

God's War against Evil throughout the Ages

Lesson 1: Is God the Author of Evil? (Part 1)

Introduction: Because God is the creator of the universe and all that is in it, and because He is Almighty and all-powerful, many have attributed to Him the idea that He willingly brought evil into the universe. In order to understand the truth concerning evil and its presence in the universe, as well as God's role concerning it, we must first understand that God is not the author of it. One's view on this will determine if they will resist evil or passively accept it.

I. Understanding attempts to solve the issue of evil.

1. **Theodicy:** The attempt to answer the ages old question as to why there is evil in this world if the God who created this world is good, kind, and powerful. This is often referred to as the Problem (or mystery) of evil.
2. Many theologians have attempted to solve the problem of evil by either making God the direct cause of it or teaching that He preordained for evil to come as a part of His sovereign plan.

II. One of several Scriptures used by theologians who claim that God authored evil:

1. *I form the light, and create darkness: **I make peace, and create evil:** I the LORD do all these things.* (Isa. 45:7)
2. Did God actually create evil as He did the earth, the heavens, angels, animals, and humans? Can evil even be considered a created thing?
3. Such an idea contradicts other Scriptures concerning the nature and character of God. For example, we are told that God is "Light":
 - a. *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.* (1 John 1:5)
 - b. If there is no darkness in God then how could He have created it? Jesus said only that which is *in* a person is what comes *out* of Him (Matt. 15:18-20; 12:35).
 - c. *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the **Father of lights**, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* (James 1:17)

- d. If God is the author of light and there is no “shadow” of darkness in Him, then how could He also be the author of darkness as well?
4. Other passages teach that God is a *God of peace*, who only desires peace, and not evil:
 - a. *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.* (1 Cor. 14:33)
 - b. *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.* (Jer. 29:11)
 - c. If God is the author of peace and only wants to give peace rather than evil, how could He be the creator of evil?
5. Furthermore, the Bible makes it implicitly clear that God hates evil and that He has absolutely nothing to do with it:
 - a. *For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee.* (Psalm 5:4)
 - b. *The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.* (Prov. 8:13)
 - c. *Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods.* (Jer. 44:4-5)
 - d. Other Scriptures that make it clear that God hates evil: Prov. 6:16-19; Zech. 8:17; Deut. 28:31; Hab. 1:13; Job 34:10-12.
 - e. If God hates evil then why would He create it? This would appear to be an extreme contradiction.
6. To solve what *appears to be* an apparent contradiction, based on the above, some commentators say that God is not the creator of *moral evil*, i.e. sin, but that He is the One who directs *calamities and disasters* in His providence.
 - a. Certainly God is not the author of moral evil:

- b. *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.* (1 John 2:16; see also James 1:13 and Eccl. 7:29)
7. These theologians are also correct in stating that the “evil” stated in Isa. 45:7 is not the *evil of sin* but of its punishments.¹
 - a. Is God the author of disasters, troubles, woe, and hardships? Theologians attempt to vindicate God from the charge of moral evil interpret Isa. 45:7 to say that He is only the creator of the punishment for evil. This is a legitimate assumption.
 - b. However, I do not find this to be very helpful. **It still makes God responsible for certain types of horrendous evils that harm and destroy**, which contrasts with a number of statements by Jesus concerning Himself (John 10:10; Luke 9:51-56)
 - c. God is not the source of evil *or its results*. Evil produces evil. - Matt. 7:15-20 (Ps. 25:8; 34:4-10; 85:12; 86:5; 105; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 135:3; 136:1)
 - d. The fruit of evil is death and destruction. God is not the giver of evil fruit, but Satan is (John 8:44; 10:10).²

III. The Context of Isa. 45:7

1. In the context, the Lord was at war with Babylon and He was letting them know that as a part of His judgment upon them He would SEND calamity or trouble their way.
2. The calamities are the result of judgment upon nations like Babylon that oppose God (Isa. 45:24) and who will reap the calamity that they have sown (see Ps. 7:14-16).

