

Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

by Bill Aumack

I would guess that all of us have asked this question at one point or another. And if we didn't ask it, somebody around us asked it. We've heard it, we've wrestled with it for generations. This is one of the premier difficult questions in Christianity. Why do bad things happen to good people?

Let's talk about some classic situations where this might come up. Maybe somebody needs healing. There's been an accident and they're injured, or they have a disease, cancer, MS, Lupus, whatever. Maybe there's a surgery coming up and they need healing from the surgery. They just need physical healing. And we pray, we pray. Good prayers. We're not praying for Ferraris and loads of cash, right? We're praying for somebody to get better, but they don't. And we wonder, why, God? Why did that happen? And it's worse if that guy, four pews over, he got an answer. But when it was my turn, we didn't, right?

Or maybe we're watching on the news and there's been a horrific car crash. Maybe it's a drunk driver hits a car, it's a runaway semi. Or some people were street racing and hit some other car and they kill half the family in the car. Of course, the drunk or the other person is fine. But now this family is decimated. And we say, why, God? Why, God, did that happen?

Or it's the bus that turns over on the way back from Bible camp, and the kids are injured and some of them are dead. We say, God, they were in Bible camp. Why did you let this happen? Why, God?

Another classic is, if God's so great and so loving, why do children die of starvation every day? You know, the estimate is that 8,500 children die every single day from starvation. We can cure starvation. We've got it licked. We know what the cure is. It works 100% of the time. Why does God let that happen? Why, God?

I don't know if you remember this. This was in the news just a couple months ago. It happened somewhere in South America. I don't remember where

exactly, but there was this massive mudslide in the middle of the night, and it came and took out a whole village gone. 300 people buried under tons and tons and tons of rock. And we wonder why, God, they were innocent people. They were just sleeping. They weren't doing anything. Why did you let that happen, God?

And these things are hard. They're difficult. We don't know what to do about them. But you know what's worse than these things? Yeah, it gets worse. It's the answers that Christians give, trying to explain them. Oh, man, it makes my heart hurt. I want to tell you a few that I've heard. You may have heard these, you may have heard something different, but these are ones that I've experienced.

Years ago, I was at a funeral for a high school student. You know, the younger it is when you die, the worse it is, right? When old people die, everybody goes [shrugs shoulders]. Young people die, we're broke up about it, right? So this was for a high school student. It was a huge, huge church. I think the whole high school was there. There were people down the sides, there were people along the back. There were people sitting in the aisle. It was a fire code violation, okay? Massive, massive funeral. This was a Christian funeral, but it was not an Adventist funeral. So they had some different beliefs than we have. That's okay. And during the message, the pastor said something like, and I don't remember the student's name, we'll call him Joey. He says, "You know, we're sad that Joey's gone, but we can rest easily knowing that he's with Jesus today and he's resting, he's with Jesus, and he's in the Lord's arms." And it's all good. Like, okay. Everybody nods. And then he says, "Because we know that God needed Joey in heaven to take care of something for him. So he called him home so that he could serve God in heaven." And everybody goes, yeah, thank you.

And I want to stand up and scream because what does that say about God, my God, the almighty God, the God with no beginning and no end, who has ruled the universe for hundreds of millions of billions of trillions of centuries and eons for infinity. And if you think about that too much, your head hurts. And all of a sudden, if Joey's not in heaven tomorrow, the wheels fall off the wagon and the whole thing comes apart. Really, that's the best answer we have?

I was at another funeral. This one happened to be an Adventist funeral. And this was when I was younger. And the person who passed was middle aged, in their 40s or 50s. And when I say 40s or 50s, some of us just went, well, they were old, you know, their time had come. And some of us are saying he had a lot of good years left, But he was in his 40s or 50s. And during the message, the pastor said something like, "We don't know why he was taken from us, but we know he's resting in Jesus arms and someday he'll be in heaven. And maybe God in his infinite wisdom looked down through the ages. And he could see that at some point in the future he was going to walk away from his faith and die and be lost in eternity. So God in his infinite wisdom and his kindness and his goodness takes him home now so he could be in heaven." And everybody goes, yeah.

