

EVIL IN THE BIBLE:
A THEODICY OF RELATIONSHIP

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Mark Andrew Kroncke
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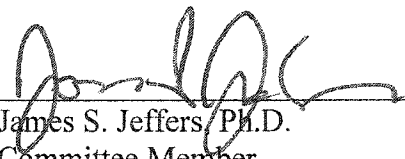
THESIS: EVIL IN THE BIBLE: A THEODICY OF RELATIONSHIP

AUTHOR: MARK ANDREW KRONCKE

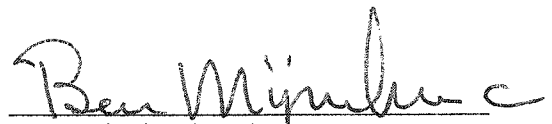
APPROVED:



William M. Hagan, S.T.D.
Thesis Committee Chair



James S. Jeffers, Ph.D.
Committee Member



Ben Mijuskovic, Ph.D.
Committee Member

To Bailey, Peyton and William,
incarnations of God's loving good
in a world that can be so evil.

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ABSTRACT

The question of the reason for evil's existence has challenged humanity for centuries. There have been many attempts, from varied philosophical perspectives, to reconcile evil and suffering with humanity's purpose and meaning. The realm of faith has been no less active in this quest, attempting to reconcile through the lens of the Bible evil with a God perceived as all-powerful and loving.

The presentations of evil in the writings of Job, Ecclesiastes, Daniel and the New Testament develop a unique theodicy rooted in the relationship between faith-filled individuals, their community, and God. Throughout the Bible and within this scripture-based theodicy is the acknowledgment that both the world and humanity are flawed and in need of God's healing, salvation and redemption. Evil and suffering define this relationship, and present opportunities – on both sides – to recognize and deepen this relationship between humanity and God.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

“What is evil anyway? Is there reason to the rhyme? Without evil, there can be no good, so it must be good to be evil sometimes [. . .]” (Satan, in Southpark: Bigger, Longer & Uncut). While the words of our animated Satan may seem trite, his thoughts echo some of the philosophical questions that have confronted and challenged humanity throughout the ages: What is evil? From where does evil come? For what purpose does evil exist? Is evil good or bad? These are just some of the questions that lead to a philosophical quest that seeks to give “reason to the rhyme.” This problem of evil, present in a long and venerable tradition, was early on known by Epicurus (341-270 BC) whose formula¹ was later succinctly made famous by David Hume (AD 1711-76): “Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?” (Surin 1-2).

While the writers of the Bible had no problems asking these questions, modern readers of the Bible often fall back upon a tradition of rationalism, which emphasizes a dependence upon the rational ability of humanity over scriptural or

¹ Epicurus is quoted as follows by Lactantius (c. AD 260- c. 340): “God 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. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or why does He not remove them?” (The Electronic Text Center).

traditional authority. This shift in preference toward a favoring of the intellect over faith creates a dilemma for the modern reader of the Bible. The stories of the Bible, including those about evil, sin and the devil, run up against a mindset that disallows the possibility of truth in these stories. Favored, instead, are the logical conclusions of a world where everything is objective and empirically observable. In a world where the scientific seeks to explain the metaphysical, de-mythologizing occurs.

All these intellectual concerns and revolutions caused a new focus upon how people ought to read the Bible. Do we read it literally, as a scientifically verifiable (or non-verifiable) document, or do we read it as an expression of faith, presented through a variety of writings and styles, collected and gathered throughout a period of one-thousand years of human history? While a distinct collection of writings, each with a unique author or authors, audience and cultural mindset, the Bible does present a unified view of faith journeys that begins with creation itself, and ends (as such) with the promise of a new beginning in an “apocalyptic” revelation.

Interpreting the Bible as a whole of its parts, rather than as an anthology of separate books, is necessary for a “working understanding of the inner configurations, interrelationships, and relative functions” of the many parts, as Charles Woods advises (qtd. in Soulen 14). It is also necessary for understanding the way evil is present in the traditions of both Judaism and Christianity, and the perceived relationships between evil and faith, God and community, and Creator and creature as illuminated through the writings of the Bible. It is easy to mire down in the contemporary presence of evil and suffering, known to us here and now. The

challenge, as Soulen tells us, is to remember, “above all, the Scriptures are concerned with the history that transpires between the God of Israel, Israel, and the nations, a history that the Scriptures appear to regard as virtually coextensive with human history as a whole” (52). Contemporary events remind us that evil is still an integral part of our world and part of our human history.

The reality, though, is that evil is not just a singular problem, but a cluster of interrelated issues that results in evil existing in both the theoretical dimensions of logic and epistemology, and the existential dimension of one’s life and subjective experiences (Geivett 3-4; Peterson 2, 7). Our focus will not be on either the *a priori*, or logical version of this problem, or the *a posteriori*, or evidential version of the problem. Given that the deductive argument shows that Christianity, as theism, requires belief in contradictory logical propositions and the inductive argument requires defending the very plausibility of theism in the face of evil, we must acknowledge that the existence of evil naturally raises questions about whether theism is ever possible, given the fact that evil exists. However, while the question of evil’s existence can be a challenge to the very existence of God, we are not seeking to determine, through philosophical proofs or theological constructs, the likelihood of the existence of God. The very existence, power and goodness of God hold true for both the Jewish and Christian traditions. The Bible itself affirms these beliefs in many passages. For example, in the Hebrew Scriptures, in Job² (42:2) we read that,

² All Scripture references are from the New American Bible.

“I know you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be hindered,” while Genesis (18:14) asks, “Is anything too marvelous for the Lord to do?” In his gospel, Luke (1:37) declares that, “nothing is impossible for God,” and Matthew adds, “For man it is impossible; but for God all things are possible” (19:26).

For both the Jewish and Christian traditions, the problem of evil is not one of reconciling its existence with a loving, creative God, but rather finding the purpose and reason for which evil exists in the world and in our lives. For the biblical authors, as for us, acknowledging the continuing presence of evil in our world is just the beginning to understanding the mystery that faces us: how do we understand the purpose of evil in light of a God who “calls us each by name” (Isa. 43:1)?

For the biblical vision of evil to address the condition of the world today as a place where we live between suffering and hope, we need to remind ourselves that the biblical writers confronted the same problem in a societal and temporal context different from ours. “To be sure, the intensity and depth with which biblical writers wrestle with these questions may be greater and even more authentic than ours. But the global context and scope in which the questions arise for us in the late twentieth century are of a magnitude which is unique in the history of mankind” (Beker 31). Further, he continues, when we raise the question “Is the biblical vision (of evil) able to enlighten us in our unique [modern] situation?” we acknowledge not only the truth of the biblical vision as relevant to the peoples of the biblical times, but our uncertainty with being able to properly apply the biblical vision to our perspective, here and now. In looking toward the Bible for answers to the problem of evil, we

seek to find some ways in which the biblical people understood evil, so that we can appropriate these understandings for our use today, and faithfully appreciate how the Jewish and Christian traditions viewed the problem of evil. “Indeed, the truthfulness of all interpretation is its ability to be faithful to the old text in a new situation!” (Beker 34). To help us in this task, we turn to the process of theodicy.