¹ Other translations render Isa. 45:7 as God “*creating calamity*” (New American Standard Bible), “*create disaster*” (New International Version), “*preparing evil*” (Young’s literal Translation), “*I cause troubles*” (New Century Version), “*sending troubles*” (Bible in Basic English), “*I create woe*” (The Complete Jewish Bible), “*create hardship*” (Peshitta - Lamsa Translation).

² The great Bible scholar, C.I. Schofield, attempted to soften the idea that God creates the calamitous results of sin in his comments on Isa. 45:7: “God created evil only in the sense that He made sorrow, wretchedness, etc., to be the sure fruits of sin.” Isaiah 45, **Scofield Reference Notes (1917 Edition)**. This is true for the most part and much better than making God the direct agent of sin’s fruits but does not go far enough from a Biblical standpoint. As we will see in these lessons the results of evil flow as a natural consequence of the evil itself just as the fruit from a tree or a vine is the natural result of the seed that is planted. Furthermore, the individual is the one doing the seed planting: “*So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way And be satiated with their own devices.*” (Prov. 1:31; New American Standard Version. See Also Gal. 6:7-8; Hosea 8:7; 10:13; Ps. 7:14-16; Prov. 22:8; Jer. 12:13). We will also see that Satan is often the active agent behind the calamities and troubles that come as a result of sin (Eph. 4:26-27).

3. The fact that God did not create evil (as bringing it into existence) is seen in Isa. 45:18:
 - a. *For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, **he created it not in vain**, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.* (Isa. 45:18)
 - b. The word “vain” in this passage means, “chaos, confusion, wasteland, wilderness, futility”. God did not create the earth to have calamity.

IV. Learning to understand the Language of the Bible

1. There are no contradictions in the Bible. There is only a failure to thoroughly examine the language of the Bible.
2. To understand the problem of evil, we must understand Bible language, its use of certain phrases and idioms and how they differ from our culture, language, and expressions.³
 - a. One scholar writes: “One peculiarity of the Hebrew tongue is that it abounds in figures of speech that must necessarily be understood, to gain its intended meaning. The simple mode of life in which the earliest Israelites lived, doubtless made them great observers of nature; any reference to which, from their familiarity with it, made them require no explanations. Our difficulty here is to reconcile this with our ideas and language; and the neglect of these idioms with our translators, where they have given a literal verbal translation, without the customary sense of the original, has led them into many errors.”⁴
 - b. God used the language, expressions and idioms of His people to speak His Word. We failed to interpret these idioms in order to be understood in the Western mind, therefore, mischaracterizing God and charging Him as the direct cause of evil.
 - c. The language in Isa. 45:7 must be viewed as “permissive” rather than “causative”⁵.

³ “For when the Deity has condescended to speak by the mouth of men, he has always left them to use the modes of expression current and intelligible in the age in which they lived.” Dathe, translation of the Historical Books, Hals, 1784, 8vo. As quoted in Twopeny, Richard **Dissertations on Some Parts of the Old and New Testaments which have been Supposed Unsuitable to the Divine Attributes** (London: C & J Riverton, 1824), p. 84

⁴ Murray, John Hale **A Help for English Readers to Understand Mis-translated Passages in Our Bible** (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1881), p. 2

⁵ Matthew Henry, a Calvinist and Puritan himself did not see Isa 45:7 as God creating EVIL. In his commentary he states: “There is no God beside Jehovah. There is nothing done without him. He make peace, put here for all good; and creates evil, not the evil of sin, but the evil of punishment. He is the Author of all that is true, holy, good, or

