

Title: Interlude: God and the Existence of Evil
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Text: Selected Scriptures
Central Idea: God gives meaning to suffering and evil
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{Prayer}

Open Bibles to the BOJ . . .

Go in a little different direction today

Interlude: God and the Existence of Evil

[i] Last time we asked: “Who Caused Job’s Suffering?”

From 1 persp. you could say that Satan did—we saw that in 2:7 (1st direct ref. to Satan afflicting Job)

2:7 ... The Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

Satan was a cause—but a secondary cause in Job’s suff.

[ii] Why secondary?

What did we see back in 1:20-21?

1:20-21 . . . Job worshiped . . . and said . . . The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.”

Not only do we see that ==>

True Worship, True Devotion Survives the Fires of Affliction

We also see that Job ULTIMATELY attributes his calamity to t/sov. hand of G.

We see that in the beginning of the book as well as at the end where we read in 42:11 that ==>

. . . all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to [Job] . . . and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the LORD had brought on him. . . .

[iii] Who is responsible for what happened to Job? God or Satan?

God brought Job to Satan's attention (1:8)

God permitted Satan to afflict Job within set limits (1:9-12; cf. 2:6)

Sov. G. who stands as t/primary agent behind Job's affliction.

That may raise some ?s we hope to answer today.

[iv] Look at chapter 2:3 where God says (what?)

3b **“And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause.”**

“Ruin” Heb. bala = “to swallow”

* Used in Jonah 1:17 which states that God appt. a great fish to “swallow” Jonah.

3b **“And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to SWALLOW him . . .”**

and that (last 2 words of the v. 3) ==>

“ . . .Without cause.”

[v] Why “without cause”?

Take a mom. to reflect on what we've learned so far about Job.

I. Introduction and Review

A. Three Things We Noted About Job in Chapter 1

1. Job is a converted man

Described 3x in these 2 chapt. as a man who is blameless & upright (what he is). As a result, Job fears G., & turns away from evil (what he does).

He's a good man, a man who knows & serves t/Triune God of t/Bible.

2. Job is a prosperous man

We see how G. has blessed Job mat. in 1:3

We see how G. had blessed him w/sons and daughters in 1:2.

No wonder he's called ==>

1:3 . . . **the greatest of all the men of the east.**

Not only is he ==>

1. ... a converted man . . .

and ==>

2. a prosperous man

He's also ==>

3. A spiritually sensitive man

1:5 **When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.**

Why does God say he has been afflicted “without cause” in 2:3?

{summarize}

Note ==>

B. Job is Also a Man (like us) Who is Not Immune from Calamity

As we’ve seen in chapt. 1, Satan is permitted to afflict Job.

C. Review of 1:14-19

1. The Four Horsemen of Doom (1:14-19)

4 disasters that rapidly strike alternate from human attacks (Raiders) to what are often referred to as “natural disasters” - what insurance companies once called “acts of God.”

a. The First Horseman: Raiders (Sabeans) (1:14-15)

1:14-15 14 a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

B4 t/visibly shaken servant can finish speaking ==>

b. The Second Horseman: Natural Disaster (Lightning) (1:16)

1:16 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

The next domino falls in v. 17 ==>

c. The Third Horseman: Raiders (Chaldeans) (1:17)

1:17 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

The last, most painful domino falls ==>

d. The Fourth Horseman: Natural Disaster (Wind) (1:18-19)

Scene is introduced in v. 18==>

1:18 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house,

Note how v. 19 starts ==>

1:19 and behold . . .

Those words mark this last event as t/most climactic.

1:19 and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

4 Horsemen of Doom / 4 Tipping dominoes. Job loses his wealth, his status, & most painfully, all of his children—in single day.

That’s just chapter 1. As if that’s not enough

2. More Calamity Concerning Job (2:7-8)

Satan is not satisfied. Job passed t/1st test. How about another round of suffering? We see a repeat in chapter 2.