CHAPTER 2

DEVELOPING A THEODICY

Theodicy³, which comes from the Greek θεός (*theos*), for “God,” and δικη (*ieke*), for “justice,” is a philosophical approach to justifying God’s actions to humanity. Many modern theologians and authors have posited the question, “Why would a good God allow evil in a good world?”⁴ Contemporary scholars and theologians approach the problem of evil from two fundamentally different responses, that of defense and theodicy. Peterson (9) further clarifies the goals of a defense versus theodicy. For him, the goal of a defense is to prove that anti-theistic arguments of evil, either logical or evidential, fail on their own merits, while the purpose and focus of theodicy is to “give positive, plausible reasons for the existence of evil in a theistic universe.” It is from this latter approach that some of these theologians,⁵ seek to find a common starting point for this process, and see the process of theodicy as an amalgam of both a defense and a positive apology.

Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of When Bad Things Happen to Good People, finds fault with theoretical theodicies that “were more concerned with defending God’s honor, with logical proof that bad is really good and that evil is necessary to

³ Commonly attributed to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (AD1646-1716), who used the French form of the word, *theodicee* in Essais de Theodicee sur la bonte de Dieu, la liberte de l’homme et l’origine du mal.

⁴ See Geivett 5; Hick 3; Leaman 2; Peterson 9; Surin 2; Talbert 9; and Wright 73.

⁵ Specifically, see Geivett 9-10; Hick 6; Peterson 9-10; and Surin 1.

make this a good world [. . .]”; Christian author Philip Yancey confirms this feeling, stating that, “Most of our problems with pain are not mental gymnastics” (qtd. in Geivett 5).

Hick noted that in the case of human suffering, the intellectual problem of evil usually arises in the mind of the spectator rather than that of the sufferer (10). It is the sufferer’s immediate task to address the evil that is present to him, and to maintain his spiritual wholeness in the face of such despair. Not wanting or needing a theoretical theodicy, he simply looks for practical grace, courage and hope. No one promises that any logical exercise of theodicy will provide the comfort and understanding a person suffering from evil seeks. For both Kushner and Yancey, there is a requirement to address the human side of any theodicy, in balance with the principles of philosophy. For Hick (243), “an implicit theodicy is at work in the Bible, at least in the sense of an effective reconciliation of profound faith in God with a deep involvement in the realities of sin and suffering.” He continues, “The Scriptures reflect the characteristic mixture of good and evil in human experience. They record every kind of sorrow and suffering; [. . .] in these writings there is no attempt to evade the clear verdict of human experience that evil is dark, menacingly ugly, heart-rending, crushing.” There is a clear acknowledgment that both the world and humanity are flawed, and are in need of God’s healing, salvation and redemption.

Throughout the many books of the Bible, the presentation and understanding of evil differs radically. Not only between the different books, but also between the

collective Jewish writings and later Christian writings is there found a conceptual change of the nature and character of evil. This divergence of views of evil reflects a developing relationship between the authors' faith communities and their God. The scriptural writings present a faith-filled tradition that both acknowledges and seeks to understand the relationship between a creator God and the peoples of the Bible.

No discussion of evil can occur without acknowledging the related doctrinal concepts of sin, grace, redemption, incarnation and afterlife (heaven). All these add to the discussion of evil, in a way that sometimes seems to diffuse rather than clarify the discussion. Evil, as commonly understood, consists of circumstances that are due to either natural causes or human choices. Augustine (AD 354-430) attempts to distinguish between various levels of evil. He considers evil which originates from human beings and their actions, through the exercise of human freedom, such as poverty, hunger and persecution of a people, as moral evil. Natural evil, independent of any human action, includes disease, earthquakes, storms, fires, floods, and the like. Finally, Augustine defines metaphysical evil, which relates to the fact of human finitude. These would take the form of events such as natural death or the passage of time and aging, which may cause pain and emotional distress but are the natural limitations of our being human (Willimon 42).

Moses Maimonides (ben Maimun AD 1135-1204) also uses three categories: natural calamities, involving events outside of human control; social evils, which humanity inflicts upon one another and society; and personal evils, which are the most common and brought about by personal actions such as bad habits and self-

indulgence (Stitskin 196). Kropf (139) breaks down evil into physical evil, moral evil and psychological evil, which approximate Maimonides' categories. D. A. Carson (45) reminds us that "war, worry, persecution, deprivation, famine, pillage, natural disasters – the Bible treats them as great afflictions, great evils. Yet, at least some of these things are not acts of (human) rebellion [. . .]." For Carson, the events in the Bible that are evil cannot be broken into three categories, but rather are the result of either human evil, or the result of natural action (which in itself may be the result of humanity's actions). The very definition of evil requires the integration of our human experiences, for as Gabriel Marcel tells us: "[. . .] evil which is only stated or observed is no longer evil which is suffered: in fact, it ceases to be evil. In reality, I can only grasp it as evil in the measure in which it *touches* me – that is to say, in the measure in which I am *involved*, as one is involved in a lawsuit" (qtd. in Hick 9-10).

In the writings of the Bible, the subject of evil is of great interest. Composed as a written history covering the journeys of the people of Israel and the early Christian communities, the Bible holds many explanations for the presence of evil in a world created by a good God, who is generally considered both omniscient and omnipotent. As concepts about God, evil and the faith communities themselves change in reaction to what is occurring in life, the Bible documents such changes. Much more than a myriad collection of writings, however, the Bible presents in its writings the very existence and life of a people. These writings give an accounting of the unique way of life for the group. In the tradition of Judaism, it creates a religious system that both draws upon and points to the Hebrew Scriptures for setting before

us a world-view of Judaism, and a reason for their particular way of life. “Religion does more than assert that the world is to be seen in a certain way. It can also insist that the meaning of the world is beyond the world [. . .]” (Leaman 16).

The Christian Scriptures serve a similar purpose, so that any reading of the Bible must necessarily reflect upon more than just historical events. Understanding such events requires viewing them in the context of a religious system, which also attempts to place the question of evil within the same world-view. Evil, like God and the faith life of the Biblical Jews and Christians, does not exist in a separate social reality but as an integral part of a distinctive way of life for a particular group.

It is interesting to note that the Bible is unconcerned with many of the questions that seem to entreat traditional theodicies; it seems to have no concern about where evil comes from. Against almost all theodicy, the Bible avoids the questions of “what might have happened?” or “what ought to have happened?” focusing closely on what is and what God reveals. The concepts of evil, as found in the Biblical literature, represent a process of many centuries of thought and reflection on the presence of evil in the world. While the exact geneses of such traditions are difficult to locate in time and place, there are several thematic connections between writings of the pre-Judaic period and the Judaic period. These help us to begin our task of understanding the relationship between evil, God and us.

CHAPTER 3

INFLUENCES UPON JEWISH DEVELOPMENT
OF BIBLICAL EVIL

We can place a pre-Judaic concept of eternal dualism between good and evil within Zoroastrianism. In this ancient religion, there is a conflict between the “principle of the lie,” known as Angra Mainyu, and the “principle of the truth,” known as Ahura Mazda. Zoroaster (Zarathustra) excluded evil from his conception of Ahura Mazda, only able to indirectly connect evil to him as the “father” of the twin spirits, Ahra Mainyu (evil spirit) and Spenta Mainyu (holy spirit). Ahura Mazda, a high god who determined the development of the earth, was bound in a dualism within an original monotheism. The twin spirits were adversarial, and responsible for the creation of the world. We can say that Ahura Mazda, author of creation, contains within himself the tendency for both good and evil (Schwartz 64).

