and ③ one specific individual would destroy the Serpent. (We later learn that this refers to Jesus Christ.)

He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Genesis 3:15 (BSB)

- **ADAM AND EVE'S INITIAL HOPES for the fulfillment of God's promise are crushed** (Genesis 4). It's going to take much longer than first expected.

The *meanings* of the names of their offspring appear to have a significance that goes far beyond merely providing a "label" to identify the individual. *Many (but not all) scholars believe that their names describe Eve's expectations and the events that followed.*

- ✓ **CAIN** ("created, obtained") – When Eve names him, and says, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man" (v. 1), she may have been thinking that she was giving birth to the promised deliverer, the man mentioned in Genesis 3:15b. But if so, she was terribly disappointed when he proved to be a man who followed the Serpent.
- ✓ **ABEL** ("breath, vapor, vanity") – Perhaps indicating disappointment. Any hope that he would be the potential replacement for Cain (as the promised offspring), was short-lived, when Cain killed him.
- ✓ **SETH** ("granted, appointed") – He was recognized as being God's replacement for Abel. "God has granted me another seed in place of Abel" (v. 25). The Serpent would not have victory; God raised up Seth to be the one through whom the promised deliverer would come.

- **ANOTHER ATTEMPT to prevent the promise's fulfillment: the corruption of the entire human race, except for Noah*** (Genesis 6).

- ✓ This chapter focuses on global apostasy – abandoning the true God.
- ✓ God describes the situation this way:

Then the LORD saw that the **wickedness of man was great** upon the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was altogether **evil all the time**.

Now the earth was **corrupt** in the sight of God, and **full of violence**.

Genesis 6:5, 11 (BSB)

- ✓ How did the people view matters? They went on living life as usual, *ignoring* the situation at hand:

People were **eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage**, up to the day Noah entered the ark.

Luke 17:27 (BSB)

* (After the Flood, Shem is also described as being faithful to God – see Genesis 9:26. But when God gave Noah the initial instructions, Shem hadn't yet been born.)¹⁰

- ✓ **Question:** Would the serpent win? He only had *one more* godly person* to get rid of! Then God's promise of a deliverer would fail!
- ✓ **The answer?** God would win... again!

- ✓ God would destroy the entire human race, *except* for that righteous individual and his family. God warned Noah about the coming judgment; and Noah trusted God and obeyed him. *Eight* people, out of the entire human race, were delivered – "saved" – through water.
- ✓ If we examine the people's ages, given in the account, we discover that, when Noah was first told to build the ark, he was still childless! His trust in God (and the resulting obedience) came before his *offspring* did.

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, **in godly fear built an ark** to save his family.

Hebrews 11:7a (BSB)

In the ark a few people, **only eight souls, were saved through water**.

1 Peter 3:20b (BSB)

* (Two individuals, if his wife was also faithful to God.)

- **ANOTHER ATTEMPT – at the Tower of Babel** (Genesis 11).

- ✓ God told Noah's offspring to *spread out* across the earth – the same instructions he gave to Adam, at the beginning (Genesis 1:28).
- ✓ But the people decided they want to *stay together*, and create a "name" for themselves. They wanted to develop their own significance ("name") *without God*. Again, it was a matter of "the world" (aligned with the Serpent) vs. "God."
- ✓ God would scatter them by confusing their languages. They would be able to *rebel*, but they would be unable to do so *united against God*.

That is why it is called Babel, for there the LORD **confused the language** of the whole world, and from that place the LORD **scattered them** over the face of all the earth.

Genesis 11:9 (BSB)

- ✓ There would be a *few* who would remain faithful to the true God – after all, Seth (Noah's son) was still alive! But after the scattering had taken place, God would eventually focus on *one* individual and his offspring – someone who was specially called by God, and through whom the promised deliverer would come: Abraham.

