



Last Days Beacon

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God is Not Surprised!



By Pastor K. Douglas Brown

Recall with me one cool day when God went walking through the garden looking for Adam and Eve. He called for them, but they were hiding. They had done what He warned them not to do and now they felt incredible shame. Imagine thinking that you can hide from God. I suppose it's not all that different than our own experience, at times, wanting to hide from the Almighty. Be sure of this, however, God was not surprised. He was not caught off guard by what they had done, nor that they were hiding. He knew all along what they had done and He knew exactly where they were hiding. God is never surprised; He can't be because He is omniscient.

Neither was God surprised some 1,000 years later when the wickedness of man had grown to the point that something had to be done (Genesis 6:5). As a matter of fact, things had become so bad it was said of man that "Every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." That sounds pretty bad! God had to enact a plan to get rid of evil or there would be no righteous people left to represent Him and His original intentions. God did not like what had become of His created ones. He was grieved. He was sorry that He had made man (Genesis 6:6). God's solution to the problem was severe. It was no small feat, taking Noah 30 or 40 years to build the ark. All the while Noah was preaching a message of repentance and warning to anyone who would listen (2 Peter 2:5). It must have been immensely sad for God to wipe out His creation through the flood and begin anew. He must have experienced a range of emotions at seeing what had become of His creation, but one thing He didn't experience was a sense of surprise. Because He is sovereign He is never stunned by the sinful behavior and lack of understanding of man. God is never caught unawares.

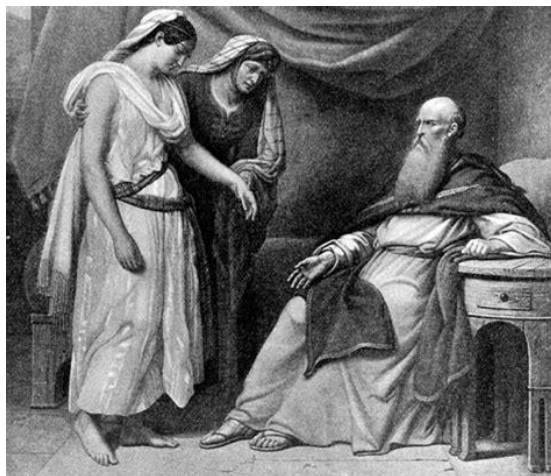
Psalm 147:5 tells us so, “Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.” To say that God would be surprised would be to view the events through our own limited, human perspective, and without an accurate understanding of God’s character and nature. How could a sovereign God not know that these frail humans would likely eat of the forbidden fruit and bring about the great Fall? It begs the question, I suppose, why would God allow this kind of potential for blunder with those who would be inclined toward sin and error? Why would He not put in place stopgap measures to ensure these created ones would not have an opportunity to tarnish what He had declared was good (Genesis 1:12, 18, 21, 25)? As we journey together through the story of God’s relationship with man, we see this question at play over and over again. And to be sure, you and I face temptation and opportunities to disobey God every day. Be sure, though, that God is not surprised. He is never surprised.



After the flood, the people God created again began working against His intentions when they came together at Babel to build a great tower that would reach into the sky (Genesis 11). God’s intention was that they spread out and fill the entire earth (Genesis 1:28, 9:7). Yet, in opposition, the people instead had come together with the purpose of building a tower that would reach into heaven. Further, it is said that they intended to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4). That is, that they would be known for building this great tower. What great pride had come over mankind. God hadn’t intended for them to make a great name for themselves, but rather wanted man to glorify Him. God is always jealous for our adoration. That’s one of the reasons for the creation in the first place (Psalm 19:1-4) and that’s why He created man (Isaiah 43:7). Building this tower would require that they stay together in one place and not spread out and fill the earth as God has said. Now, it’s not that towers are bad, or even that God has something against tall towers, but God had a different purpose for man, and man was not in submission to that plan.

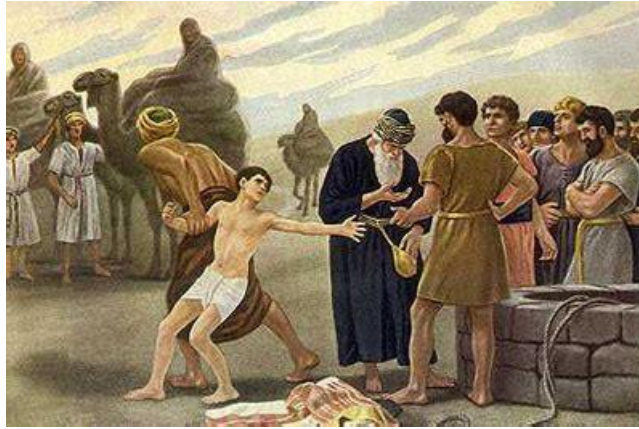
God looked over what man was doing and was not pleased with what He saw. (Genesis 11:5-6). Man was running his own plan instead of honoring the direction He had given them. At this point creation of man was only 2,300 years old and, this was only 700 years after God gave the instructions to Noah to fill the earth (Genesis 9:1,7). That’s a relatively short time in terms of world history. Because of this detour of man, God enacted a new plan to scatter man and confuse their language and, as a result, man would be forced to follow God’s direction to fill the earth (Genesis 11:7-9). Sometimes God has

to do something like this to get our stubborn hearts to fall in line with His agenda. It had to grieve God greatly that He found it so necessary to go to this extreme length. This had to be another disappointment for God in the short history of man. When will man ever be faithful to God's desires? Still, God in His sovereignty was not taken by surprise, he was not stunned by the continual sinfulness of man. God is all-knowing and is never surprised.