This created a catalytic influence that affected the development of later Judeo-Christian tradition. Both the teachings of Zoroaster and the image of Satan found in Hebrew Scriptures present the causality of evil as separate from the concept of God and placed within a power external to God. During the period of pre-Christian Judaism, Satan is actively seeking to destroy any relationship between God and humanity, and especially that relationship between God and the people of Israel. Through this catalytic influence of Zoroastrian parsism, the Jewish authors could

understand the existence of a hostile world and its history, but without a need to compromise their belief in God's ultimate power (Schwartz 65).

Another ancient concept is the myth, not unique to the story of Genesis, that creation is the result of spoken words that brought order out of chaos. Perhaps the one creation story most known for its similarity to that of the account in Genesis is the Enuma Elish. A Babylonian story known from at least 1700 BC and based on an older Sumerian story, this story includes creation occurring from a wind or breath of God, the earth and the heavens created from pre-existing materials, and the presence of subordinate gods (indicated in Genesis by the use of the plural *Elohim* for God). These stories all speak of the tradition that creation was not an act of *creatio ex nihilo*,⁶ but of bringing order out of a pre-existing material. This idea of creation from primordial chaos allows for the integral relationship of evil to the creation of the world, through a permanent threat to human existence, once subjected to a primordial chaos and now kept at bay by the order that God has imposed upon it through the creation. The Atrahasis Story, an ancient Sumerian story on which the later Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic was based, speaks of the gods sending a flood to destroy humans precisely because they have grown too numerous and noisy. The Atrahasis Story held that humanity had grown too numerous and burdensome, while in the Genesis account the author shows that God concluded that all flesh was corrupt, having abandoned a vegetarian diet and eating other animals.

⁶ "Creation from nothing."

These stories of creation, and subsequent destruction of most of the world by water, show the continued importance placed upon the relationship of chaos to creation, as a constant threat to creation. James suggests that contained within such a worldview “is a conception of evil as the breakdown of order,” and therefore, “evil is thus an ever present tendency for creation to return to chaos” (14). Evil, according to these pre-Biblical ancient stories, is not synonymous with the punishment humanity receives for failing to attain holiness, but is rather an active force which requires continuous resistance on the part of both God and humans.

From Egypt also came a concept of retributive justice, which creates a basis for the rational-moral view of the universe. The concept of *ma'at* (an all-encompassing creation order) as a balance of order and justice that rules the world can be synonymous with the Old Testament concepts of “justice” and “righteousness.” It was also an influence on the writings of the Old Testament. The Instruction of Amen-em-opet, an Egyptian book of wisdom consisting of thirty proverbs and sayings, and dating from eighth-ninth century BC, was an apparent source for Proverbs 22:17-24:22. Within both the Egyptian concept of *ma'at* and the Old Testament “there is a direct correlation between sowing and harvesting, between cause and effect; actions determine people’s destinies and produce their fateful and unalterable consequences” (Beker 46). The concept of retributive justice relates not so much to the past, as to the future, Beker continues. Retribution, both in the Egyptian and Old Testament models, preserves a moral order and creates a stable future. Yet for the people of Israel’s exilic and post-exilic experiences, the prophetic

conviction of a correlation between God's justice and Israel's suffering becomes a matter of doubt. It is this "situational incongruity," as Jonathan Z. Smith (1-19) calls it, which falls between "God's sovereign justice and the daily reality of oppression (that) leads to a crisis of faith, both nationally and individually" (Beker 50).

Listing five explanations found within the Old Testament, Beker suggests some reasons for the presence of evil and suffering (60):

[1] The retributive explanation interprets suffering as God's punishment for sin. Suffering is deserved because God is the norm and executor of justice on the world.

[2] Suffering is a form of divine pedagogy, testing, or cleansing.

[3] Suffering evokes either rebellion or submission: rebellion, because no explanation of innocent suffering makes sense; submission, because faith in God's hidden wisdom and communion with him are the only possibilities in the face of inexplicable suffering.

[4] The response of resignation – closely related to submission, but nourished by a profound skepticism – advises acquiescence to an irrational world. It interprets suffering as a necessary aspect of the inexorable rhythm of life.

[5] The apocalyptic response counsels endurance in the midst of an active and/or passive resistance to the powers of evil. Here suffering, whether interpreted as punishment, testing, or undeserved suffering, is a penultimate reality that will cease when God's judgment punishes evil and rewards good.

The following six themes and Scriptural passages echo the five points Beker raises (Talbert 11-16):

[1] God disciplines the people as a parent would a child: “So you must realize that the Lord, your God, disciplines you even as a man disciplines⁷ his son” (Deut. 8:5). See also Prov. 12:24; 22:15; 23:13; 29:17.

[2] In ancient Israel and later Judaism, corporal punishment was seen as a means of discipline or education: “The discipline of the Lord, my son, disdain not; spurn not his reproof; for whom the Lord loves he reproves and he chastises the son he favors” (Prov. 3:11-12). See also Prov. 22:15; 29:15.

[3] God’s motivation is love and mercy. Wisdom of Solomon 11:9; and Psalms of Solomon 13:7-11.

[4] The afflictions and sufferings are designed to encourage growth and purification in the person: “[. . .] but the Lord’s mercy reaches all flesh, reproving, admonishing, teaching as a shepherd guides his flock” (Sir 18:11-12). See also Jth. 8:27; 2 Macc. 6:12, 16; Wisdom of Solomon 7:14; 12:19; 12:22; 2 Bar. 13:10; and Psalms of Solomon 10:1-2; 13:10; 16:11; 18: 4.

[5] Correction is given by God so that condemnation is avoided in favor of reward: “Cling to him, forsake him not [. . .] and your reward will not be lost” (Sir 2: 3, 8). See also 2 Macc. 6:12-15; Ecclus. 2:2-3; Wisdom of Solomon 3:5; and Wisd. 12:26.

⁷ In the LXX these two uses of “disciplines” are “paideuse . . . paideusei,” which connotes “educates.”

[6] Discipline, as benefiting people through God's mercy and intended for their good, is to be accepted, welcomed and responded to properly: "He who rejects admonition despises his own soul, but he who heeds reproof gains understanding" (Prov.15:32). See also Ps. 94:12; Psalms of Solomon 3:3-4; 7:3; Wisdom of Solomon 17:1; 1 Enoch 5:8; and 2 Bar. 44:14-15.

It is not surprising that the Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions, which portray suffering as a divine education of God's people, come together in the Hellenistic Jewish document 4 Maccabees (63 BC – AD 70). In this Jewish text, suffering (as a result of evil) is not the correction of misdeeds but a conditioning that results in increased strength, which is couched in the language of a "victor's prize." This writing integrates the Stoic view of suffering within a Jewish (theistic) framework rather than a pagan (pantheistic) framework. The pagan view of virtue, transformed into a Jewish view, emphasizes personal and communal obedience to God and the Law. In this Jewish text, suffering takes on certain characteristics: as training; as producing endurance; as endured out of hope in the future; and as a blessing and reason for rejoicing (Talbert 21).

There is an ancient Mesopotamian text, translated I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom, which talks of a young man who is subjected to suffering by the gods. He is not able to understand the purpose or reasoning for his suffering and feels utterly abandoned. Finally, without further explanation from the gods he receives a message that tells him his suffering is over, his health and life made whole. The story places human suffering within the control of the gods, and subject to their desires and

whims. While the gods ultimately provide relief, their motivation is as uncertain in the beginning of the story as at the end of the story. This story parallels the story of Job in many ways, and raises the question of why the innocent suffer from evil.