And I want to stand up and scream. I'm a hoot at funerals. You should go to funerals with me. Because what does that say about God? The God who is huge on personal choice and he doesn't make anybody do anything. You choose and all of a sudden... and let's get rid of the flowery language and talk plain. I'm an engineer, let's talk plain. So God murdered this guy to take him to heaven and force him to be someplace he didn't want to be for eternity. Really? That's the best answer we have? Oh, my heart hurts, my heart hurts.

Another one is, well, you know, it's all part of God's plan. We just have to trust God's plan. We don't know it all, but if we trust God's plan, it's good. You mean to tell me that it's God's plan that that 3 year old got cancer and fought and went through chemo and went through surgeries and got weaker and weaker and weaker and passes away before she ever gets to go to school? And that was God's plan? If that was my child and somebody told me that I'd walk away from my faith too, if that's the best God has to offer, no thanks, right?

And another one that's kind of related to it is, well, we know God's in control. God's in control. We just trust God's ways are not our ways, but God's in control. You look around the world and there's a war over there. They're killing Christians by the millions over there. Over here we're abusing kids and over here. And it just goes on and on and on. If God's in control and this is the mess

we have, why, why would I want that dude in control? Let's vote him out and put somebody else in.

And it's easy to understand why people walk away from their faith in these situations. It's not because of what God did, it's because of what we said.

Now I'm going to say something that's going to make a lot of us really uncomfortable. And I'll be honest with you, it makes me uncomfortable. Okay. I don't think God is in control as much as some of us thinks he is. Now, some of you, your blood pressure is rising, heart's beating a little quicker before you get the tar and feathers and pitchforks. Let me explain, okay? It's going to take us a minute to get there, so you got to be patient. But let me explain. But I don't think God's in control as much as we think he is. Okay, I'll let that sit for a second because that hurts. That hurts me. But let's see where we get with that. All right.

Now, I had an answer for some of these tough questions that I kind of liked. Wasn't perfect, doesn't answer everything. I can't explain why that guy got an answer to prayer and you didn't. I don't know. I know life's not fair, right? You told your parents life's not fair. And what'd your parents say? Who said life's fair? Right? Christianity's not fair. You know, it's not fair that Jesus came and died for me and paid the price. I benefit from it, but it ain't fair. It's not fair that God lets me come back to him time after time after time for mercy and grace and forgiveness. That's not fair. I benefit from it. I'm glad he does, but it ain't fair. Life's not fair.

But the answer I had for this question is, evil is real. **Evil is real.** It's not some made-up abstract thought that some academic in some ivory tower somewhere dreamed up. Evil is real and it's active while we are sitting here talking. Evil is out there doing evil and evil is real. And a lot of friends at work would come to me and say these different things, and I say, you know, evil is real, man. We got to deal with it. And you might not like it, but yet it kind of answers some of the questions. If we believe in good, we've got to believe in evil.

Okay, so I don't know if you guys know this, but Pastor and I meet every week and we talk about the sermons and what we're going to try and bring, what

we're planning and trying to make sure we're covering a wide variety of topics of Old Testament, New Testament, the fundamental beliefs, just all the stuff that we talk about, trying to make sure that the sermons are on point and on topic. And we talked about this topic and kind of decided not to do it right then. And they say your phone's not listening to you, but it is, because next week in my feed was this article, and it was advertised as 14 things you don't know about Satan. And I said, that's interesting. Let's read that. I'm gonna learn 14 new things here. I'm up for this. And I read the article, and the actual title of the article is a little bit disappointing once I got in there, because the actual title was Satan in the 14 sobering facts about the Devil. Now, we kind of forgot the new part. I was looking forward to the new part, but I read it, and I was mildly disappointed at the end. It was an okay article, but I didn't learn anything really new. I knew all 14 facts. Now, there were some points that kind of said, well, you know, this means this, and this kind of means this. But there was nothing really new. So I went home a little disappointed.