{Summarize vv. 1-6}

a. Chronic Sores from Head to Toe (7)

7 . . . the Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

8 And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

(1) Job is now living at the town dump

The greatest man of t/East (v. 3) is now living among t/ashes scraping himself with a potsherd—a piece of broken pottery!

b. Job's Confession (10b)

10b . . . “Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” . . .

c. The Author's Confirmation (10c)

10c . . . In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

3b “And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to SWALLOW him without cause.”

II. What is God's Relationship to Suffering and Evil?

It's 1 thing to say G. is sov., it's another to ask t/? how can He be sov. over evil, even ordaining it for His purposes, & yet be good?

A. An age-old question

T/O history skeptics have cited t/existence of evil as sufficient proof that the G. of t/Bible does not exist.

Dr. Ron Nash (a fav. philosopher of mine) wrote this==>

“Every philosopher I know believes that the most serious challenge to theism, was, is, and will continue to be the problem of evil.” (Faith and

Reason. Grand Rapids, MI, 1988), 177

Nash wrote those words in 1988.

Let’s go back in time to about t/4th c. BC (3-400 yrs b4 X).

We have what has been called “t/Epicurean paradox” ==>

“God,” it was said “either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able.”

Expressed in a familiar syllogism:

1. If God were truly omnipotent, he would be able to prevent evil
2. If God were truly omnibenevolent, he would prevent evil.
3. Evil exists.
4. Therefore, a truly omnipotent & omnibenevolent G. does not exist.

B. Over the years I have encountered those skeptical of Christianity that, in one way or another, have followed this line of reasoning

I think of a man I knew, we’ll call him Fred (not his real name). Fred appreciated my theology & my preaching. Fred was in basic agreement w/what we call “the doctrines of grace.” But all was not right in Fred’s heart. After I lost touch w/him, he slowly & deliberately began to reject t/faith. He became a X-rejecting secularist. His rational? The existence of God is incompatible w/the existence of suffering & evil.

That's not only a question for skeptics, it's also 1 that perplexes Xns.

As Stephen J. Wellum observes:

The problem of evil, however, is not just an issue that non-Christians raise and which rightly requires a full-blown biblical-theological answer; it is also a problem for Christians . . . it is a problem in regard to our daily lives, questions, and struggles, what has been labeled the emotional or religious problem of evil. Christians too, live in a fallen world ravaged by sin, and even though we may not question in exactly the same way as the non-Christian how God and evil can exist simultaneously, we often wrestle with the relationship of God's sovereignty to evil and wonder why specific evils happen to us and others. . . .” [“God’s Sovereignty Over Evil,” in *Whomever He Wills: A Surprising Display of Sovereign Mercy*, Ed. Matthew Barrett and Thomas J. Nettles (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2012), 231–32.]

This was the question that also perplexed Augustine early in his quest for the truth. It's been said that t/problem of evil troubled him more than any anything else.

This is an issue that touches us all.

Here is where we are going to go deep. Put your thinking caps on.

I think it was Howard Hendricks who had a friend that was a forensic pathologist. Hendricks asked him if he'd seen many brains. T/man said he had. Hendricks then asked him if he'd ever seen one that was worn out. The man replied, “Worn out? I've never even seen one hardly used!”

I'm going to ask you to buck t/trend and use yours.

{note my paper}

C. How Do We Define Evil?

We are generally more fam. w/the ? of suffering. After all, everyone suffers and therefore knows how to define what it means to suffer.

But what about evil?

R. C. Sproul attempts a definition when he writes:

Historically, evil has been defined in terms of privation . . . and negation . . ., especially in the works of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas. The point of such definitions is to define evil in terms of a lack of, or negation of, the good. We define sin, for example, as any want of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God. Sin is characteristically defined in negative terms. We speak of sin as disobedience, lawlessness, immorality, unethical behavior, and the like. So that, above and beyond the problem of evil always stands the standard of good by which evil is determined to be evil. In this regard, evil is parasitic. It depends upon a host outside of itself for its very definition. Nothing can be said to be evil without the prior standard of the good. [“The Problem of Pain,” TableTalk, (June 2006).]