Yet another story from the Ancient Near East, with similarities to the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, is titled A Pessimistic Dialogue between Master and Servant.

Presented through a series of ten actions, the story places the master in need of the servant's support to accomplish the task. Yet, the master capriciously would change his mind, and the servant would be required to follow his whim. Like Ecclesiastes, this story embraces the inherent ambiguity of life's meaning, including the presence of evil, and looks into the murkiness of the world for order and sense. Drawing upon these many diverse explanations and traditions, we find that the Old Testament holds three distinct responses to this crisis of relationship, in the writings of Job, Ecclesiastes, and Daniel. Perhaps Job is the best known of these writings, and to him we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER 4

JOB: THE OLD TESTAMENT'S
HUMAN FACE ON THE
PROBLEM OF EVIL

“In the land of Uz there was a blameless and upright man named Job, who feared God and avoided evil” (Job 1:1). In the person of Job, whose name is believed to be an acronym for “Where is the Father?” (Rohr 185), we find the story of a person who receives evil in his life, for no apparent reason. Unlike many of the people of the times, the author of Job challenges the concept of suffering (evil) as a form of divine punishment or chastisement. He advances the notion that evil may even represent, in some unknown way, a sign of God’s love rather than anger. Conventional Jewish thought in the times of Job dictated that a doctrine of reward and punishment would make some systematic sense of the problem of evil. Job acknowledges this tradition: “It may be that my sons have sinned and blasphemed God in their hearts” (1:5). However, in opposition to both his friends and his faith, Job sought to understand the meaning of the evil in his life, beyond blind acceptance of such evil as punishment.

Both the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, following in the wisdom tradition, seek to focus more on the very human issue of suffering, rather than Israel’s collective salvation history. Job does not challenge the power of God, but rather the justice of God. Job directly challenges the Deuteronomic and prophetic views of reward and punishment, declaring that if the righteous suffer while the wicked

people thrive, there must be a reason, and he demands God's answer to such an indictment. God, as we read, is silent. The truth held in Job is not so much the answer that Job receives, but rather in what God does not say. The truth lies as well in the dialogue between Job and his wife and friends. "We accept good things from God: and should we not accept evil?" (2:10) Job asks his wife. "But what is man's lot from God above, his inheritance from the Almighty on high? Is it not calamity for the unrighteous, and woe for evildoers?" (Job 31:2). In Job's story, we find some answers to the problem of evil, although not at the depth Job would have hoped.

Job, in his personal suffering, presents a face to evil not previously found in the Old Testament. In the words of Beker (51), Job "experiences a radical disjunction between 'just' suffering – the punishment of transgression – and the 'unjust' suffering of the innocent sufferer." Job is certain that nothing he has done deserves the evils that have befallen him. In despair and anger, Job blames God for being indifferent, if not outright unjust through the affliction of suffering. Eliphaz, one of Job's friends, reminds Job that the righteous receive good things, while the wicked suffer, and therefore, Job must have done something in his past to receive such misfortune. The notions that Eliphaz advances, that evil is the result of human actions, and divine retribution is the result for such behavior, were common in the times of Job. Eliphaz gives advice to Job, that he should take his suffering from evil as a warning, and turn toward God, committing himself to God's cause (Job 5:8). Harder on Job is his friend Bildad. He also considers Job's evil as a result of his behavior, and states that because God is just, God cannot be the source of evil. It

must be something Job had done (Job 8:3). A third friend of Job, Zophar, feels that Job has not received enough evil for what he has done (Job 11:6) and claims that God's ways are unknown and beyond human comprehension (Job 11:7-8).

Also of interest in this story is the role that the Satan plays. In the story of Job, we read that God is surrounded by "the sons of God [. . .] Satan also came among them" (1:6). While in today's world, we would not likely consider Satan to be among God's advisors, this passage shows just how deeply the ancient Jewish tradition integrated evil into the concept of God. From Hebrew, "Satan" means "adversary" or "accuser." Found only three times in the entire Old Testament⁸, this limited use of Satan shows that the Old Testament God was the source of good as well as evil. Later distinctions would evolve into a doctrine of causality, but for the Jewish people there was no problem believing in a God made of paradoxes. "If evil befalls a city, has not the Lord caused it?" (Amos 3:6). In the words of the prophet Isaiah: "I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe, I am the Lord, who do all these things" (45:6-7). The God that brings life brings woe; the God that creates destroys. Satan, the force that stands in opposition to God, exists throughout creation as a part of creation. Representing the force that pulls humanity toward evil, Satan is in dialogue with God. When asked by God, "Where have you been?" Satan replies, "Round the earth, patrolling about" (Job 1:8). This adversary, the accuser, is present throughout

⁸ See Zech. 3:1; Job 1-2; 1 Chron. 21:1.

the world. It is of interest that nowhere in the Old Testament is Satan placed in a dualistic relationship with God, requiring God to serve as the “principle of the good.” Indeed, even the temptations of the Satan must further God’s redemptive plans. In looking at these passages and the tradition of Satan in the Old Testament, it appears that God’s plan necessarily involves some evil. Even if not created outright by God, evil still exists through God’s allowance for some purpose.

For the audience of Job the idea of God inflicting any harm upon creation would not be an unusual proposition. Yet what sets Job apart from others who may have questioned the role of evil and suffering in correcting or punishing behavior, is that Job never lost his faith. He does not abandon God in spite of all that has befallen him, and even though he lacks a clear response from God, Job stays the course. What Job understands is not so much the meaning of evil, but rather, that evil has meaning. Job is equally convinced that what the ultimate meaning of evil and suffering may be is unknown. Job, rather than creating a shallow explanation, draws upon the manner in which God acts in our lives: “Then call me, and I will respond; or let me speak first, and answer me. What are my faults and my sins? My misdeeds and my sins make known to me! Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy?” (Job 13:22-24). Such an approach requires an understanding of the difference between individual and community, for surely Job’s suffering is not uniquely for his individual actions, but rather for the people of Israel.

Other Biblical references (such as second Isaiah) stress this link between God and the community, as God acts through individuals to bring the community closer.

Such an approach may result from God desiring to use human nature to change itself. By gradually encouraging the Jews to transform themselves into a better and more distinct people, Leaman (229) suggests, truly “they have responsibilities to the community as well to themselves [. . .].” Within the possibility of such suffering and evil bringing about a sense of redemption of both individuals and community, is the realization of an improved relationship between God and the faithful. As the medieval Jewish philosopher, Judah Halevi (AD 1074-1141) states in the *Kuzari*, “the main Jewish virtue is not saintliness or humility, but fidelity. Through the sufferings of individuals the welfare of the group as a whole is advanced, and the role of suffering is to benefit the community” (Leaman 229).

Job did not get an answer to his question, but God did respond. The questions that Job raised are not important for their answers, but for the way in which they reorient ourselves toward our relationship with God. Perhaps, this is the truth as Job found it, and the purpose of suffering and evil as presented in the book of Job. His response is valuable for it places the suffering and evil within his relationship with God. While Job views the affliction of good people not as punishment, but as a test of faith or moral strength, Schwartz would counter, “The punishment of God for individuals or the entire people when they deviate from God’s ways is that which is perceived as evil or calamity” (43). In either sense, evil and suffering serve as ways of humbling human nature, and opening the way to self-transcendence. The Book of Job does not address human suffering and evil, but rather, human relationship with God in the face of evil. Job would tell us, according

to Leaman, that once we are capable of understanding the problem of evil as being connected with understanding our relationship with God, then we are on the right track. He quickly adds, "Where that track takes us is another question" (250).

