



God, Evil, & Suffering

WHAT SHALL WE SAY?

Today

- ▶ Conclude the “Why” of suffering
 - ▶ Does not answer the question of why God allows suffering
- ▶ What is Evil in the Bible
- ▶ The Demonic and the Devil

- ▶ Next Week – Evil post-enlightenment

Review

- ▶ Post-Enlightenment it is no longer plausible to say that all suffering is caused by God.
 - ▶ Science helps us understand our world in new ways.
- ▶ God is relational.
 - ▶ God is not the only one with something to say – prayer
 - ▶ God is not the only one with something to do or the power to do it.
 - ▶ Honoring of relationship means honoring of the capacities God has given us.
 - ▶ “Free Will”

The Why of Suffering

Human beings are created with limits – of intelligence, agility, and strength.

Testing limits creates the possibility of suffering...

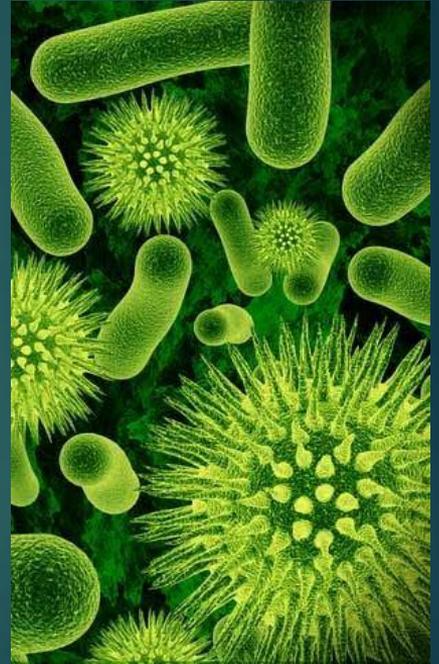
Terrence Fretheim, Word & World, Fall 1999 pg 349



The Why of Suffering

- ▶ God has created a dynamic world;
- ▶ earthquakes, volcanoes, glaciers, storms, bacteria, and viruses have their role to play in the life of this world. ... Because we are part of this interconnected world, we may get in the way of these processes and get hurt by them.

- ▶ Terrence Fretheim "About God, Evil, & Suffering" Word and World, 349



The Why of Suffering

▶ Vocational Calling

- ▶ Such vocational suffering, which is explicitly taken up for the sake of the neighbor and could be avoided, may be called the will of God.
- ▶ **1 Corinthians 12:26** If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

The Why of Suffering

- ▶ Sin increases our experience of suffering
 - ▶ Our sin has consequences both for individuals and communities.
 - ▶ Non-Deterministic
 - ▶ Consequences often called Divine Judgment in Scripture
 - ▶ “the fruit of their schemes” (Jeremiah 6:19)
 - ▶ Romans 13:4 – Authorities are in place to enforce consequences.
- ▶ Sin as both action and inaction.

What is Sin?

- ▶ **Individual Sin/Moral deficiencies.** (stealing, cheating, adultery, abuse, etc.)
- ▶ **Larger communal/national sin**
 - ▶ **Sin of Arms races**
 - ▶ Overseas weapons sales by the United States totaled \$66.3 billion last year, ... Russia was a distant second, with \$4.8 billion in deals. NY Times 8 -26-12
 - ▶ **Sin of 1st World Wealth & Greed, Corrupt Governments, Cultural Sins?**
 - ▶ **Sin of Environmental Disaster due to Technology.**
- ▶ **We suffer not only because of our sin but because of the sin of others.**
 - ▶ Example: People of Israel enslaved in Egypt
 - ▶ God's response - Salvation

The Why of Suffering



▶ According to Fretheim:

▶ We also suffer because we belong to communities that have had a long history of sinfulness with the result that its effects, which can be named “evil,” are integrated into the very structures of our life together.

Manifested in such realities as ageism, racism, and sexism, everyone will make their own contribution to these systemic evils to be experienced by coming generations.

Questions?



What is Evil?



