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Does the Bible Talk About Not Doing Anything That's out of God's Timing?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about what the Bible says about not doing anything that's out of God's timing and whether Amos 4:13 and Isaiah 30:21 point to our hearing special messages from God.

- * Does the Bible talk about not doing anything that's out of God's timing?
- * Do Amos 4:13 and Isaiah 30:21 point to our hearing special messages from God?

Transcript

Welcome back to Stand to Reason's hashtag SDRask Podcast. And I'm saying welcome back because, Greg, we're going to continue on from our last episode. We were in the last episode, we were talking about questions about hearing the voice of God and what your view is and responding to verses and ideas and things like that.

And since we laid all that groundwork already, we're going to continue on on this topic. So I encourage everyone, if you didn't hear the last one, to start there because I'm sure you said a lot of things there that will be helpful to this. I don't want people to be confused.

Yeah, that are relevant. Of course, this is an issue we've revisits with some frequency. But yeah, that's a predicate to answering the challenges that we have here.

So this first one comes from Mr. Speedy. People talk about not doing anything that is out of God's timing. Does the Bible talk about this? This is another way of putting it is people have said, no, you're getting ahead of God.

Don't get ahead of God. Now, the only way we could know that we're doing something like that, if God were to say clearly and unequivocally, here's what I want you to do and I want you to do it at this time. And then we decide to do the thing at a different time before.

All right. In that case, we are getting ahead of God. But notice the requirement that we have to

have an explicit command from God regarding that thing.

I can think of one example, at least arguably from scripture, and I just read it recently because I'm moving through the book of Genesis right now in my own reading. And that is Abraham, who has promised a son who had come forth from his own loins. And that son would be, you know, et cetera, Sarai and all that.

And then Sarai's barren. And so what does he do? He takes Sarai's handmaiden and Hagar and has a baby through Hagar. Now, that wasn't what God had told him was going to happen, but now he's kind of taking things into his own hand.

So I guess you could characterize that as getting ahead of God kind of thing. But that's only possible if the clear purpose of God has already been revealed and a person is jumping ahead of the game. But this is not characteristic of our lives as Christians.

And I don't know why people would make this kind of comment. I guess there is, because it presumes God wants you to do this, but not yet. Well, how do we know that God wants them to do this particular thing? And when? Okay.

I think that most of the time this statement is made. It's without substance. It's not justifiable.

Okay. Now, I'm trying to be charitable and think of examples where this might properly apply. Let's just say, well, even if you said you have a daughter who's got a boyfriend and she's 16 years old and they want to get married.

You see, this is too early. You're getting ahead of God. Well, that's presuming something on God that you don't know.

It might be wise not to get married that young. That's a different consideration. But to say you're getting ahead of God that presumes God wants that young lady to be married at a different age or maybe to a different person.

And so how are you coming by that information? I guess it's hard for me, Amy, to imagine a circumstance in which that kind of expectation can properly apply to a Christian. Now, a believer might be doing something on wise. They might be moving ahead faster than is appropriate for the circumstances or taking on a commitment that is not good for them or whatever.

They might be all kinds of ways that a Christian might be too hasty in a decision that person is making. But that's in light of wisdom considerations and circumstantial considerations. We can't say they're getting ahead of God unless we have a clear statement from God as to what the timetable is.

And a lot of times the so-called clear statement from God about the timetable is what people feel the Holy Spirit is leading them to do, nudge, nudge, hint, hint, style. And I think that's a

completely unreliable way, certainly not a biblical way to determine what God is so-called telling us to do. Yeah, I think that's where it comes down to in situations where somebody feels like, oh, I shouldn't go ahead, then they'll say, oh, it's not God's timing because they have a feeling that they're interpreting to mean don't go ahead.

So it does go back, I think, to this kind of interpretation of nudges and things like that. Now, I can think of examples where something might be out of God's timing morally. So, and I think this even goes with Abraham, because if Abraham had not taken on taking her made servant as another wife, then everything would have gone on just like normal and he would have been in God's timing.

But of course, God used all of this, or let's say it's not in God's timing for you to have sex with your boyfriend before you're married. That's something that's out of God's timing, but these are all things- But that's a view of a moral injunction we already know. These are all things that God revealed morally, objectively, that we have access to.

It's not kind of an interpretation of what's happening. So what I would say is God can take care of himself with his timing. You don't have to worry about that.