IOW, evil cannot exist apart from that which is good.

John Calvin, following Augustine, wrote that, “evil and sin are nothing in themselves but only a disorder or corruption of what ought to be.” [Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 169.]

Evil is the lack of true good. It stands in contrast to, and is the absence of, the revealed holiness of the Bible's Triune God.

In short, evil cannot exist apart from G.

D. We must not lose sight of the fact that nowhere in the Bible do we see God portrayed as the author of evil

G. is not to be blamed for moral evil. He does not take delight in it. Evil is brought about thru t/free agency of fallen creatures.

We must never come to a place where we think that we are not responsible for the evil that we do, or that God takes pleasure in such evil, or is to be blamed for it.

The fault always lies with the creature, not the Creator.

James 1:13–17 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

E. The Free Will Defense?

I can hear some of you thinking, “What about free will?”

T/most commonly cited solution of t/problem of evil.

It is t/favorite of pew-sitter and pundit alike.

Argument proposes that evil is t/result of t/unhindered free choices of rational creatures (human or angelic).

G. does not, in any sense, foreordain these free acts and therefore bears no responsibility for them.

Sounds feasible at first blush.

However, it does not conform to t/totality of t/biblical evidence.

For 1 thing, it strips G. of t/sov. that is attributed to Him t/o t/Bible.

For another, so-called “free will” does not exist.

Individuals are, indeed, free moral agents in that they make choices. However, they do not possess the kind of liberty that’s usually proposed by those who uphold a free-will theology. Indeed most Xns who chirp about “free-will” hold to a view that has been deemed heretical t/o t/history of t/CH — Augustine & Pelagius . . .

T/16th c. Protestant Reformation made clear that t/biblical position as it relates to man’s will is 1 of bondage, not freedom.

We also see t/o Scripture that God’s sovereignty encompasses & overrules t/seemingly free actions of men.

In Acts 2:23 we read that sinful men nailed Jesus to a cross ==>
. . . the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God . . .

As Theologian Wayne Grudem writes ==>

“There are literally dozens of Scripture passages that say that God (indirectly) brought about some kind of evil. . . . Christians often are unaware of the extent of this forthright teaching in Scripture. Yet it must be remembered that in all of these examples, the evil is actually done not by God but by people or demons who choose to do it.”

[Systematic Theology: Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 322–23.]

It is noteworthy that TAP, in Rom. 9, while explicitly addressing evil, does not explain away t/issue by way of free will. Rather, he engages in an uncompromised defense of God’s absolute sovereignty.

Rather than “free will” has asks the ? “who can resist His will”

We could spend a lot more time on this, but it’s time we don’t have.

Where to we go from here?

III. A Multidimensional Perspective on God and Evil

It seems to me that any proposed solution to the problem of evil should involve a multidimensional method.

A. Theologically, this has been termed “compatibilism”

IOW- there is a compatibility between t/existence of a sov. G. & t/existence of evil, or God’s sov. as it relates to t/human resp.

D. A. Carson defines compatibilism ==>

The Bible as a whole . . . presupposes or teaches that both of the following propositions are true:

1. God is absolutely Sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in such a way that human responsibility is curtailed [or] minimized...

2. Human beings are morally responsible creatures—they significantly choose, rebel, obey, believe, defy, make decisions, . . . and they are rightly held accountable for such actions; but this characteristic never functions so as to make God absolutely contingent. [How Long O Lord?

Reflections on Suffering and Evil (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 179.]

Again, this is just a thumbnail sketch of some of t/issues and answers to this ? of evil that’s relevant to our study of Job.

B. Four Considerations as it Relates to God and Evil

1. God’s Decree is Not Simple, it is Complex

When we talk about G.s decree, we are ref. to that which He has determined would happen from eternity. For example, G. decreed (determined) that He would create t/universe. He also decreed that He would permit man’s fall into sin & that JC would be sent to earth on a mission to redeem fallen humanity.