But as I thought about it a little bit, I had an epiphany, but it was a slow burn. Now, sometimes when you get an epiphany, the light comes on and you're like, oh, wow, check it out. This was like sunrise. It took a while for the light to come on. But I started connecting some of the dots in this article, and I think it really helped me move down. And I think there's a little better answer than evil is real. It's not the end all, be all. I don't know everything. I can't explain everything, but I think we can do a little better. All right, That's a lot of backstory to get us to here. But we had to go through all that. All right.

Did you know that **the Bible calls the devil the prince of this world**? Okay, now we're not gonna have time to look all these up, but I put them there in your notes so you can look them up later. Jesus calls him the prince of the world three times in the book of John. Okay. Jesus says it. Right. That's kind of hard to argue with. Right. But there's some other times, too, where it's used are words similar to it. So he's called the God of this world, or the God of this age, depending on your translation, in 2nd Corinthians 4:4. Like I said, these are in your notes, so you can look them up. He's called the prince of the power of the air, or the ruler of the kingdom of air In Ephesians 2;2 and 1 John 5:19 says, the whole world is under the control of the evil one. How much is

under control? Does anybody escape? Christians? Good Adventists? They certainly get out of it. Right.

But more than just say it, Jesus acts like Satan is in Control.

Open your Bibles with me to **Matthew, chapter 4, verses 1 to 11**. It's a story we're pretty familiar with. This is early in Jesus's ministry. This is where he goes into the wilderness for 40 days. He fasts, the devil tempts him.

Now, this same story is in Luke, chapter 4. And Luke says that Satan tempted Jesus for all 40 days. Can you imagine 40 days with no food and the devil's harassing you the whole time? I mean, most of us here don't like to miss lunch, let alone 40 days.

Okay, so at the end, there's the three big temptations that we know. The first one is Jesus, or Satan tells Jesus to turn some of the stones to bread. And I've always wondered about that. Like, why is that a sin? He ain't hurting nobody. I mean, who cares if a stone gets turned to bread? But if he does that, the devil can claim unfair because I can't do that. So Jesus can't use his power for his own benefit. Or the devil says, you weren't fully human when you did that. That was unfair. Took me a long time to learn that.

The second one is verse 5. The devil takes him up on top of the holy city, has him stand on the highest point of the temple. I'm sorry, the second one? Yeah. Stand on the highest point of the temple. And he says, throw yourself down. The devil says, hey, listen, God has commanded that his angels will take care of you, but you'll be all right. Jesus says, don't tempt God. But let's look at the third one.

The third one's in verse 8, Matthew 4:8 again. "The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their splendor. All. All of this I will give you, he said, if you bow down and worship me.

And Jesus said to him, away from me, Satan. For it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only. And the devil left him, and the angels came and attended him."

Now, when the devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, does Jesus say, hey, don't be silly. I already own those. You can't offer me what I have already. No, he doesn't correct him. Why? Because those kingdoms are the devil's, and he is free to offer them to Jesus in a deal if he wants to. Now, I'm glad Jesus turns down the deal. That benefits me. Being selfish again, that

benefits me. But Satan was free to offer those to Jesus if he wanted to because they are his.

Wait a minute. Wait A minute. That hurts again, doesn't it? How do we know that? Go to Genesis chapter three. Genesis chapter 3.

Now, Genesis chapter 3 is the fall. Adam and Eve sin. And real quick, just a little side note, we'll come over here because this is a side note, little visual thing to help, you know, we don't know how long Adam and Eve lived in the garden. Chapter 2 talks about them being created on Friday. Chapter 3 talks about them sinning, falling. And so we kind of think like, well, they were created on Friday and like Wednesday they sinned or something. Right? You know, just happened right away. We don't know that. We have no idea how long that is. That could have been tens of years, hundreds of years, thousands of years. We don't know. Now, some people believe that it was a shorter time frame because God told them to be fruitful and multiply. And they haven't had any kids, so maybe that's been 10 or 20 years. You know, they're still in the honeymoon phase. When you're built to last forever, what's a thousand years amongst friends, right? Who cares? Time looks really different when you're going to live forever. So we don't know how long that was. Just thought I'd throw that out there.