CHAPTER 5

ECCLESIASTES: THE PREACHER'S VIEW OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Ecclesiastes, also known as Qoheleth or the Preacher, follows Job in attempting to place evil within a framework of creation that acknowledges God as both creator and sustainer of all creation, and acknowledges that some sense of God's wisdom is present throughout creation. Whereas Job attempts to place evil within a personal dialogue and relationship with God, Qoheleth attempts to distance us from the existence of evil through a philosophical approach that is almost transcendental. While addressing the purpose and value of life, he also acknowledges that the purpose of life, and the meaning of related evil, is unknown to humanity. "If you see oppression of the poor, and violation of rights and justice in the realm, do not be shocked [. . .]" (Eccles. 5:7). Qoheleth shows a bias against the moral-rational view of faith, focusing on a rhythm in the world that requires us to abandon any search for meaning (including the question of evil) and, rather, to focus on simply living life for what it has to offer – both good and bad. Qoheleth does not follow the traditional view of divine retribution, rather suggesting that some greater reward or punishment in the future replaces earthly reward and punishment.

Ultimately, though, the meaning of life and evil is not clear, and in the end, it is all “vanity of vanities”⁹ (Eccles. 1:2).

The acceptance of evil as an integral part of our life is an important theme found in Ecclesiastes: “On a good day enjoy good things, and on an evil day consider: Both the one and the other God has made, so that man cannot find fault with him in anything” (Eccles. 7:14). The apparent capriciousness of life is not to be questioned, for evil is without meaning for the Preacher, as it is with Job. People may only accept the evil as it comes, and make of it what they will. This is the mystery of evil for Qoheleth. Neither the presence of evil, nor its origin in creation through God’s will, is in question. Rather, the question remains as to its purpose and meaning for us. It is impossible to know what God is doing (Eccles. 3:11; 8:17; 11:5) and therefore the reason for evil remains just as unknown.

Evil exists simply because it does, and for reasons to be known later. For Qoheleth, like Job, the question of evil focuses squarely on the God who creates evil and remains hidden in mystery (Eccles. 7:13). The relationship between Qoheleth and God, as with Job, defined his view of evil and his personal response to the presence of evil in life. The entire purpose of life is to respond in the moment: “fear

⁹ “Vanity of vanities” is a Hebrew expression of a high degree of futility and emptiness. This theme is present throughout Ecclesiastes: 2:11, 17, 23, 26; 3:19; 4:4, 7, 16; 5:10; 6:2, 4, 7; 8:14; 11:8; 12:8. Though “vanity” is the usual translation for the Hebrew *hebel*, its primary understanding can be that of “emptiness” or “void.”

God and keep his commandments, for this is man's all [. . .]" (Eccles. 12:13).

Qoheleth feels that nothing, not universe nor God nor evil, can be known to humanity. People, both the righteous and the sinners, are in God's hands, but whether the purpose is for love or for evil, we do not know (Eccles. 9:1).

Soulen reminds us "the scriptures are thought to relate a story whose fundamental presupposition is the catastrophe of sin and whose goal is therefore deliverance from the negative conditions of existence" (53). However, "this perspective obscures the possibility that the Hebrew Scriptures are not solely or even primarily concerned with the antithesis of sin and redemption but much rather with the God of Israel's passionate engagement with the mundane affairs of Israel and the nations." The God who delivers evil to us also delivers us from evil, according to the Old Testament. The action-consequence of suffering is an integral part of this relationship-based process: "I am the Lord, there is no other; I form the light, and create the darkness, I make well-being and create woe [. . .]; woe to him who contends with his Maker [. . .]" (Isa. 45:7, 9). Job echoes this to his wife: "We accept good things from God; and should we not accept evil?" (Job 2:10). The ability for a people to collectively change their ways and turn toward their God in a renewed relationship is the hopeful message of the Old Testament.

The thoughts of Karl Barth are similar in acknowledging the possibility of creative evil serving an important role in the world. Barth holds that the very act of creation and the resultant existence necessarily consists of both negative and positive aspects. These are parts of God's overall good creation, and include things such as

“hours, days and years, both bright and dark, success and failure, laughter and tears, growth and age, gain and loss, birth and sooner or later its inevitable corollary, death” (qtd. in Wright 92). Barth suggests that creation, while good in totality, has a threatening side (the Shadow) that may not rise to the level of evil. It provides humanity with a world where people would not be “cushioned from discomfort, struggle and effort, failure or disappointment” but rather “a world where through the struggle of earthly existence they would undergo a soul-making experience whereby through difficulty and demand they would grow to maturity” (Wright 93). As defined by Barth, the Shadow requires humanity to call upon God for strength and help. The reality is that evil is separate from God, and requires a response that – like the Shadow – requires us to call upon God for strength and assistance. Job recognized in his life the many faces of the Shadow, perhaps even evil, while Qoheleth saw the inclusion of Shadow/evil within the very order of creation.

The focus of wisdom literature on the everyday concerns of life gives hint to this purpose, for it is in the everyday experiences that we find the very presence of God, and the reality of evil. This view of wisdom allows humanity to draw from the most sublime questions of human suffering, and develop a focus on what it means to be human and in relationship with God.

CHAPTER 6

DANIEL: AN APOCALYPTIC VOICE ON
THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

From the wisdom views of Job and Ecclesiastes, we move to the apocalyptic voice of Daniel. The Jewish people certainly suffered evil at the hands of Antiochus IV Epiphanes from 167 to 164 B.C. Imprisoned and persecuted during the Babylonian exile, the Jewish people of this time found in the Book of Daniel some answers to the question of evil. This understanding, however, came from a teleological focus that reveals evil's meaning and purpose in the future. In Job, we see that evil and suffering, often endured in anger or a blind submission is accepted in Ecclesiastes in fateful resignation. For Daniel, there is a similar difficulty in reconciling expectation and reality. The Deuteronomic explanations of suffering failed to explain evil and suffering adequately. In Deuteronomic theology and the wisdom school, the experience of evil and suffering is endurable because it is either deserved suffering or divine testing. Daniel, as an apocalyptic author clings to the faithfulness of the God of creation and refuses to surrender hope in God's justice, and in God's ultimate triumph over the evil (Beker 58). "Clearly, suffering expresses a certain rationality. But only within limits, and in the end, a more encompassing explanation would be required. That explanation derived from belief in the world to come" (Neusner, *Evil* 113).

Daniel and his companions found themselves at the mercy of King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1:6). During Daniel's time, he faced the reality that evil surrounded him in the person of the king. When the king ordered all the wise men of Babylon slain, Daniel and his friends implored God to make known the dream's interpretation the king was looking for, "so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon" (Dan. 2:18). Daniel explained the mystery about which the king had wondered, and which "the wise men, enchanters, magicians and astrologers could not explain to the king" (Dan. 2:27), asserting that "there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what is to happen in days to come" (Dan. 2:28).