• **MANY MORE ATTEMPTS would follow...**

- ✓ The Serpent's goal would remain the same: to prevent the fulfillment of God's promise to Adam and Eve. But as time progressed, his methods would have to change.
- ✓ His focus would be on Israel and on key people through whom the promised deliverer would come.
- ✓ SOME EXAMPLES:
 - » Attempts to get the nation to *totally* abandon the true God. (But there would always be a "remnant" of people who remained loyal.)
 - » Attempts to eradicate the nation – Pharaoh trying to kill all the male Jewish babies; Haman's plot to exterminate all Jews.
 - » Attempts to kill specific individuals – Esau wanting to kill Jacob; Saul and Absalom wanting to kill David; Queen Athaliah attempting to kill off the entire royal line; King Herod trying to kill Jesus, by killing all the male babies in Bethlehem, who were two years and younger.

★ In every attempt, the Serpent would fail; God's promise would triumph. ★

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**People make inventions and social structures in rebellion to God...
God takes these things
and changes them into something that fulfils his will.**

- Here, our focus is on things that we have called "neutral." These are things that can be good or bad *depending on the context*. (And there is *always* a context.)
- This change is possible *only* because Jesus' accomplishment (as the promised deliverer) includes not only the salvation of people, but also the transformation of all things that have this "neutral" nature.
- We can see it throughout history, as people have done (or made) things and God has "repurposed" what they did, to accomplish his goals. Obvious examples would include: Roman roads and the Greek language (which enabled the gospel to quickly spread), and the printing press (which enabled the Bible to be printed at the very time that interest in the Bible was rapidly growing). These things were often done with absolutely no consideration for God or his honor... but God used them.
- We will comment on two examples. →

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• **CITIES – Changed from: ① a place of rebellion, to: ② the place where God resides.**

- ✓ God told Adam and Eve to have children, and that they (the children) were to spread-out across the earth.
- ✓ The earliest records of cities were connected to rebellion against God – and a refusal to spread-out.
 - » Cain, after he left God's presence, built a city *apart from God*. There would be technology (which, even today, we can benefit from) ... along with moral corruption and rebellion.
 - » Nimrod, after the Flood, built several cities – all in rebellion against God. Babylon was just one of them.
- ✓ Yet God has taken this "city" concept and turned it into something that can be used for his glory.
 - » In this present age, there may be a mixture of good and evil (since saved and unsaved people may be present). Jerusalem, where the temple resided was an example of this.
 - » Yet in eternity, the "city-concept" will be seen in the "New Jerusalem," which will be the "home of righteousness."

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• **KINGS, RULERS – Changed from: ① evil tyrants, to: ② the rule of God (in human form – Jesus), residing among humans.**

- ✓ Adam was to rule over the earth, *for the glory of God*. His sin resulted in devastation, instead.
- ✓ Though rulers probably existed before the Flood, the first one mentioned is Nimrod (after the Flood). He is described as a "mighty warrior" and a "mighty hunter." From what little we know, this "hunting" probably involved hunting for people, enslaving them, and forcing them to build his empire – which included the city of Babylon (and the tower of Babel).
- ✓ In the long run, there would be kings in Israel. Yet even the people's *desire* for a king would be rooted in sin; for they wanted to rely on a king *instead of* relying on God.
- ✓ Nevertheless, God would use this desire for a king to raise up King David – the one he made the "Davidic Covenant" with. Yet even this king – described as "a man after God's heart" – was a sinner.
- ✓ Even so, through David will come the promised deliverer (Genesis 3:15), who will someday be the righteous King over all the earth.

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Next time...

- In order to prepare for the fulfillment of God's promises throughout Scripture, there needs to be a *king* – someone who will rule over the earth with justice, righteousness and peace ... someone able to accomplish what Adam failed to do.
- We plan to look at the Davidic Covenant – which shows us how God plans to accomplish this. *This is an "end-times" issue!*

OUR MISSION (for today)!

- God has planned to use *all things* to accomplish his purposes – not just on the "cosmic" level, but on *our* level. We have focused on some of the "bigger" issues; but we need to remember: This includes God using *all things* that happen to us in *our* lives (Romans 8:28).

SO: Trust him! There is a lot of good in store for us, his followers!

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