Evil Defined

- ▶ **Any act or event that is contrary or opposes the good and holy purposes of God.**
 - ▶ Stanley J Grenz et. al., Dictionary of Theological Terms, pg 48
- ▶ **Evil may be experienced and described simply as that which thwarts such purposes as seem intrinsic to the human condition.**
 - ▶ Paul R. Sponheim , Christian Dogmatics – Volume 1 -5th Locus, pg 363

Two types of Evil

▶ Moral Evil: (SIN) evil caused by free human beings, such as:

- ▶ Murder
- ▶ Lying
- ▶ Stealing
- ▶ Greed
- ▶ Abuse
- ▶ Dishonesty



▶ Natural Evil, such as:

- ▶ Hurricanes, floods, tornados, fires
- ▶ Famine
- ▶ Cancer and AIDS
- ▶ Birth defects and deformities
- ▶ Disabilities: blindness, deafness, insanity



Caution: Avoid Dualism

- ▶ **Dualism** – God having two natures – good and evil.
 - ▶ Or a coexistent negative power equal to God
 - ▶ Good God - Bad Devil
 - ▶ Common Heresy



Evil in the Old Testament

A DIVERSITY OF PERSPECTIVES

Evil in the Old Testament

- ▶ Evil or wickedness is called ra - רע_ַ
 - ▶ something negative
 - ▶ something that is God opposing.

Evil in the Old Testament

- ▶ **2 Kings 2:19** ¹⁹ Now the people of the city said to Elisha, "The location of this city is good, as my lord sees; but the water is **bad**, and the land is unfruitful."
- ▶ ^{NRS} **Numbers 20:5** Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, to bring us to this **wretched** place? It is no place for grain, or figs, or vines, or pomegranates; and there is no water to drink."
- ▶ ^{NRS} **Genesis 41:19** Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, **very ugly**, and thin. Never had I seen such **ugly** ones in all the land of Egypt.
- ▶ ^{NRS} **Genesis 37:20** Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a **wild** animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

Evil in the Old Testament

▶ **“Something Negative”**

- ▶ Brackish water, famine, death, destruction
- ▶ Comes from God
- ▶ Isaiah 45:7 - I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the LORD do all these things.

▶ **“Something God Opposing”**

- ▶ Actions of people
 - ▶ Murder, destruction, false worship, pride
- ▶ Actions of Nations
 - ▶ Egypt, Nineveh, “Wicked Kings of Israel”
- ▶ Not from God – Not prevented by God – God does respond (judgment)

Evil in the Old Testament

▶ How is Evil embodied?

▶ The law breaker who must be purged is evil.

▶ **Deuteronomy 17:7** ⁷ The hands of the witnesses shall be the first raised against the person to execute the death penalty, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

▶ Mythical Creatures – Leviathan, Behemoth, Rahab, etc.

▶ All managed by God

▶ People who stand against the will of God:

▶ Pharaoh, Kings of the nations, God's sinful people.



The satan – “The Accuser”

- ▶ The satan
 - ▶ **Job** - part of heavenly court – the accuser
 - ▶ **1 Chronicles** – only proper name of Satan
 - ▶ 2 Samuel 24 – Same story but character is God.
 - ▶ **Zechariah** – Legal accuser
 - ▶ Adversary but submissive to the will and workings of God

Evil in the Old Testament

▶ In the Old Testament God is Sovereign

▶ There is no dualism

▶ Creation can rebel against God

▶ Good and Evil come from God

▶ *Isaiah 45:7 - I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the LORD do all these things.*

▶ God's response to suffering is to offer a promise of a future.



Evil in the New Testament

LIMITED COSMIC DUALISM

Evil in the New Testament



- ▶ From beginning to end the New Testament message is characterized by the conflict between good and evil, God and the world, Jesus and Satan. A dualistic worldview, however, with God and antigod as its two poles, cannot be found in the New Testament. – Hans Schwarz

Evil in the New Testament



- Cosmic struggle between
 - good and evil
 - God and the world
 - Jesus and Satan
- Limited Cosmic Dualism
- Precipitating Event – Jesus' Announcement of the Kingdom of God.

Evil in the New Testament

▶ **Evil and the human person**

▶ Evil comes from within.

▶ Evil actions are equated with sin.

▶ **Mark 7:20-23** ²⁰ And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. ²¹ For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, ²² adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Evil in the New Testament

▶ Response to Evil – Resistance

- ▶ **Ephesians 6:10-17** ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
- ▶ **James 4:7** ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Evil in the New Testament

▶ **God allows evil to co-exist... for now**

- ▶ Weeds and Wheat
- ▶ Revelation – release of the dragon before throwing into the abyss.