Later, Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced the choice of worshipping the golden statue set up by the king, or being cast into a furnace (Dan. 3:17-18). In the face of death, these Judean captives never gave up their faith. In the face of evil and uncertainty they did not give up their belief that their relationship with God was stronger than any furnace flames, and even death itself. Should God not choose to save them, they knew that their suffering in the face of evil would be justified in the future. Abednego reflects this in a song of praise: "you are just in all you have done; all your deeds are faultless, all your ways right [. . .] you have executed proper judgments in all that you have brought upon us and upon Jerusalem [. . .] for we have sinned and transgressed by departing from you, and we have done every kind of evil" (Dan. 3:27-29). In the face of evil is the understanding that God's punishment is not without purpose.

Correcting the people of Israel, God reminds them of their need to be faithful and to turn away from their sinful (evil) lifestyles. To this the people respond, using the evil as a means of repentance and change of heart: “with contrite heart and humble spirit let us be received [. . .] now we follow you with our whole heart [. . .] let all those be routed who inflict evils on your servants; let them be shamed and powerless, and their strength broken” (Dan. 3:39, 41, 44). The reality that all evil is subject to God’s power and is therefore, in the realm of the kingdom of God, an experience without lasting concern, is summed up by Abednego: “Let them know that you alone are the Lord God, glorious over the whole world” (Dan. 3:45).

An apocalyptic writing, the book of Daniel is concerned with “revealing” or “uncovering” meaning. While not historical in the sense that it lacks accuracy of certain dates and people, it is historical in the sense that it addresses the life of the people of Judea as they suffered evil at the hands of oppressors. As Lawrence Boadt notes, “its whole purpose is to interpret that history without being wedded to the details” (510). For the authors of Daniel, the interpretation of that history necessarily required them to address the evil and suffering of their people. Ultimately, the meaning for this evil and suffering was not to be found here in the world, but rather was located beyond the world. Given this viewpoint, Griffin (*Evil* 15) feels that the occurrence of both natural and moral evil is not in contradiction to God’s goodness and power, but enhances God’s plan. “The authors were intensely interested in what was happening and what God could do about it. They were convinced that *God really does act at every moment even when it may seem that he*

has abandoned his people" (Boadt 510). This answer to evil includes some constant values as found in the book of Daniel. These include that God is not indifferent to the world, nor is God powerless, and that a strong belief decisively rejects the power of evil to control our lives and proclaims that death is not the end for those who are faithful to Yahweh. Also present is the belief that we must have a strong trust in Yahweh, rejecting human desires for evil such as war and violence, while living lives that place us among the just rather than the wicked (Boadt 515). Ridgeon (69) advances that "the existence of evil in this world must be due to God, as part of his plan for man. His plan is, of course, the development of man from childhood to adulthood when man is able to appreciate the meaning of the likeness of God."

For Daniel, the scope and intensity of faith based hope tempers the sense of evil and suffering; for Daniel, as for Job and Qoheleth, evil and suffering cannot be separated from structures of hope without becoming a tragic and meaningless experience. Stitskin reminds us, "The major effort in the realm of religion is how to fortify man's spirit, deepen his sense of compassion, broaden his horizon and turn sorrow into self-transcendence by means of symbolic expressions that make an understood relationship a deeply felt experience" (198). Any response to evil must include adherence to right conduct, a belief in divine control over events (even in the face of actions seemingly to the contrary), and the certain belief that God's future reign will come and triumph over all evil. The Jewish people believed that evil, as a human dilemma, did have meaning. As Joseph told his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). The Kaddish places this

transforming of evil within a proclamation of relationship. It is unique in that it creates an expression of faith while acknowledging a crisis. It recognizes that it is difficult for man to fully comprehend, or even believe, in God's immanent presence when faced with evil and suffering (Stitskin 212).

“Like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven” (Dan. 7:13). The “son of man” image is one of a person who “received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and people of every language serve him” (Dan. 7:14). In hopeful anticipation, Daniel proclaimed thanks to the God who cared for him in his trials: “You have remembered me, O God [. . .] you have not forsaken those that love you” (Dan. 14:38). God responds, “Blessed is the man who had patience and perseveres [. . .] Go, take your rest, you shall rise for your reward at the end of days” (Dan. 12:12). For Daniel, the meaning of evil lies in the future, even beyond the suffering of death. The divine overthrow of evil also lies in the future, and it is in the person of the “son of man” that we glimpse what this involves; it is in the person of Jesus that we see a promise against evil fulfilled.

CHAPTER 7

THE NEW TESTAMENT'S RESPONSE TO
THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

In the New Testament, there is a continual battle between good and evil. Placing evil in relationship between God and the world, Jesus and Satan, the New Testament still does not contain a dualistic worldview, locating God and some “antigod” at the poles. Wright tells us that while there is a dualism in the New Testament, a conflict between good and evil, “it is a temporary one and not eternal. To make the devil into God’s opposite number is to give him (Satan) a status he does not have” (60). Rather, we find that evil is the adversary of God, and in the writings of Paul, this adversary takes on the form of sin. “The story of Jesus, as it is presented in the New Testament, is characterized by the absolute and irreconcilable contrast between God and Satan and the presence of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, which Satan seeks to destroy” (Schwartz 68). There is an understanding that it is in the person of Jesus Christ, “who gave himself for our sins, to rescue us from the present evil age,” that the New Testament conflict between God and evil is centered (Gal. 1:4). It would be difficult to understand the message of the New Testament without first understanding the conflict between the kingdom of God, in Christ, and the realm of the devil. In the Johannine writings, this duality between the person of Jesus as the Christ and the person of Satan as evil is particularly evident. “The man who sins belongs to the devil, because the devil is a sinner from the beginning. No

one begotten of God acts sinfully [. . .]” (1 John 3:8-9). The entire reason that Christ has come is to destroy the evil works of the devil: “It was to destroy the devil’s works that the Son of God revealed himself” (1 John 3:8). Satan is presented as the direct cause of evil in the New Testament.

In Jesus Christ, God has revealed the relationship between God and the world. Within this relationship, the meaning of evil has its place. Had the life of Jesus turned out differently, the meaning of evil within the Christian tradition would also be different. It is in the cross that evil finds its meaning; the cross is God’s answer to evil. “The Buddhist,” Willimon tells us, “living under the story of the Enlightened One who trod the Eightfold Path to Nirvana, seeks to become disengaged from this world and its attendant evil. The Christian, following the crucified God, seeks to engage evil in the same spirit that Christ died” (84). Marilyn M. Adams adds that “Christians will not want to depreciate the awfulness (awefulness) of suffering in this life [. . .] they see in the cross of Christ a revelation of God’s righteous love and a paradigm of his redemptive use of suffering” (Peterson 187). This cross has always been a problem for those outside of Christianity. As Paul says, “we preach Christ crucified – a stumbling block to Jews, and an absurdity to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23). The gentiles of Paul’s time held to a philosophy that was sophisticated, with an impassive and abstract view of God. For them, the Christian approach of faith beyond reason made no sense. The classical philosophical approach emphasizes a visible universe that is as perfect as the inferred perfection of the creator. The presence of evil in the world, and the conquering power of the cross

were impossible to reconcile. The Jews also had as difficult a time, for with their belief in an all-powerful and personal God who controlled creation and stands above our history and tragedy, they could not reconcile the “death of God” in the cross.

