

# EVIL, SUFFERING, DEATH: WHY?

## Lesson 1

### "Evil ... Suffering ... Death"

#### INTRODUCTION:

Paul endured trials in this life and then died a martyr, still anticipating his reward. Job endured trials in this life, but then received a fine reward while he was still alive. **So, WHAT, EXACTLY, can we expect from God?** Perhaps the best way to view the ending of Job is not to see it as a blueprint for what will happen to us in this life, but as being significant of what God has prepared for those who endure! So, let me state from the very outset that faithfulness to God, striving to live in keeping with His will, is not going to guarantee for us every physical blessing or that there will never be any conflict or adversity! *We need to see from the beginning of this study that the ultimate mortality rate is the same for atheists and saints alike! All of us die!* And the route to that point can be a real ordeal for us all --- except for the strength we derive from and the confidence we place in the Lord!

#### I. EVIL, SUFFERING AND DEATH ARE REAL PROBLEMS FOR US ALL!

##### A. What about the problem of EVIL?

1. The presence of "evil" in a world pronounced "very good" by its Creator has always presented a challenge to rational, spiritual people.
  - a) The OT word [Hebrew *ra'*] refers to those things which may be physically undesirable, "BAD" in our estimation, such as disease, calamity, and destruction from such forces as tornados, earthquakes, et al, the causes of which are generally not fully understood.
  - b) The word also refers to that which is morally wicked or sinful in the sight of God. In fact, the last six commandments of the decalogue relate to moral behavior and any violations of them constitute moral evils, or sins!
  - c) The NT word [Greek- *poneros, poneria, and kakos*] usually refers to moral evil, that is, SIN, disobedience to God, with predictable results.
2. How can the existence of a benevolent and omnipotent God be reconciled with the fact of so much evil and misery in the world He is supposed to have created?
  - a) Such negative things as animal pain, human suffering, and man's inhumanity to man are held to be incompatible with the existence of a just, merciful and powerful deity.
  - b) Some 300 years before Christ, EPICURUS gave this problem its classical philosophic formulation: *"If God wants to prevent evil but cannot, he is not omnipotent; if he is powerful enough to prevent evil but will not, he is not benevolent; if he neither can nor desires to prevent evil, there is no good reason to think of him as 'divine' at all; if he both can and wishes to prevent evil, there is no way to account for its presence in our experience; thus, since evil clearly does exist, we must conclude that no omnipotent and omnibenevolent God exists!"* In recent years the thoughts have been given wider circulation by writers like Harold S. Kushner in books like "When Bad Things Happen to Good People".
3. MORAL EVIL is a result of turning against the will of God, and is much easier to explain than "evils" in the natural world.

- a) "GOOD AND EVIL" were set side by side before Adam in the garden when God placed the "*tree of knowledge of good and evil*" there with the instruction that he was not to eat of it! **Gen.2:9, 17**. It was for the purpose of allowing the exercise of his free will as well as testing his loyalty to God.
  - b) He was **not TEMPTED by God**, because "*God cannot be tempted with evil, and He himself tempteth no man*" - **James 1:13**. The **TEMPTATION to sin**, or to commit moral evil, came from a different source, Satan, who appeared in the form of a serpent!
4. C. J. Ducasse in **A Philosophical Scrutiny of Religion** suggests that there are four classes of evil.
- a) *Physical* - diseases or pain associated with the human body and its limitations and the forces in the natural universe.
  - b) *Psychological* - all the states of mind that create suffering such as loneliness, anxiety, fear, and rejection.
  - c) *Moral* - all those negative character traits such as selfishness, greed, malice, hatred, and cruelty.
  - d) *Intellectual* - including irrational behavior, bad judgment, and stupidity.
- B. What are some of the **RESULTS of evil**? Though the world was created by a loving God, the problems brought on by evil are **REAL**, and the results are **ABUNDANT**, but at this time we shall only consider a couple!
1. Evil brings about suffering and death, to both the righteous and the wicked.
    - a) As we shall consider later, **evil is not the only source** of suffering and death, but has certainly had a big part in it, from the very foundation of the world!
    - b) Most of us can "*understand*" the suffering of sinners [*"They deserve it!"*], but it's just really difficult to understand why righteous Abel had to suffer, because he was urgently striving to be well-pleasing to God! **More on this when we discuss the sources of adversity!**
  2. In **Matthew 6:19-34**, Jesus impresses God's concern for our well-being on our thinking by assuring people that they need not be *anxious*, or *worry*, so long as they're holding on to the Lord. So, one of the **results** of evil is to exercise "natural" tendencies that show a distrust or a lack of confidence in God!
    - a) The noun *merimna* means **anxiety, worry, or care**. In explaining the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said of that which was sown among the thorns, "*This is he that heareth the word, and the **care of the world** ... chokes out the word!*" Anxieties or worries of the world and of life choke out the word so that the individual fails to develop fully as a Christian!
    - b) The verb *merimnao* means to **have anxiety, to be anxious, or to be unduly concerned**. This word, occurring six times in the citation, shows that Jesus is mindful of the disciples' worry about matters of everyday life and points them to the Father who makes provision for all their necessities.
    - c) Jesus begins with the command, "*Be not anxious*", then specifies what they're to not worry about. Those things which most distract us are things that pertain to the physical life --- food, drink, raiment, social obligations, and the like!
  3. **Another perplexing question that compounds our confusion is NOT ONLY why do the righteous SUFFER, but why do the evil seem to PROSPER?**
- C. Now, what about the problems of **SUFFERING** and **DEATH**?