- d. Old Testament scholar, Dr. Walter C. Kaiser, writes concerning Isa. 45:7, “Even though much of the physical evil often comes through the hands of wicked men and women, ultimately God permits it. Thus, the Hebrew way of speaking, which ignores secondary causation in a way Western thought would never do, whatever God permits may be directly attributed to him, often without noting that secondary and sinful parties were the immediate causes of the disaster.... It is God who must allow (and that is the proper term) these calamities to come.”⁶
 - e. C. S. Cowles, professor of Bible and theology at Point Loma Nazarene University, writes concerning Isa. 45:7: “...ancient Israel had no concept of secondary causes of death and destruction, what we call ‘acts of nature.’ The Hebrew language does not even have a word for ‘nature.’ Consequently, natural disasters, such as plagues, famines, floods, fires, storms, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, accidents, diseases, and deformities, were attributed to God. These distinctions, however, are either unknown or lost upon most readers of the Old Testament. The sad result is that the glory of God celebrated in both Testaments is diminished by those biblical passages where God is sometimes portrayed as a fierce warrior and a wanton destroyer.”⁷
3. Some passages that make this point clear:
- a. Deuteronomy 28:15-28 uses the typical punitive language for disobedience and it ascribes to God the tragedies that would fall upon Israel such as “I will destroy thee....., I will smite thee....I will send enemies I will send pestilence... etc.
 - b. However, these are simply Hebrew idioms which ascribe to God as doing the thing which He only permitted.⁸
 - c. Interpreting Scripture with Scripture, we see that God is not the author of the disasters (evils) that came upon Babylon. He *permits* these disasters due to their sin.

happy; and evil, error, and misery, **came into the world by his permission, through the willful apostasy of his creatures**, but are restrained and overruled to his righteous purpose.” (emphasis are mine) **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on The Bible**, E-Sword Edition

⁶ Kaiser Jr., Walter C. **Hard Sayings of the Bible** (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), p. 306

⁷ Cowles, C. S. **Who is God? His Character Revealed in the Christ** (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2005), pp. 46-47

⁸ Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser Jr. wrote: “The syntax of Old Testament Hebrew tends to be concerned with secondary causes; thus, what God *permitted* is often said in the Old Testament to be done directly by him.” (Emphasis are mine). Kaiser Jr. *Hard Sayings*, p. 140.

- d. *“And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.” Deut. 31:16-18.*
- e. The word “evils” in the passage above is the Hebrew word “ra”; the same word used in Isa. 45:7. Interpreting Scripture with Scripture we see that evil comes when the Lord is *absent*. This is the proper understanding of the phrase “I create evil”.
- f. People tell God, “We don't need you.” They serve other gods and push the True God out of their lives and thus they are cursed.⁹ This is *their own choice*:
- g. *See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil.... I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live (Deut. 30:15, 19; see also Jer. 8:3)*
- h. Examining Isa. 45:7 in light of the above, we see that God is light (1 John 1:9; James 1:17) and creates darkness when He withdraws and darkness prevails. God, who is the God of peace (Judges 6:24; Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:33), creates evil by withdrawing Himself and His peace from a person or nation.¹⁰
- i. God offers men His light in spite of their rebellion (Isa. 50:10; John 8:12; 12:46; 1 Pet. 2:9) but men reject it because they hate it (John 1:5-11; 3:19-20). Therefore, Isa. 45:7 is *permissive* in that God is *allowing* men the consequences of their choices.¹¹

⁹ As we will later learn, the same holds true when God “cursed” the ground. Adam and Eve told God “We want to be like gods. We want to be independent” and thus demonstrated that they had no need for God's help in their agricultural efforts. Thus the ground was cursed because of them.

¹⁰ Adam Clarke's comments on Isaiah 45:7: “Evil is here evidently put for war and its attendant miseries. I will procure peace for the Israelites, and destroy Babylon by war. I form light, and create darkness. **Now, as darkness is only the privation of light, so the evil of war is the privation of peace.**” (Emphasis mine). Clarke, Adam. “Commentary on Isaiah 45”. “**The Adam Clarke Commentary**”.

<<http://www.studylight.org/com/acc/view.cgi?book=isa&chapter=045>>. 1832.