This desire to live in the path of Christ requires a different way of viewing evil as well. The paradoxical affirmation of Christianity is that when we admit the presence of evil in this world and in our lives, such acknowledgment of evil keeps evil from getting out of hand (Willimon 179). In the Old Testament view, evil can be retribution and punishment, a paternal correction for God’s children gone astray, or a means of testing and strengthening one’s relationship with God. Evil in the New Testament, though, takes on a new witness. The biblical witness clearly identifies that all events, even evil, finally glorify God (Schwartz 73). In contrast to ancient Jewish traditions, the New Testament authors specifically rejected the concept that personal misfortune resulted in a person suffering evil. “As (Jesus) walked along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, was it his sin or that of his parents that caused him to be born blind?’ ‘Neither,’ answered Jesus: ‘It was no sin, either of this man or of his parents. Rather, it was to let God’s works show forth in him’” (John 9:1-3). The writers were not interested in taking blame away from Satan, in a sense, but rather wished to show that the evil events presented in the New Testament were able to serve the salvific purposes of God (Wright 70). The presence of evil under Satan is strong in the New Testament. As we already know, the Old Testament mentions Satan three times only. In the New Testament, though, the presence of Satan in the world is almost overwhelming.

In the synoptic gospels, the devil tempts Jesus in the desert (Mark 1:12-13; Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Jesus then immediately comes across a demonized man in the synagogue (Mark 1:23-26; Luke 4:33-37) and then faces more demons while engaged in healing ministry and traveling around the countryside (Mark 2:32-34; 5:1-16; Matt. 8:28-34; Luke 4:41). After healing a woman possessed by Satan for eighteen years (Luke 13:16), and a possessed mute (Matt. 9:32-34), Jesus later faces Satan in the betrayal of Judas Iscariot (Mark 14:10-11; Matt. 26:20-25; Luke 22:3). In John, the person of Satan is just as active in the world, presented as one in whom opposition to Jesus is concentrated (John 8:44; 12:31; 13:27; 14:30; 16:11). The use of the term “evil” must include the concept of the “evil one.” In a sense, this metaphysical connection lends to evil a weight and force found throughout the New Testament. “In the final analysis, this means that humans do not simply have the power to do or not to do evil, but rather they stand under the power of sin; that is to say, they are overshadowed by the power of evil” (Schwartz 78).

“When we summarize how evil is depicted according to the perspective of the New Testament, we notice, in analogy to the Old Testament, that humanity in its being-in-the-world is characterized by its entanglement in evil, a destiny to which humanity willingly acquiesces” (Schwartz 84). Indeed, the presence of evil in the New Testament is without question. The question becomes, what do we do with this evil? Why does this evil even exist if Christ has come to defeat evil? In the text of Isaiah 52:13-53:12, we find that the Christian understanding requires an outright rejection of the view of retribution for sin. In Isaiah, suffering is not the punishment

of sin but an acknowledgment of the state of general human failing, which Christ has come to set aright. This is echoed in Romans: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world and with sin death [. . .] the gift (Jesus Christ) is not like the offense. For if by the offense of the one man all died, much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound for all” (5:12, 15). In Jewish tradition, the term *galut* refers to “a deep sense of homelessness in a world that is not quite right” (Neusner, *Judaism* 296). Whereas evil has created a loss of Eden-like relationship with God, the hope of the world lies in the acceptance of *galut*, for both Jewish and Christian traditions recognize that original sin (seen as the “introduction” of evil into the world) and exile convey the great potential of evil in humans (Neusner, *Judaism* 297). In this longing, humanity can recognize and attempt to overcome evil, and restore their right relationship with God.

The life and death of the Christ is a model for our life, in which evil is vanquished once and for all time. “For Christians, sin lies in nature of the individual: limited and creaturely. Created by a loving God but driven to evil by Satanic desire, the fallen human creature repeatedly fails. Jesus is the second chance” (Neusner, *Judaism* 307). Origen (AD 185-232) clearly posits that the problem of evil is not located in what the devil does or does not do, but rather located in what we do with our natural (and naturally good) desires (Neusner, *Evil* 87). The locus of evil is now located within the realm of human action and free-will: “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Whoever does what is good belongs to God; whoever does what is evil has never seen God” (3 John 11). How

we react to evil is critical in defining our purpose as humans and as Christians. Paul reminds us that “it is (our) special privilege to take Christ’s part – not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him” (Phil. 1:29). “The world itself will be freed from its slavery to corruption [. . .] while we await the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:21, 23). Suffering, and evil, remain only as temporary prologues to the eschatological promise of eternal good, when “the earth and all its deeds will be made manifest,” and where “what we await are new heavens and a new earth where, according to his promise, the justice of God will reside” (2 Pet. 3:10, 13). The New Testament witness calls us to leave behind the realities of the world, evil included, and look toward the loving good of eternal union with God. This was the message for the hearers of the New Testament, and the message of Christ’s life: “Detest what is evil, cling to what is good” (Rom. 12:9). “The resolution between divine goodness and our suffering is found in the teaching of eschatology [. . .] but Christians are in agreement that it is our exemplary response to evil, after the pattern of Jesus, that permits us access to God’s living transformation” (Neusner, *Evil* 91).

In the Christian tradition, the experience of evil and the related sensation of suffering is not hopeless or meaningless, for it allows an encounter between humanity and our God who is revealed as the focus and meaning of humanity. Further, if suffering, even in only the physical sense of pain, occurs in the universe it must be because God commands it, or allows its use as an unavoidable result of the evolutionary process. God seems to be intent on transforming, through redeeming love, the best of our efforts into a kingdom where all sufferings are the substance of

“new heavens and new earth” (Kropf 174-75). This does not imply that all evil must result in good, but in the world, we find God is a “co-worker” of our suffering. As Paul tells us, this does not change the reality of evil or the experience of our suffering, but rather changes the choice we have in how to respond to evil: “See that no one returns evil to any other; always seek another’s good and, for that matter, the good of all” (1 Thess. 15:15).

Often evil is presented in the New Testament, more so in Paul’s writings than the gospels, as a situation of test/affliction and proper response. While Paul may have received some of this understanding from his Jewish roots, the Christian testamental message of evil being a means of “testing through fire” is not completely unknown or dismissed out of hand. “[. . .] in persecution and trial [. . .] you endure these as an expression of God’s just judgment, in order to be found worthy of his kingdom – it is for his kingdom you suffer,” for “there is cause for rejoicing here. You may for a time have to suffer the distress of many trials: but this is so that your faith, which is more precious than the passing splendor of fire-tried gold may by its genuineness lead to praise, glory and honor [. . .]” and we should “count it pure joy when you are involved in every sort of trial. Realize that when your faith is tested this makes for endurance” (2 Thess. 1:4-5; 1 Pet. 6-7; James 1:2-4). “Although the negative effects of evil are not denied, the experience of evil is also an occasion for a positive faith experience, in relation to an encounter with God” (James 44). Further, Carson observes, “The idea is that for human beings to become what they ought to be, they must make choices, face hurts, cope with suffering, taste evil and then turn

away from it” (35). In this context, the existence of evil takes on a teleological emphasis. It is in the interest of “soul-making” that evil becomes justified, for it is in the belief that “the end justifies the means” that we say that evil has a purpose, which lies not here in this world, but in the world to come.

