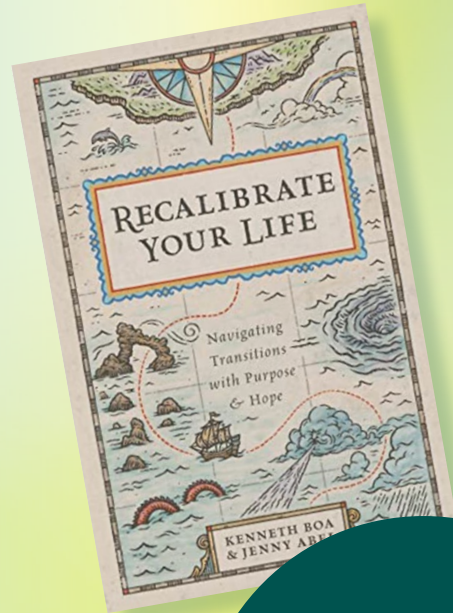


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## GOD AND EVIL

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many people thought the world was on the verge of a period of unprecedented human peace and prosperity. But two world wars, as well as displays of inhumanity not previously witnessed in the modern era, put an end to all such optimistic speculation.

Joseph Stalin, premier of the Soviet Union from 1941 through 1953, killed tens of millions of Russian peasants and political opponents. Adolph Hitler, chancellor of the Nazi (German) Third Reich from 1933 through 1945, exterminated millions of Jews and other so-called “undesirables.” Nicolae Ceaușescu, president of Romania from 1967 through 1989, brutalized his people while living in the lap of luxury. Indeed, the twentieth century turned out to be less an era of peace than a startling demonstration of humankind’s potential for wickedness

Humans didn’t turn suddenly evil in the twentieth century. But advancements in communication allowed us to witness that evil like never before. A timeless question, therefore, asked now more frequently than ever is this: Why does God tolerate evil in the world?

If we were without a biblical perspective on such issues, life could get discouraging. But the encounters of Daniel with a Babylonian king named Nebuchadnezzar (himself no saint) provide us with a heavenly view of those who propagate evil in the world. God, the book of Daniel tells us, sets up kings and takes them down; He knows what lies in darkness. For His purposes, He sometimes sets even the lowliest of people over the kingdoms of the earth. He does what He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of

earth. We don’t know exactly why God allows evil in the world. But we do know that, despite the presence of that evil, “Wisdom and power belong to Him.”

Christians are certainly not immune to the effects of evil, many have perished at the hands of evil rulers or dictators. Countless others have been wounded at a personal level by an evil word or action. If you have suffered personally from evil hands, or if you hurt for those who have, remember: The Creator, not anyone or anything in His creation, rules, and “no one can ward off His hand” (Dan. 4:35).

### God’s Promise:

No evil thing or person acts independently of Him;  
He is still in control.

## THE GLORY OF THE CREATOR

O Lord my God, You are exalted above all things we can conceive and imagine. Time and space are a part of Your created order-You brought them into being, and You dwell in all times and places. You are the eternal now, the great I AM, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. You are present everywhere and You rule all things, from the microcosm to the macrocosm. You spoke, and energy and matter came into being. Your boundless power and wisdom are evident in Your works, and all things derive their being from You. The beauty, radiance and wisdom that abound in Your creation all point beyond themselves to You, their Creator and Sustainer. I ask for the eyes to see Your goodness, beauty, and truth as I behold plants, trees, animals, insects, sunrises and sunsets, landscapes and the starry sky.

Reflections Ministries  
One Piedmont Center, Suite 130 • Atlanta, GA 30305  
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# “My Steps Had Almost Slipped”

If we “only go around once” as the commercial says, then there is no ultimate justice on this planet. Like Job and Jeremiah, we look at the world about us and ask, “Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?” (Job 21:7, NIV). “Why has the way of the wicked prospered?” (Jer. 12:1).

Psalm 73 is the record of a man’s struggle with the issue of why good things happen to bad people and why bad things happen to good people.

Asaph begins his meditation with an affirmation of the goodness of God “to those who are pure in heart” (v. 1), but honestly admits that he went through a crisis of faith in which he questioned the truth of this affirmation. “But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; my steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (vv. 2-3). As Asaph considered those whose hearts were far from the Lord, he observed not only their prosperity, but also their unbridled pride

(“pride is their necklace; . . . they speak from on high. They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth;” vv. 6, 8-9).

One need not be an astute monitor of culture to see that if these things were true in Asaph’s time, they are far more evident in our own time when entertainers mindlessly blather about topics of which they

## PSALM 73: “THE NEARNESS OF GOD IS MY GOOD”

know nothing before millions of fawning admirers, when power mongers pontificate about

the path to success, and when unscrupulous business people are adulated and imitated until they get caught.

### *Was It All in Vain?*

The psalmist draws this painful inference: “Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning” (vv. 12-14). At this point, he could

have masked his inner struggle with a pretence of spirituality, but this would have been the path of self-deception and hypocrisy. The unshakable truth is that contrary to the prosperity gospel, there is no assurance that obedience to God will lead to material or physical well-being. In fact, Asaph’s purity of heart appeared to lead to the opposite. But it was his obligation to others that prevented him from succumbing to self-pity and forced him to look beneath the surface of this dilemma. “If I had said, ‘I will speak thus,’ behold, I should have betrayed the generation of Thy children” (v. 15).

### *“Then I Perceived Their End”*

But when Asaph went to the temple to bring his affliction before the Lord, his perspective was radically changed: “When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end” (vv. 16-17). The turning point in the psalm is reached when the author takes his eyes away from the foolish pride of men and turns them to the glory of God. In that moment, he discovers the futility of gaining the world for a few brief years and losing one’s soul forever (Matt. 16:26). No earthly pursuit or prize is worthwhile if the end of one’s journey is “disgrace and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). Those who had reveled in their greatness will be “destroyed in a moment” and “utterly swept away” (v. 19). “I never knew you; depart from

Me” (Matt. 7:23) are the worst words anyone will hear.

God is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6), but we will not enter into the fullness of that reward until we stand before Him. The deepest desire of our heart should be to hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant; . . . Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matt. 25:21, NKJV). Until that time, we must confess that we are strangers and exiles on the earth and grow strong enough in faith to welcome God’s promises from a distance (Heb. 11:13). Like Asaph, we must repent of the bitterness of heart that comes from putting our hope in anything other than the goodness and promises of God (see vv. 21-22).

We will not understand the adversities and afflictions of this life, but to the degree that we embrace the affirmations in verses 23-26, we will know a peace and joy that transcends our circumstances: “Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou hast taken hold of my right hand. With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

The focus of your heart will define and direct you more than any other thing. If your longing is for the things the world declares to be

important, you will treat the temporal as eternal and the eternal as temporal. The Lord Jesus told us “that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). But if the nearness of God is your good (v. 28), you will never be disappointed.



One Piedmont Center, Suite 130 • Atlanta, GA 30305  
info@kenboa.org

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