1. They are real problems and, as we just noted, seem to be **primarily** the results of EVIL, though, again, evil is NOT THE ONLY CAUSE!
  - a) Death and suffering should NEITHER be regarded as *intrinsically evil* intruders!
  - b) SIN, moral evil that results from the abuse of freedom, **is the only intrinsic evil in human experience!**
2. Regardless of all that, DEATH IS REAL! Its *outward symbols* are well known to all of us! A *cemetery* is not hard to detect! A *hearse* is rarely confused with any other vehicle! A *coffin* is like no other box!
  - a) These outward signs tell us we're in the presence of death, but little more!
  - b) The mystery of what happens at death will not be unraveled by meditation in a cemetery, investigation of a hearse, or reflection on a coffin!
  - c) DEATH is a result of man being separated from the tree of life, when he was cast from the garden as a consequence of his spiritual death for eating the forbidden fruit!
  - d) This physical **consequence** has passed on to all the heirs of Adam!
  - e) No matter how much we may try to understand death, whenever it comes it is a sad event. And regardless of our comprehension of the subject, we still abhor the thought of dying.
    - 1) The frustration of death is a feeling we can readily understand, but that fear can be diminished by the promise of sharing Jesus' glory.
    - 2) The dread of judgment is another feeling that feeds our fears, but that can also be abolished to the extent of our certainty that Jesus is our Savior [**this is the strength of our faith!**]
    - 3) And with some, the uncertainty of the resurrection causes death to be a real fear, but it can be obliterated by our confidence that we are the children of God!
3. What if there were no Evil or Suffering or Death? If they were all eliminated rational and moral qualities would be only excess baggage, and without any real influence on human nature, responsibility, or behavior.
  - a) John Hick, in **Evil and the God of Love**, imagines some of the features of a world utterly incapable of experiencing suffering: *"It would mean that no wrong action could ever have bad effects, and that no piece of carelessness or ill-judgment in dealing with the world could ever lead to harmful consequences. If a thief were to steal a million pounds from a bank, instead of anyone being made poorer thereby, another million pounds would appear from nowhere to replenish the safe; and this, moreover, without causing any inflationary consequences...Anyone driving at breakneck speed along a narrow road and hitting a pedestrian would leave his victim miraculously unharmed; or if one slipped and fell through a fifth-floor window, gravity would be partially suspended, and he would float gently to the ground."*
  - b) **ALL THIS is within the power of God**, but it can't be realized and be consistent with His intention to serve a soul-making, character-developing purpose! *"There would be nothing wrong with stealing, because no one would ever lose anything by it; there would be no such crime as murder, because [with no death] no one could ever be killed ... Not only would there be no way in which anyone could injure anyone else, but there would also be no way in which anyone could benefit anyone else, since there would be no possibility of lack or danger!"*
4. So it seems **the real problems in regard to these things** are really problems that we have with our *attitudes*, our *reactions* to adversities when they come, and our *focus* on and preparation for eternity.