Later, God announced to Abram that He would make Him a great nation, and that he would be the father of many descendants (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5). God had a plan to bless all of mankind through Abram. This was a grand plan of God. He explained to Abram His plan to build a new movement, a new relationship with man which allows for a people set apart as His own. Before things ever got going with that plan however, there were lapses of faith by Abram and his wife. God was not surprised when Sarai, Abram's wife saw that she had not yet born children and created a plan to have Abram produce an heir through Hagar, her Egyptian maid. Sarai was not trusting that God would follow through with His promise for an heir. Lacking faith in God's promise himself, Abram obliged and followed his wife's plan instead of trusting that God would be faithful. You and I are not all that different than these two followers. We, too, experience lapses in our faith and struggle to trust that God will be faithful. We sin because we don't ultimately trust that God will meet our needs. The offspring produced by Abram and Sarai's sin did not get them what they were looking for and 4,000 years of history have meted out the tragic results of Abram and Sarai's lack of trust. Still, God was not caught off guard at the couple's lack of faith, and neither did these actions deter His plan. We never see God frightened when people fail to obey Him and trust that His will is best.

After some time, Abram, now known as Abraham, ventured into a dangerous territory, in the land of the Negev, with Sarai (Genesis 20:1), now known as Sarah. Out of fear that the king would kill Abraham on account of Sarah's beauty, He introduced her as his sister (Genesis 20:2, 11). As a result, the king took Sarah into his harem. God had to step in and intervene in order to complete His promise to Abraham (Genesis 20:3-18). In all of the Scriptural recounting of these events however, there is no indication that God was ever stunned or caught off guard by the lack of faith and actions of these two. God is never surprised at any of man's failings, nor lack of faith. We can be thankful that God is sovereign and nothing we can do can alter His plans or throw Him off kilter.



As the story of God's interaction with man progressed it appeared, for all practical purposes, that a young man named Joseph would be the obvious one to carry on the lineage of God's promise (Genesis 37:1-17). Yet again, the plan of God appears to be in jeopardy as Joseph's brothers treacherously sold him off to slavery in Egypt (Genesis 37:18-36). Still, God blessed Joseph and gave him prominence in the land of Egypt. An even more unexpected apparent turn in the story is that God's plan continued, and the blessing of a Messiah would come through Judah, one of Joseph's brothers who had perpetrated the evil against him (Matthew 1:3). From a human perspective, this is a stunning and surprising turn of events as the story of God's interaction with man unfolds. Judah was actually the one who hatched the plan to sell Joseph into slavery (Genesis 37:26). Why would God choose Him and not Joseph, Jacob's favored son to carry out His blessing? One thing never recorded in the story of Joseph and his brothers is God being startled or shocked by these events. Be sure that God cannot be surprised, even by the most diabolical plans man can hatch. His plan to redeem mankind can never be thwarted. One of the lessons of the story of Joseph and his brothers is that sometimes God chooses to work out His plan through those who clearly are not in line with His desires. In all of this God was not surprised.



Haman's Fatal Mistake

There are many examples of similar times when God's plans seemed to be in jeopardy. One of my favorites is the story of Esther and how the wicked Haman tried to eliminate God's chosen people. We find God's people in captivity, away from the promised land. This picture of the chosen people in

captivity would lend to the perception that God's plan could not come to completion. Here are God's people stuck in a faraway place, away from the land He promised them. All the promises to God's people were tied to their existence in the land and yet, they were not living in it. How could God's promises to Israel be fulfilled when the people have been defeated in such a way by their enemy. Along comes the wicked Haman, with hatred in his heart for God's people and a plan to rid the land of them (Esther 3:5-6). He would build gallows and hang Mordecai, Esther's uncle on it. Esther, a young and timid girl, had already found favor in the king's harem and become queen (Esther 2:8-16). This put the young Israelite girl in a prominent place where she could be used to save God's people from the wicked plans of Haman. In the end Esther reveals the plans of Haman and in a dramatic moment the king orders him to be hung on the very gallows Haman had built for Mordecai. As a result of the work of Esther and Mordecai, God's people were spared. None of this was a surprise to God, not God's people being taken into captivity, nor Haman's evil plan. God is never caught off guard even when it seems to us that His plan has gone array.