▶ **Jesus grants disciples power over evil spirits.**

- ▶ **Luke 10:17-20** ¹⁷ The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" ¹⁸ He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. ¹⁹ See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

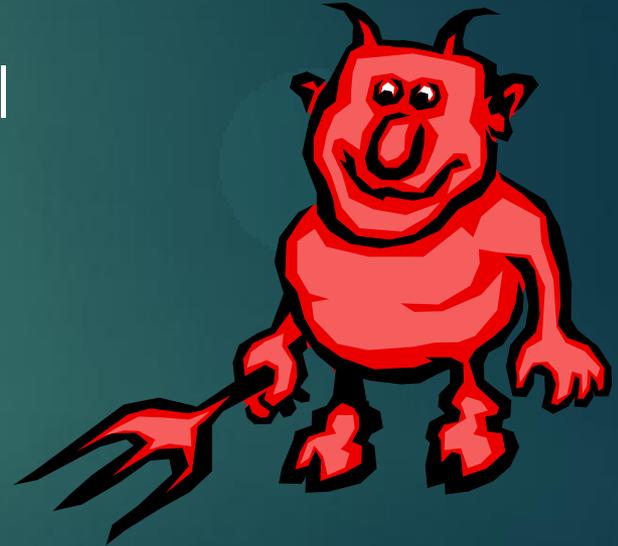


The Devil, Satan, and Demons... oh my!

The Demonic

Do you believe in the devil?

Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God, the powers of this world that rebel against God, and the ways of sin that draw you from God?



Images of the Devil and Demons

- ▶ Physical characteristics never described in Scripture
- ▶ Medieval period
 - ▶ Horns
 - ▶ Goat's hindquarters
 - ▶ Tail
 - ▶ Pitch-fork (or Trident)
 - ▶ Wings



The Demonic

▶ What is a demon?

- ▶ Ancient Greek mythology – daemon = anonymous god.
- ▶ In Homer daemon & theos are virtually interchangeable.

▶ In the NT demon is a negative term

- ▶ Evil spirits
 - ▶ Objects of pagan worship (1 Cor. 10:20-21)
 - ▶ Agents of trouble/suffering – connected to a Chief demon
 - ▶ Satan, Belial, Beelzebul (Matt. 12, Mark 3, Luke 11)

The Demonic

- ▶ How did we get here?
- ▶ Cultural implications:
 - ▶ Zoroastrianism
 - ▶ 600-700 b.c Persia
 - ▶ Dualism - Good & Evil have different sources.
 - ▶ Platonism → Neo-Platonism
 - ▶ 428 – 348 BC Greece (Macedonia)
 - ▶ Incorporeal immortal soul