## II. THERE ARE SEVERAL FALSE IDEAS THAT STILL EXIST IN THE MINDS OF MANY ABOUT THE SOURCES OF THESE PROBLEMS

A. Sources of Adversity: WHO/ WHAT causes evil/ pain/ suffering/ death?

1. One of the things that makes such a question so complex is that men have **offered** and people have **accepted** [*and continue to hold to*] false answers to evil and suffering!
    - a) A few even suggest that suffering is just an illusion! [Mary Baker Eddy & her followers in the "Christian Science" religion.]
    - b) A very popular explanation for pain and suffering that's been around for centuries is that these things are a result of man's own sins! [Friends of Job & people in Jesus day suggested this: **Luke 13:1-5;** **Jno.9:1-3.**]
    - c) Others suggest that God just can't do anything about it! [This is what Harold Kushner boldly asserts in his aforementioned book.] Those three men about to be cast into the furnace voiced confidence in God in **Dan.3:17-**"*Our God is able to deliver us!*" **Matt.19:26-** "*Jesus .. said .. with God all things are possible*".
  2. We might suggest the following **sources:**
    - a) **SATAN** is a source of evil, suffering and death. The experience of Job will cause most to be ready and willing to accept Satan's role in this, but we cannot list him as the SOLE SOURCE!
    - b) **GOD**, also, is a source of adversity, so this should tell us that not all suffering is evil! God seems to be the source of Paul's thorn in the flesh! **2 Cor.12:7-9.** Ruth, whether right or wrong, holds the Lord responsible for her anxieties in **Ruth 1:13, 20-21-**"*...the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me...the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me...the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me!*" **Amos 3:6-**"*Shall evil befall a city, and Jehovah hath not done it?*" See also **Isa.45:7;** **31:2**
    - c) **WE** are often the source of our own sufferings. The consequences of some actions that are not sinful of themselves, even, can bring about suffering [going to sleep while driving, for instance]. Or, consider **James 1:14-15;** **Matt.12:34-35;** **Rom.1:18-32-**[*man is responsible for the evils encountered in the moral realm*].
    - d) **OTHER PEOPLE** can also be the source of pain and suffering and even death for others. [A drunk driver or a drunkard family man inflicts much affliction on others!]
- B. The Satanic source and influence in evil causes us to wonder about his origin, power and continued influence in this world.
1. I do not believe that Satan is eternal in nature (that he has always existed), so then I must believe that he is a created being.
    - a) As a created being, I believe he was created by Christ, as per **Col.1:16-17-** (NKJV) "*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*"
    - b) If he were created by Christ, then I believe he was not evil when he was created, and we have previously cited **Jas.1:13.**
    - c) If he were created and were "good", then I believe he must have fallen from that estate, and can perceive **Luke 10:18** meaning that! So, **in my mind** I liken him to a "fallen angel", as per **2 Pet.2:4** and **Jude 6.** At least, he's going to have part with them eternally - **Matt.25:41.**
  2. The **extent** to which Satan is involved in the natural calamities of life may be beyond our total comprehension, but there are a few passages that give us glimpses of his activities.
    - a) In Job's ordeals, Satan (*through the instrumentality of men*) destroyed or carried away all of Job's livestock, then followed this with a great wind (*a force of nature*) which destroyed the house where Job's 10 children were, killing them all!

- b) Then, other evils were manifested as he continued to plague Job:
    - 1) Satan smote Job with sore boils from head to foot- (*the evil of disease*).
    - 2) He caused Job to become an outcast, sit in the ash-heap, and be rejected by society- (*this is social evil*).
    - 3) His wife lost faith in Job's God and urged him to curse God and die- (*this is the evil of unbelief and disloyalty*).
    - 4) His friends who came to console him became his accusers- (*religious or philosophical evil*).
  - c) In both the physical and moral realms, Satan caused the evil that plagued God's faithful servant. A very interesting point we'll try to cover later is that **it was all done with God's permission!**
3. Although we may not be able to determine with great accuracy the extent to which Satan acts in the natural world to bring various calamities and evils upon man, we can know that in the past he has done this, and that even now he probably continues to act within divinely prescribed limitations.