So many times, man has not honored God. Ever since the Fall, man has continually found ways to be disobedient, following their own plan instead of God's. We see numerous times when God chastises His people for being disobedient. There is one such the indictment against the leaders of Israel in the time of the prophets. God rebuked the leaders of Israel for their failure to fulfill their role as shepherds (Ezekial 34). He accused them of feeding themselves when they were supposed to be feeding the sheep of Israel (Ezekiel 34:2). It's a temptation for leaders throughout time to use their position, not to serve the people, but to serve their own needs and advancement.

This is not just an Old Testament problem, but a New Testament issue as well. Once, when addressing the leaders, Jesus rebuked them for the same failure. In John 10:11 Jesus declared, "I am the good shepherd." These words He spoke in the presence of the Pharisees heralded back to the situation in Ezekial 34 and God's rebuke of those leader's failure to obey Him. Jesus wasn't only making a statement about Himself here. He was making a comparison with the false leaders of Israel. He was comparing the Pharisees to Israel's leaders in Ezekiel's time and saying that the Pharisees were worthy of the same rebuke as them. In both the rebuke in Ezekiel and the one where Jesus addressed the Pharisees there is no indication of surprise on the part of God. Frustration? Yes! Disappointment? Yes! But God is never dazed or startled when His people, even those who are leaders, disobey. God cannot be surprised.



No example of God's plan seemingly being thwarted is greater than when Jesus, the awaited Messiah, was arrested, tried and hung on a cross. For a moment, all of history leading up to this point seemed in peril. The promises to bless all people through Abraham, and the promises about the coming Messiah all seemed to hang in the balance. All of this happened just as Jesus had begun to be recognized as the Messiah, the awaited King, who would rescue Israel from her enemies. The excitement of the people grew in the realization that what was promised was coming true right before their very eyes. You can feel the intensity, and joyous celebration, as the crowd yelled out, "Hosanna," on the day of Jesus triumphal entry into the Holy City (Matthew 21:9). The praises which were sung and chanted with such passion on that day were even drawn directly from Messianic promises from Psalm 118:25-26 and Zechariah 9:9. There was no question about who the people thought Jesus was as they cheered their King. The crowd was in total belief that the Messiah had come, and victory was sure. It seemed to all who participated in that joy filled occasion that God had won, and victory was imminent.



How quickly things changed when, just five days later, that same crowd was yelling, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him" (Luke 23:21). If Satan was wringing his hands in fear on that day when the people cheered, "Hosanna," on this day he must have exulted greatly, thinking that, once and for all, he was the victor over God's authority, and plan to redeem the world. For a moment all hell was in a time of celebration. Even in that hour, that terrible time, God was not surprised. His plan was not thwarted, but only playing out as He had planned, and all of mankind would now have the opportunity to be redeemed through the death of His Son (1 Peter 3:18). What great victory was won over sin when Jesus went to the cross. God was not surprised however, at the hatred of the people toward His Son, he was not surprised that the followers of Christ would scatter in fear, nor was He caught off guard by the actions of Judas who had betrayed Jesus. Neither was He surprised at the pain His Son endured for us, or even that His Son would die. All of it was part of God's loving plan to redeem this broken world, and, once and for all, a way was provided for all who chose to believe to come into relation with Him, and find everlasting peace. As John 5:24 declares, "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.



Imagine with me the great experience of surprise for the followers of Christ after He had been in the grave for three days. Think about the emotions experienced by those who were greatly surprised on that third day when Jesus rose again. What an incredible experience of astonishment for Mary Magdalene and the other women as they came up to the tomb and discovered the stone had been rolled away. Imagine what they went through at the announcement that the Savior was not in the tomb but had risen from the dead (Mark 16:1-7). There was great surprise experienced by each of the disciples as they too came to understand that Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive. Even though Jesus had promised that He would rise again (Matthew 17:23), His followers struggled through unimaginable bewilderment as they each discovered that their beloved Savior was alive. I imagine, too, there was a great terror among the evil host who had thought they had finally done away with Jesus. Imagine the horror of surprise of Satan's armies when Jesus, according to God's plan, rose again and walked out of the grave in victory over death. The greatest surprise in human history was the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There was one, however, who was not at all surprised that Jesus rose again, and that was the Father. He was not surprised when Jesus rose from the dead for this was His sovereign plan. He is never caught off guard by events here on earth. God cannot be surprised because He is all-knowing and sovereign. His plans can never be altered by mistakes, sin, or even by the craftiest of evil intentions. God knew all along that He would see His Son go to the cross and satisfy the need for the justification of all those who believe and still rise again in victory over death. 1 John 4:9 announces with great joy this wonderful truth, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." We can experience life through Jesus. Because He lives, we too have the hope of the coming resurrection and eternal life with Him. What great hope we celebrate this Easter because we serve a Savior who rose again and lives.



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