There is an imp. nuance in understanding this.

There is what’s been called a permissive, or passive decree, sometimes referred to as G’s “permissive will.”

When we talk about that which G. permits, we’re talking about that which He allows to happen, even though it may not be in keeping w/His revealed will.

IOW - it's not God's revealed will for a gunman to murder dozens of people in a public High School. Yet, G. permits things like that to happen.

We've seen G's permissive decree in t/Book of Job. He gave permission to Satan to afflict Job, even tho Job had done nothing to deserve it.

Another example is found in Luke 7:30 which states that t/Jewish leaders "rejected God's purpose for themselves"

Also relevant is Acts 14:16 where we read that G. "permitted all the nations to go their own ways."

1 other passage of note is Luke 22:31-32 where Jesus informs Peter that Satan has demanded to sift him as wheat. While t/word "permission" isn't in the Greek text, it is strongly implied.

Many more examples of permissive language could be cited.

If t/Bible uses t/lang. of permission in describing how G. sometimes relates to his creation, why should we be reluctant to do so?

This understanding of what we're calling a "permissive decree" makes sense out of G's hatred of sinful behaviors, such as the practice of homosexuality (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27).

That G. allows ppl to engage in such things—giving them over to t/banquet of their sin—affirms that their disobedience is real w/o logically denying His sovereignty.

2. God's Will is Not Simple, it is Complex (God's Revealed vs Secret Will)

a. God's revealed will is that which he either commands or forbids

2 Tim 2:22 Now flee from youthful lusts [that is what G. forbids] and pursue righteousness [what G. commands] . . .

(1) God's revealed will can be violated

Right? If I don't pursue righteousness or if I covet my neighbor's wife (10th comm.) I have broken G's revealed will. Cf. Eph. 5:18.

Even w/that G. is not rendered powerless. He can and does change situations or hearts (Gen. 50:20; Prov. 21:1).

Gen 50:20 "As for you, you meant evil against me [you broke G's revealed will], but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

b. God's secret will is that which He ordains—Those things that are secret to us

Why are some chosen for salv? We don't know.

But we do know that G. has commanded us to evangelize! That's His revealed will. Whom He saves is His concern.

2 Tim. 2:10 For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen [I evangelize, I minister to t/CHs. That's G's revealed will for us. Why?], so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. [that's G's secret will]

(1) Indeed, God's will is not simple, it is complex (as we understand it)

We see in Job 1:12 that God allowed Satan, within certain limitations, to put forth his hand upon Job to afflict him.

However, later in 1:21 Job declares ==>

1:21 "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."

Job attributes that which came through the secondary agency of Satan to the primary agency of God.

That the author adds in verse 22 ==>

1:22 "Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God"

shows that Job was not in error in either attributing his suffering to G. or in declaring that G. himself was not t/blameworthy cause.

G. may thereby be spoken of as the final or ultimate cause as it relates to all that occurs within his creation. When it comes to evil, however, secondary agents serve as the efficient, or blameworthy cause. This is an essential distinction.

Acts 4:27–28 27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together

against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

Again, note the words of Shedd:

“By reason of his permissive decree, God has absolute control over moral evil, while yet he is not the author of it and forbids it.” [Dogmatic Theology, 319.]

The Westminster Confession of Faith adds that God “neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin” (5.4).

Deut 29:29 offers a familiar statement that is classic when it comes to understanding differing aspects to God’s will:

Deut. 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

Clearly, there are aspects of God’s will that are not revealed to us. However, t/Bible contains “those things revealed” that we are to heed.

When it comes to God’s relationship with evil, we ought not go beyond what is revealed to us in sacred scripture.

Don’t be tempted to lose sight of the fact that G. interacts with us on a personal level. Don’t give in to an impersonal fatalism.

God enjoins us to worship him—and to pray. He desires our

fellowship and is pleased when our joy is made full in him. On the other hand, he is displeased when we neglect our holy calling.