### **III. WHY AREN'T THERE SOME ANSWERS TO THESE PROBLEMS?**

- A. **THANK GOD THERE ARE!** And we've had them with us all along --- we just haven't always pursued or accepted God's revelations about these things!
1. The power of God is LIMITED, not because He couldn't have pursued it, but because He has restricted Himself!
    - a) In some of these limitations that He tells us about, we understand what He's said, but often we just don't understand the "how", as in **James 1:13**- "*God cannot be tempted with evil, and He, Himself, tempteth no man!*" or in **Hebrews 6:18** where we're told that it's impossible for God to lie!
    - b) We're also aware that God has restricted Himself so far as interfering with man's free agency in choosing to serve, or not to serve, God!
    - c) And, in relation to the presence of good and evil in the world God has also limited himself, so as not to interfere with those who would CHOOSE to do evil! It all begins with Satan's temptations, then with man's lusts or desires of man's heart for those things by which he's tempted, then the sin, then the death!
  2. The nature of the universe, this system of law and order and uniformity, also helps to explain some of the suffering and evil in the world.
    - a) The same laws of nature which allow us to have fire to cook with also impresses us that they house where we live can be tinderred.
    - b) 55,000 +/- people die every year in vehicle accidents. But those same vehicles can also save many lives by getting the sick and injured rapidly to the doctors and hospitals.
    - c) We have certain freedoms to use the blessings God has placed here for us on the earth, but if we misuse those freedoms there is the possibility of evil and suffering. Defying the laws of gravity, polluting our waters, or stringing high voltage electric wires over our dwellings have all had a part in causing pain and adversity!
  3. All suffering is not necessarily evil!
    - a) Suffering is remedial ... it produces results.
    - b) Suffering and trials build character.
    - c) Handling suffering and trials encourages others in many different ways.

- d) Suffering will help us to seek heaven's eternal home more diligently, and then to appreciate it more completely!
- B. STILL, why doesn't God do something else to kind of equalize things?
1. **God HAS done something**; every time His people have needed Him, ***HE WAS THERE!***
    - a) When the church came into existence ***GOD WAS THERE***, in and through the Holy Spirit to guide and direct those apostles into all truth - **Jno.16:13**.
    - b) When help was needed a little later on to impress people with the need for truthful involvement, ***GOD WAS THERE***, to the dismay of Ananias and Sapphira in **Acts 5**.
    - c) And when Saul needed to be convinced to be an instrument of God and then needed some special revelations and a "post-graduate" course in Arabia, and later a special call into Macedonia, ***GOD WAS THERE!***
  2. **God CONTINUES to do something!** Those are not empty words when He tells the disciples, "*Lo, I'll be with you alway, even to the end of the world!*" in **Matt.28:20**. And when He tells us that He CARES for us in **1 Pet.5:7**, He fulfills that commitment by manifesting His care in ways that are best for us!
- C. **WHAT has God done** about the problem of evil, suffering and death?
1. ***He has SANCTIONED it at times***, as well as **brought more adversity when necessary!** **Heb.12:6-11**; **Psa.119:71**-"*It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes.*"
  2. But then also, He provided the only complete and lasting relief from such problems!
    - a) In His righteous justice, He has determined that the consequence of evil is eternal damnation! But then, He has done the most dramatic, costly, and effective thing possible by giving His Son to die for evil man.
    - b) IT IS POSSIBLE for man to escape God's inevitable judgment on sin and evil.
    - c) It is also possible to have the **power of evil** broken by entering into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - d) The ultimate answer to the problem of evil, at the personal level, is found in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ!
  3. And God has stayed in control, in both the spiritual and moral realms. First, He continues to control Himself to allow us to be creatures of choice. Then, His consistency allows a dependency upon Him that affords us the SURETY of our own salvation. ***HE IS STILL HERE!***

## **CONCLUSION:**

Suffering seems to be one of life's imponderables. It's one of those things we desperately want to know all about, but just can't figure out very well. I'm sure some of the things we'd like to know are "God's ways", and the scriptures say they are "*past finding out!*" We ARE disappointed with God when we expect something He doesn't do. That's kind of like the Jews, who were expecting a physical kingdom -- which **HE never promised them!** FALSE assumptions, even today, keep many from the security and peace of mind that God is affording us, because we keep expecting those things that are not a part of His intentions. **BRETHREN BE AT PEACE WITH GOD!**

***For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be***

*compared with the glory that  
is to be revealed to us!*

---Rom.8:18