But we get to this thing here where they say they fall and the serpent's involved. And we don't know very much about the serpent either. Genesis 3:1 says, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made." Okay, I don't really know what that means, but this animal had great intelligence. We know that the word serpent in the original language means shining one.

And you know, Hebrew is really interesting because all the words mean something, and sometimes not even just the words, but a couple of letters in the middle could mean something. And in the middle of that word is a couple letters that mean winged one. So he was a shining one with wings, potentially. Okay. We don't know what he looked like.

Isaiah, Ezekiel and Revelation tell us more about it a little bit. But they're speaking in prophecy and it gets a little muddy of whether they're talking about Satan or they're talking about the actual animal, the serpent that was

used. And there's disagreements there of who's being referred to in those prophecies. So we're going to leave that alone today.

We know that Ellen White describes him as a dazzling. His appearance was dazzling, resembling bright, burnished gold. And he had wings and could move through the air and fly. The shining one.

And apparently Eve is not surprised at all, because the serpent talks to her. Now, I don't know about you, but if my dog talked to me, we're going to have to sit down a minute. Right. I need to recover from that. But she is not surprised at all that this creature talks to her. Maybe this creature was that intelligent that it could speak. I don't know. I don't know.

But we know that when God gives them a curse, he curses Eve, he curses Adam, and he curses the serpent. And the fact that he curses the serpent kind of leads us to believe that maybe the serpent was a willing participant in this deceit? If the serpent had been unwillingly used against its will, would God have cursed it? That seems unfair. I think my God is fair.

Think about it this way. If you were the serpent and you were intelligent and you had wings, and you shone like gold, and you were created before Adam and Eve, but Adam and Eve are given dominion over you, how might you feel about Adam and Eve? Maybe. We don't know. We don't know, but maybe.

Let's look at Genesis 3:14. So you know, Eve gets her curse of painful childbirth. Adam gets his of hard work with the thorns and weeds. And verse 14, we get to the serpent. So the Lord said to the serpent, because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals. You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and this woman, between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

Have you ever noticed that women don't like snakes? By and large, there's a reason. There's a reason.

But the curse is interesting. You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. Do snakes eat dirt? No. Earthworms eat dirt. Snakes

do not. So this is a metaphor for something. Okay, now, in the original language, it says he got cast down to erets. E R E T S. Erets. And that's a term that refers to dirt and what's underneath it all the way through the dirt. So metaphorically, this refers to the dust and the underworld. Because we think of Earth is in the middle. We go up to heaven, we go down to hell. Right. Hell is the underworld. Does that mean hell's in the middle of the Earth? I don't think so, but that's how we kind of think of it. And so Satan has been cursed to the dirt. And below the dirt, his domain is death.

Okay, now there's a theologian, Dr. Michael Heiser, and he specialized in the Old Testament and specifically the supernatural view of the world that was used when the Old Testament was written. These people saw things, right? There's a flood, there's burning bushes, there's plagues, axe heads float. We can go on and on and on and on and on. There's a lot of supernatural things that happen today. We don't think that way because we have science, we know how to split the atom, we understand quantum physics, right? And so our worldview is really different than the worldview of the writers of the Bible.

And Michael Heisner, he wrote this about this curse. He said the curse also had him eating dirt, which is clearly a metaphorical reference since snakes don't really eat dirt as food. The point being made by this curse is that the Nechesh, which is the Hebrew word for serpent, who wanted to be the most high, will be made the most low. He's cast away from God and the council to earth. And even underneath the earth in the underworld, the serpent is even lower than the beast of the field. He is hidden from view and from life in God's world. His domain is death.

Okay, so what do we know about Satan and what his power is here? Who gave him power here? God did. God said, your domain is the earth and underneath the earth and he has the power. He is the prince of the world designated by God.