We must take Scrip. seriously when it warns us against grieving t/HS (Eph. 4:30) or when it commands us to share t/good news with those who are lost & hell-bound.

We must not adopt t/attitude that God has decreed everything so why bother. That's hyper-Calvinism. That's bad theology.

3. The existence of evil is really a problem for those who reject the Bible as God's Word

T/skeptic has to demonstrate that good and evil can truly exist apart from Xnty. IOW, there can be no ontological absolutes in a world in which God does not exist.

T/brutal clubbing to death of baby seals for mercenary reasons is not evil if God is not.

Atheism reduces man to the level of a mere animal living in a random, naturalistic universe. There may be pain, there may be disappointment, there may be anguish, but there can be no absolute moral wrong.

“Thus, the Christian may turn the tables on the unbeliever who raises the problem of evil: The non-Christian has a problem of good. Without God, there is neither good nor evil.” [John Frame, Systematic Theology, 292.]

In the words of the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer:

“If there is no absolute moral standard, then one cannot say in a final sense that anything is right or wrong. By absolute we mean that which always applies [to all people], that which provides a final or ultimate standard. There must be an absolute if there are to be morals, and there must be an absolute if there are to be real values. If there is no absolute beyond man’s ideas, then there is no final appeal to judge between individuals and groups whose moral judgements conflict. We are merely left with conflicting opinions.”

A biblical and comprehensive compatibilism offers the best understanding of the relationship between God and evil.

To summarize, we must remember that:

1. God is perfectly holy, sovereign, and hates evil.
2. While God permits evil for his purposes, he is not the author of it.
3. There are aspects of God’s sovereignty as it relates to evil that are beyond our understanding.
4. God’s relationship to evil is not simplistic; it is multifaceted.
5. We live in a fallen, sinful universe that contains moral&natural evil
6. God has a good reason for creating a universe that contains evil.
7. God entreats us to simply trust him.

Gordon J. Spykman cautions us to be mindful that ==>

Every pursuit of a more original and ultimate “explanation” is bound to come up empty. The origin of evil remains forever that ultimately inexplicable “mystery of ungodliness.” Calvin therefore advocates approaching this issue in the spirit of humble and pious ignorance.

Seeking to break the bounds of Scripture is “a kind of madness.”

[Gordon J. Spykman, Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 304.]

4. We must keep in mind that God is not required to offer us any explanations

Nowhere in Scripture does he defend his actions, beyond reminding us of the Creator-creature distinction.

It is his right to be trusted and believed, regardless of the questions & accusations of fallen creatures.

To borrow a metaphor used by a well-known apologist, when we sit in judgement on God we are as a child sitting in his father’s lap while indignantly slapping him in the face.

That someone “loses” his or her faith over anything, much less t/problem of evil, only serves to demonstrate that they were never really converted. 1 John 2:19.

These things may bother us // we may have ?s. That’s ok. There are answers that have been given t/o t/history of t/CH by minds much greater than ours.

Regardless of your intellect, you can do this 1 thing: TRUST.
Prov. 3:5-6.

Rem. — All suffering & evil points to t/Cross, even as all that is good

and righteous does.

The Cross is like a dagger plunged into the ground. It was planted into t/earth at Calvary; it was also planted deep into history.

It is there that good conquered evil; it is there that t/deepest ?s of life are answered.

A great evil struck our family back on Dec. 24, 2015. While I struggled to make sense of it all, I never really wavered on t/fact that G. was/is sov. And that t/Bible is true & ultimately has t/only answers.

T/existence of evil may be a big ?. But there's no bigger ? than where will you spend eternity.

No one is good enough to gain eternal life (Rom. 3:10).

God's revealed will clearly shows that ==>

God is holy & we are not.

We are separated from Him because of our innate sin.

That God cannot overlook sin.

That we have violated God's law – his very character – and stand condemned.

That t/ only hope we have is faith in Christ.

And it is clear that truth matters.....

{invitation}