Paul actually, when he tries to go to Asia, says the Holy Spirit doesn't allow them to go. The Holy Spirit was able to stop him. I have no reason to think that he was trying to interpret signs or things like that.

So God can stop you from doing something, and maybe you're going ahead and then something doesn't work out. In that case, you might say, I guess it wasn't God's timing. But that's not because you're trying to figure out a secret message.

It's because it didn't happen. Well, the same thing happens with Paul trying to go to Romans, Romans chapter one, he's saying, I want to visit you for all of these good purposes, and I'm trying, but so far, I have not been allowed to do that. And hopefully, one day, if possible by the will of God, I will be able to come to you.

And then we're speaking clearly, it seems to be the sovereign will of God that as he's banging on the door, one day that door will open. And of course it did, in God's own way, when he went to Rome and changed. So I think that's a legitimate way to talk about God's timing.

Looking back at God's sovereign actions in your life, it wasn't the right time. And maybe it happens later, but you can see that God prevented it from happening earlier. So again, this is something that we can observe, but not something that we have to learn how to do and that we can get wrong.

I don't think we can get God's timing wrong. God can take care of his own timing. That's right.

And I mean, in the sense that we are somehow getting ahead of God, and we can have bad timing in our life regarding a whole bunch of things, but not in the sense that this question

suggests. And back to another issue that's somewhat related is the whole idea of God is the way it's often characterized as God is trying to talk to you, but you're not listening. God is trying.

Now I want people to think about that for a moment. Does God try? Does God try? What is entailed, at least as a possibility, in the notion of trying? Failure. You try and it doesn't work.

And in fact, that's what people are suggesting. God's trying to talk to you, but you're not hearing him. So God is failing what he's trying to do.

This is a libel on the character of God. God doesn't try. Whatever he sets his will to accomplish gets accomplished.

Okay, we should remove that language from our vocabulary because it's because it's unworthy of the character of God. And then what it does is implies that we are not doing the right technique in order to hear the trying of God speaking to us. That's all misguided.

Okay, let's go into a question from Summer. Does Amos 4:13 or Isaiah 40:21 point to us point to our hearing special messages from God? Okay. Well, let's look at the text.

The first one is Amos 4:13 and here's what that text says. For behold, he who forms mountains and creates the wind and declares to man what are his thoughts. He who makes dawn into darkness and treads on the high places of the earth, the Lord God of hosts is his name.

Now, this is a verse that is talking about the greatness of God, all of the things that God accomplishes as God. And one of them is and declares to man what are his thoughts. Now, in the translation here, the pronoun his is capitalized.

So the translator seems to be convinced that the his is God, his thoughts are God's thoughts. So he declares to man what are God's own thoughts. Okay.

Possible. Maybe he's declaring to man what man's thoughts are, but he's probably referring to declaring to man what God's thoughts are. Well, we're reading here at Amos.

Amos is a man and God is declared to Amos what God's thoughts are and Amos wrote them down in his book called Amos. So all that needs to be said here or concluded is that God reveals himself through words to his people. That's it.

Well, that's not controversial. We got 66 books of that. We all agree to that.

The question isn't whether God reveals his words to people, but whether God, whether every New Testament Christian should expect to have a conversational relationship with God that also not only builds intimacy with them and God, but also provides information for them about the specifics in their life, the decisions that they individually need to make apart from the questions that are broadly described or the issues broadly taught about in scripture. What about me? What about my circumstance? My job? My wife? My wife? This, that and the other thing. So this verse doesn't justify that at all.

It just simply says that God makes his thoughts known to man. He declares them, which is called revelation. It doesn't give any indication of who the recipients of that revelation are.

Though in this case, it's obviously Amos and all the other prophets which we acknowledge. So there's nothing more that needs to be added to this for us to take this at face value true than just understanding that God is a God who speaks and he reveals himself to men. And we have that revelation in the 66 books of the scripture and whether he reveals more.

Well, that's another question, but it can't be answered by looking at this verse in Amos. So now let's look at the other passage. And this is Isaiah.

30 21. Chapter 30 verse 21. And I'll read the verse.

And I've heard this verse lots of times as a way of justifying this kind of practice that we're taking exception with here now. The verse says, your ears will hear a word behind you. This is the way walk in it whenever you turn to the right or to the left.

And of course, when someone cites this passage to me, they say, well, there you go. There it is. God promised.