Think about in an age where kings and queens ruled the world, right? And the king would sometimes take a prince and give him a province and say, you're in charge of the province, right? We see this, we still see this in the UK, right? There's the Prince of York or the Prince of Wales, the Duchess of York or

whatever, right? That's exactly what's happened. Here we have a king who has given the day to day activities over to a prince.

Okay, so if we go back to our question of is God in control? I want you to listen close because I don't want anybody to misquote me. I believe God is ultimately in control. I also believe that he's given great power to the devil to run the day to day activities of this world. Now the king has veto power. Sometimes the king interacts with us supernaturally and performs a miracle. But those are the exceptions, not the rule.

Imagine if every time a Christian prayed, you got the answer to your prayer. Who would become Christian? Everybody. The fringe benefits would be great. I never get a flat tire, never get fired from work. All my relationships work out great. We never get a divorce. Nobody ever gets sick. It's great. Everybody would want to be a Christian. Not because they love God, because the fringe benefits. So we don't all get the things that we know. But we know that God's in control, but he's given power to Satan. And when we have this kind of worldview, **we need to stop blaming God for the things the devil's responsible for.**

This, I believe, is the biggest coup the devil has ever come up with. Bad things happen, we blame God and walk away from our faith. And devil's going, yeah, I got another one right. God gets blamed for things he had nothing to do with, things that made his heart hurt, just like it makes your heart hurt.

We're all affected by the harsh realities of life. And why do bad things happen to good people? It's one of the most difficult questions in all of theology. If God is sovereign, then all that happens must have at least been allowed by Him, Right? But it isn't that simple. That's our reasoning, not God's reasoning.

We know that 1 John 1:5 says, this is the message we have heard from him and declare to you, God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. My God doesn't murder people to make them go to heaven. That's foolishness.

Okay, by the way, your homework is to read 1 John 1:1 to 1:5 or 6 powerful stuff these guys are just talking about. Listen, we walked around with this guy, we touched him, and we've written down what we saw and what we heard.

These are eyewitnesses that write down what they saw and heard, not what they believed, not what somebody told them. They were eyewitnesses that wrote down what they saw and heard. Powerful stuff. Powerful stuff. That's your homework today, after your nap. That's your homework.

Okay, one more text. Romans 8:28. We know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Bad things happen to all of us. They will. They do. They just do. But God can use those bad things if we let him and if we stop blaming him for them. And I know some of you are thinking, how did God use.... I don't know. I don't know. God doesn't share everything with me, as much as I wish. He would probably be overwhelmed if he did.

All right, is this starting to make sense now? You guys putting away the tar and feathers and not coming after me with pitchforks? Some of you aren't sure.

Okay, reflection. **Are you blaming God for something he was not responsible for causing?** Are you holding a grudge against God? Because I prayed for so and so to get better and they didn't. That's God's fault. Is it? Is it?

One of the big issues in this whole concept is our own self importance. We think that we're so important. Everything revolves around us. It's all about me. Why does God let this happen to me? Doesn't he know who I am? Maybe we're not quite that important.

Our challenge, Ask God for the wisdom to recognize his moving versus the work of the evil one. Sometimes that's hard because when you're in the midst of everything going on, emotions are high, the stress is high, things are spiraling out of control. It's difficult.

I'm not saying this is easy, this is difficult. But recognize God's moving versus the evil one **and** it's a two parter. **Allow God to use everything that happens for his purposes.**

All right. What you're going through or what you've gone through is probably not pleasant. I get it. Been there, had my share of friends and my mom passed away. I know, I know. And some of us have gone through worse than that.

It's hard. But it's not God's fault. It's the evil one's fault. We need to remember that. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, help us to remember that the evil one's in control for a time, but that you have ultimately won this war. And we're just in the last stages of the battle. Lord, give us the strength to continue on. Give us the strength to recognize your moving and the evil ones moving and to turn away from that. Lord, give us courage when things are difficult because things get difficult and it's hard and we want answers and we don't always get them. Be with us, Lord, and for those of us that are struggling with those things, be with us. Bring comfort, bring peace, Lord. Because ultimately we know that you are the great God. Be with us now. In Jesus name. Amen.