¹¹ Commenting on Isa. 45:7, Amos 3:6, and other passages that contribute evil to God, Daniel Waterland writes, “God sees fit to execute vengeance he unties the hands of wicked men and lets them loose to commit all uncleanness and iniquity with greediness. He withdraws his protecting arm for a time from those whom he has once determined to chastize.” “A Thanksgiving Sermon” **The Works of the Reverend Daniel Waterland** (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1843), p. 452

- j. God is *not* the author of *physical* or *moral evil*. Evil comes when the source of good that protects from evil is forsaken. This is *permission* and not *causation*.¹²
- k. “Upon all those who separate themselves from Him, God inflicts the separation that they have chosen. Now separation from God is death; separation from light is darkness; separation from God means the loss of all good things that come from Him.”¹³ Church father Irenaeus (125-202 AD)

V. The Lord places a high premium on the free will of men.

1. God so respects the free-will and His delegated authority that if we forsake and reject Him then He allows us the freedom of our choices and its subsequent consequences.
 - a. Concerning Isa. 45:7 and similar passages, Lawrence O. Richards writes, “A number of passages indicate that God will accept responsibility for many of the consequent evils that trouble us.”¹⁴
 - b. Richards further writes, “. . .normally God’s responsibility is indirect, worked out through the natural consequences. In our morally ordered universe there are moral laws, even as there are natural laws. And violation of the moral laws as well as of the natural laws brings inevitable consequences.”¹⁵
 - c. *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.* (Gal. 6:7-8)
2. Within the context of Isaiah, we see that one can choose evil and reap its results:

¹² In explaining the permissive sense in which Isa. 45:7 is to be understood in regards to God, one scholar states the following: “*As the Hebrew was fond of using a causative verb for a permissive* or reflexive form a causal for a concessive conjunction so a telic for an ecbatic particle came naturally to the lips as it conformed logically to the conception of the race. This of course was largely due to the thought of divine sovereignty as supreme for had not Jehovah declared amid the sorrows of the Captivity Isa xlv 7, *I create evil and had not a prophet*. Amos iii 6 asked, *Shall evil befall a city and the Lord hath not done it?* We say then first that this conception would lead a writer to regard as designed what we should look at as facts merely and then secondly that habit would lead to the use of the telic particle when not even the writer could have had a serious idea of expressing purpose.” (Emphasis mine). Callin, Hasket Derby “A Certain Hebraism in the New Testament” in **The Andover Review** (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1887), p. 424

¹³ Quoted by Faryna, Rev. Deacon Michael *The Theology of Illness and Death*, https://www.umanitoba.ca/colleges/st_andrews/profiles/MichaelFarynaArticle.html (Last accessed: Dec. 19, 2012).

¹⁴ Richards, Lawrence O. **Zondervan Expository Dictionary of Bible Words** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985, 1991), p. 253

¹⁵ Ibid.

- a. *But ye are they that forsake the LORD, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for that troop, and that furnish the drink offering unto that number. Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not.* (Isa. 65:11-12)

- b. Notice how God offers Himself but He is refused. The people chose against God. They forsake God and remove themselves from under His protection. In a similar passage in Proverbs God pronounces the results of this type of choice:

- c. *Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.* (Prov. 1:24-33)

- d. God calls but is not answered. He reaches out but is rejected. God does not give up immediately but when continually told “leave us alone”, He honors our free will. He has no choice but to leave us to the consequences of our rebellion. Since He is responsible for what happens after His protection is removed, the Hebrew idiomatic expression appears to be *causation* to the Western mind.

Summary: Evil is the result of people removing themselves God’s protection, thus receiving the consequences of their choices in a morally ordered universe. God’s responsibility as far as evil is concerned is only to the extent that He created laws of sowing and reaping. God has often restrained and protected us from the full consequences of our rebellion and has pleaded us to stop, but often we continually reject Him and remove ourselves from His protection. God so respects our free will that He reluctantly releases us to receive what we have sown. The Hebrews have often understood this to mean God was the cause of the consequences of our sins. However, the Bible explains itself and shows us that these things happen by God’s reluctant permission and not His active causation.