The Demonic - Tradition



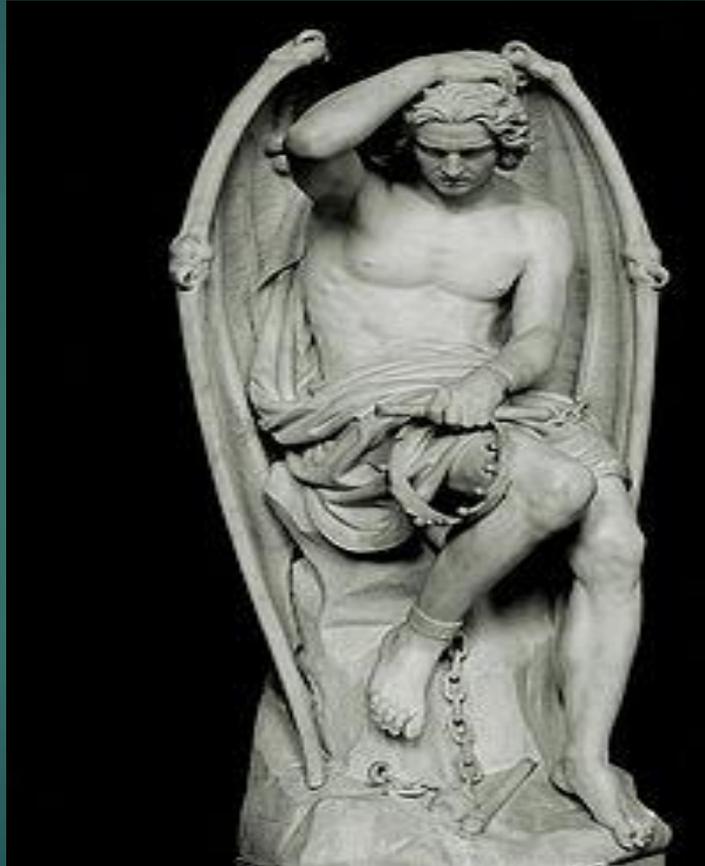
▶ Origins of demons

▶ Tradition: Apostate angels who rebelled against the will of God

- ▶ 2 Peter 2:4 For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment;
- ▶ Jude 1:6 ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great Day.
- ▶ Revelation 12:7-9 And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world-- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Lucifer

- ▶ *Lucifer (Le génie du mal)* by [Guillaume Geefs](#) (Cathedral of St. Paul, [Liège](#), Belgium)



Lucifer



▶ Lucifer – Isaiah 14

- ▶ Isaiah 14:12-15 ¹² How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! ¹³ You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon; ¹⁴ I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High." ¹⁵ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit.
- ▶ **Lucifer = Latin for Light Bringer (Day Star) KJV makes lucifer a proper name.**
- ▶ **Part of tradition from Late 100's – Origen.**

The Devil

- ▶ Greek – diabolos = Devil - the slanderer, tempter, or accuser
 - ▶ **Matthew 4:1** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
 - ▶ Occurs 32 times in the New Testament
- ▶ Satan
 - ▶ ^{NRS} **Mark 1:13** He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

The Devil



The Devil depicted in
*The Temptation of
Christ*, by [Ary Scheffer](#),
1854.

Satan



Satan, from
[Gustave Doré's](#)
illustrations for
Paradise Lost.

Other names

▶ **Beelzebub (Beelzeboul)**

- ▶ Matt. 10:25, Matt. 12:24, Mark 3:22, Luke 11:18-19 (Beelzebub)
- ▶ Canaanite Deity - Baal → Baal-zebul (Lord of Princes)
- ▶ Beelzebub – literally “Lord of the Flies”

▶ **The Wicked One**

- ▶ Matthew 13:19

▶ **Prince of this World**

- ▶ John 12:31 & John 14:30

▶ **The Tempter**

- ▶ Matthew 4:3 & 1 Thessalonians 3:5

▶ **Belial**

- ▶ 2 Cor. 6:15

▶ **The Dragon**

- ▶ Revelation 12:9 & 20:2

Powers & role of the Devil

- ▶ Prince of the world, space, and time
- ▶ Lord of matter & flesh (Ephesians 2:3)
- ▶ Principal adversary of Christ (Matt. 4:11)
- ▶ Satan seeks to pervert humanity as:
 - ▶ Tempter (1 Thess 3:5)
 - ▶ Liar & Murderer (John 8:44)
 - ▶ Cause of illness and death (Lk 13:16, Hebrews 2:14)
 - ▶ A power behind the storm (Mark 4:39)
- ▶ Devil attacks by possession (Mark 5:7-8)
- ▶ He can enter a person's heart (Luke 22:3)
- ▶ He is the master of sorcery and idolatry (Acts 13:8)
- ▶ Above all he works to obstruct the Mission of Christ (2 Cor 4:4)

Old Testament vs. New Testament

■ Old Testament

- God is supremely Sovereign
- Everything Cosmic happens by the knowledge and will of God.
- Isaiah 45:7 - I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the LORD do all these things.
- Satan = part of heavenly court
 - legal role of accuser.

■ Evil

- Something Bad
- Something earthly opposed to God's will or creation.
 - God responds - Judgment

▶ New Testament

- ▶ Limited Cosmic Dualism
- ▶ Cosmic powers rebelling against God.
 - ▶ Esp. the Kingdom of God
- ▶ Satan = Chief demon
- ▶ Chief demon = God's primary adversary.

▶ Evil

- ▶ Cosmic Force that has or seeks to temporarily thwart God's will.

Questions?



Next Week

- ▶ Evil & the demonic post-enlightenment