

Lamentations 3:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?

Analysis

Another rhetorical question deepening divine sovereignty: "**Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?**" The Hebrew mi-pi Elyon lotetse hara'ot vehatov (מִפִּי עֶלְיוֹן לֹא תֵצֵא חֶבְעָוֹת וְהַטּוֹב) asserts that both calamities and blessings proceed from God's mouth. The term Elyon (עֶלְיוֹן, "Most High") emphasizes God's supreme authority over all.

The phrase "evil and good" uses hara'ot vehatov (חֶבְעָוֹת וְהַטּוֹב)—literally "the evils and the good." Here "evil" means calamity, disaster, or hardship, not moral evil. God doesn't cause sin, but He does ordain difficult circumstances for His purposes. Isaiah 45:7 states explicitly: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil [calamity]: I the LORD do all these things."

This verse challenges both ancient and modern false theology. Ancient Near Eastern dualism taught that good comes from good gods and evil from evil gods—a cosmic battle between equals. Biblical monotheism insists that one sovereign God ordains all things, using even calamity for His purposes. Modern prosperity theology suggests faithful Christians should expect only blessing. But Lamentations teaches that from God's mouth proceeds both affliction and prosperity, judgment and mercy, hardship and blessing. The key is trusting His sovereign wisdom and goodness even when experiencing the "evil" (calamity) He ordains.

Historical Context

This teaching directly confronted Persian-influenced dualism that emerged during and after the exile. Zoroastrianism, Persia's dominant religion, taught cosmic conflict between Ahura Mazda (good god) and Angra Mainyu (evil god). Some exilic Jews may have been tempted toward this dualistic thinking—attributing their blessings to Yahweh and their calamities to an opposing evil power.

But Lamentations insists that both proceed from the Most High's mouth. Job expresses this same theology: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil [calamity]?" (Job 2:10). Isaiah proclaimed God's absolute sovereignty even over enemy nations: "I will raise up Cyrus...that thou mayest know that I, the LORD...am the God of Israel" (Isaiah 45:3).

The practical import for exiles was profound: their suffering wasn't due to Yahweh's weakness or defeat by Babylon's gods. Rather, Yahweh Himself had decreed the exile as judgment and discipline. This meant hope remained—the same God who spoke calamity could speak restoration. Indeed, the prophets promised that God would reverse the exile (Jeremiah 29:10-14, Isaiah 40:1-2), which occurred when Cyrus conquered Babylon and authorized Jewish return in 538 BC.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the assertion that both calamity and blessing proceed from God's mouth challenge prosperity theology?
2. What is the difference between God ordaining calamity (disaster, hardship) and God causing moral evil or sin?

3. How do Isaiah 45:7 and this verse work together to establish God's absolute sovereignty over all circumstances?
4. In what ways does trusting that our hardships proceed from God's mouth (rather than random chance or evil powers) provide comfort and purpose in suffering?

Interlinear Text

מֵ	עַלְיוֹן	לֹא	תֵּצֵא
Out of the mouth	of the most High	H3808	proceedeth
H6310	H5945	H3318	not evil
			and good
			H2896

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 45:7 (Evil): I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

Amos 3:6 (Evil): Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?

Job 2:10 (Evil): But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

Jeremiah 32:42 (Evil): For thus saith the LORD; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them.

Psalms 75:7 (Parallel theme): But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.

Proverbs 29:26 (Parallel theme): Many seek the ruler's favour; but every man's judgment cometh from the LORD.