Well, it always helps to read a little bit above it a little bit below so you can find out if there's any restrictions or anything that's said around it in the flow of thought, the context that might modify our understanding. OK, but I will make this observation. There is nothing like this in the New Testament.

There's no parallel to this kind of straight ahead forward statement in terms of Christians living their lives. OK, and it strikes me as curious if you're going to justify a practice. It's curious that you have to go 2,800 years back in history to find a verse that sounds like it might justify the practice.

In the New Testament, because there are no New Testament verses to justify it. OK, now that's not a, you know, a knockdown dragout refutation, but it is something you should keep in mind. Because if this is so important for Christians to learn to do so they can do the will of God and be close to God, by golly, it seems to me it would have been mentioned more often in the New Testament and it's not mentioned at all.

But we also find something else when we read the larger context. All right, and so I'm going to start in verse 18. Therefore the Lord longs to be gracious to you.

And therefore he wants, he waits on high to have compassion on you for the Lord is a God of justice. How blessed are all those who long for him. Oh people of Zion, OK, now we have a subject in mind that's being spoken to.

Oh people of Zion. In other words, these are Jews inhabitants of Jerusalem, more precise. You will weep no longer.

He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. When he hears it, he will answer you. Oh, the Lord has given you bread of privation and water of oppression.

He your teacher will no longer hide himself, but your eyes will behold your teacher. Your ears will hear a word behind you. This is the way walk in it whenever you turn to the right or to the left.

And you will defile your graven images overlaid with silver and your molten images plated with gold. You will scatter them as an impure thing and say to them, be gone. Then he will give you rain for the seed which you will sow in the ground and bread from the yield of the ground.

And it will be rich and plenteous on that day or livestock will graze in roomy pasture. And on it goes with more blessings. So this is a promise given to the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the midst of the punishment for their idolatry.

And God is saying, I'm not going to always punish you. I want to take care of you. I want to provide for you.

And there's going to be a day when that will happen. And when it happens, you're going to burn those idols and I'm going to overflow your land with plenty. Okay.

It's interesting how he characterizes his turn though to favor. And he says two things, your eyes will behold your teacher and your ears will hear him essentially the word behind you. Okay.

So if we are to understand hearing the word behind us, this is the way walk in it. If we understand that literally, then we have to understand the phrase that comes before it literally too. It's in parallel.

Your eyes will behold your teacher and your ears will hear a word behind you. So in this circumstance, God is present who they see and who is telling them what to do. Well, that ain't now.

This looks like it's eschatological. It's a look towards the end when final prosperity would come to Israel and redemption to Israel. This could be Christological talking about seeing Jesus, although they wouldn't understand that in Isaiah, but we look back and say he could be referring to that.

And then he's given a word and instruction. Go this way, not that way, and Jesus did that. But there's no justification of isolating this passage and saying what God is teaching through Isaiah is if any individual Christian wants to know what to do, God is saying, okay, I will tell you, you'll hear the word behind you.

Turn left or turn right because it's inextricably connected with the verse in front of it. When he says, you will not just hear the teacher. You will see the teacher who's saying what you hear.

So this obviously cannot be taken in the way that most people apply it. Well, I think we can take

this even farther that this isn't about God telling anyone what to do. And the reason why I say that is because usually when the Bible is talking about not turning to the right or to the left, but staying on the way, it's being moral, it's doing the right thing.

It's not, do I buy this car? Do I take this job? It's actually, this whole thing is about repentance. This is the way walk in it whenever you turn to the right or left. In other words, he's going to keep you on the straight and narrow moral path.

So I think even in the case you're saying, I think this is about morality. This isn't about choices that we're making about which direction to go in. That's just how the Bible usually talks about not turning to the right or to the left, but staying on the way.

So, and we talked about that in the last episode about how God has revealed those moral things to us, and that is how we are making our decisions by learning to walk in that way. Right. Well, Greg, I just want to close by saying, and I can't remember if we mentioned this in this episode, but in the last one, we definitely did.

There are three articles called does God whisper on our website at str.org, where we go into this in more detail, because if this is the first time you've heard this, I'm sure you have a lot of questions, and hopefully those things will cover your questions there. And I'm sure we'll be getting more questions about this after people hear this, so we'll be able to respond to that after we hear from you. So, thank you for sending those in.

Thank you, Mr. Speedy, and Summer, we appreciate hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.