Christianity, especially as modeled in the New Testament, requires a response of faith rather than reason when responding to evil. Throughout the gospels and the letters of Paul, we see evil as resulting from a person willingly turning away from God, toward the “evil one,” or Satan. The power of the “evil one” is not to be ignored, and the battle within a soul is the most important one for the New Testament message. Carson proposes that “we could not be people who truly love and obey God unless we are free; and that freedom entails failures, evil, suffering, whose existence is justified in that it is being used to make us mature. This fallen world is the region of soul making” (36). What the New Testament offers us as a response to evil is the knowledge that we are in relationship with a God who suffers with us, and that Christ is the crucified God who suffers with us. It is into this relationship that we are invited to enter, and to place all suffering and evil within this relationship.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Surrounded by daily experiences of individual and communal evil, we join many modern theologians and authors in posing the question, why would a good God allow evil in a good world? There is no simple or singular answer to this problem of evil. Within the Bible, composed of both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, there is no single theodicy that addresses the issue of “God’s justice” and its relationship to evil. Not only between the collective Jewish writings and later Christian writings, but also between individual books is there a conceptual change in the nature and character of evil. This divergence of views on evil reflects an ongoing, developing relationship between the authors’ respective faith communities and God.

Some philosophers and theologians break down evil into physical evil, moral evil and psychological evil, while others distinguish between evil brought on by our own actions, often times called “sin,” and those evils of the natural world, such as famines and floods, disease and even old age and death. Perhaps the results of evil are easier to appreciate than a definition. Some, like Griffin, define evil as consisting of suffering and sinful intentions. Others argue that evil is merely the deprivation of good, or what could be good, so that any absence of good that could have been realized is evil, even if no suffering is involved. Marcel adds that evil is a subjective experience, so that evil that is only stated or observed is no longer evil, while Karavites

places evil in the realm of human action, defining evil as the result of action from a person toward another, or through the natural course of events. However, he agrees that evil touches all of us in all places and at all times and makes us understand our limitations and the limitations of the world.

Through our attempts to clarify the evil found in the world around us, we seek to fight against a world full of evil itself, and to conceptualize an ideal world in which evil ceases. As a part of this process, theodicy is an integral part of our understanding the place of evil in the world, especially when evil is located within the realm of faith and our relationship with God. Looking at biblical theodicies, we turn toward the scriptures for their view of evil. We can place an origin of the concept of eternal dualism of good and evil within Zoroastrianism, and acknowledge a catalytic influence that would later affect the development of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In both the teachings of Zoroaster, and in the image of Satan as found in Hebrew Scriptures, we see that the causality of evil is separate from the concept of God and placed within a power external to God. Pre-Christian Judaism portrays Satan as actively seeking to destroy any relationship between God and humanity. Through this imagery, the Jewish authors could understand the existence of a hostile world and its history, but without compromising their belief in God's ultimate power and goodness. Later portrayals of Satan in the New Testament echo this conflict, placing God in the person of Christ against the evil of Satan.

Babylonian, Sumerian and Egyptian sources also foretell the stories of the creation in Genesis and the flood of Noah as well as the idea of creation out of the

primordial chaos. These stories allow for the integral relationship of evil to the creation of the world. Through this threat to human existence caused by the primordial chaos, which is now kept at bay by the order that God has imposed upon it through creation, we can view evil in these pre-biblical ancient stories as no longer being synonymous with the punishment that humanity receives for failing to attain holiness. Rather, evil (in the form of primordial chaos) is an active force that requires continuous resistance on the part of God and humans.

From Egypt came the concept of retributive justice (*ma'at*), a balance of order and justice that rules the world and can be synonymous with the Old Testament concepts of “justice” and “righteousness.” It was also a strong influence on the writings of the Old Testament. We find in both the Egyptian concept of *ma'at* and the Old Testament a direct correlation between the sowing and harvest, between cause and effect, where actions determine people’s destinies and produce their fateful and unalterable consequences. In rabbinic thought, there was also this belief in divine response, in the form of evil, to human actions. There are several ways that the Old Testament views the purpose or usefulness of evil: as retribution; as suffering for cleansing; as suffering for the benefit of strengthening relationship with God; as a necessary part of life, therefore as something to be accepted as a natural rhythm of life; as a penultimate reality that will cease when God’s judgment punishes evil and rewards good. Evil is also viewed as being corrective in nature, much as a parent’s correction of a child. In this sense, God uses extant evil as an occasion of love to elicit a proper response from humanity.

Job, in his personal suffering, presents a face to evil not previously found in the Old Testament. He knows that God's ways are unknown and beyond human comprehension, and in the end his faith in God is still intact – perhaps more so, having been challenged by the evil in his life. What Job understands is not so much the meaning of evil, but rather, that evil has meaning. Although his response is valuable for the emphasis he places on suffering and evil within the relationship between humanity and God, we must not consider Job as the only response to evil. Whereas Job attempts to place evil within a personal dialogue and relationship with God, Qoheleth attempts to distance us from evil through a philosophical approach that borders on the transcendental. Qoheleth, unlike Job, does not see the purpose of evil as being retributive or corrective in nature. Qoheleth feels that nothing, not of the universe nor of God, is known to humanity. Whereas Job sees in his life the many faces of evil, Qoheleth sees the inclusion of evil within the very order of creation. Daniel is an apocalyptic author who clings to the faithfulness of the God of creation and refuses to surrender hope in God's justice, and in God's ultimate triumph over the powers of evil. Imprisoned and persecuted during the Babylonian exile, the Jewish people found in the Book of Daniel some answers to the question of evil, drawing from a teleological focus revealing evil's meaning and purpose as laying in the future. The existence of evil in this world must be due to God's action or intent, as part of a greater plan for humanity. The Jewish people believe that evil has meaning, and that through the battling and resisting of evil, in squaring ideas

with human conduct, and in bringing about appreciation and love for our relationship with God, we can help sanctify God's name on earth.

The New Testament places evil in a dualistic relationship between God and the world, and Jesus and Satan. In fact, the direct cause of evil is located in Satan. In Jesus Christ, God has revealed the relationship between God and the world. Within this relationship, the meaning of evil has its place, and it is in the cross that evil finds its meaning, for the cross is God's final answer to evil. The biblical authors did not create a division that placed good within the realm of God, and evil in the realm of Satan. Even though the presence of evil under Satan is strong in the New Testament, and any use of the term "evil" must necessarily include the concept of the "evil one," evil in the New Testament takes on a new face. In the New Testament, evil finally glorifies God.

The experience of evil can be an occasion for a positive faith experience. In all cases of evil, there is some possible response, and evil provides us a balance beam by which we can weigh evil and good and choose upon which end to place ourselves. Throughout the gospels and the letters of Paul, we see evil as resulting from a person willingly turning away from God. This does not mean that all evil results in good, but rather that we find in God a "co-worker" for our suffering. As Paul tells us, our experience does not change the reality of evil or our suffering, but rather changes the choice we have in how to respond to evil. For human beings to become what they ought to be, they must make choices, face hurts, cope with suffering, taste evil and then turn away from it, and turn toward their God.

Any consideration of evil, especially in light of the biblical witness, requires that we understand that God and evil are not separate concepts, but rather a united reality in which we can only fully understand the one by acknowledging the other. Ultimately, there are several theodicies at work in the biblical witness to evil. These strands both stand alone and work cooperatively to present a view of evil that defies simplicity or comfort, for no single view is able to explain away the immense suffering and pain experienced through evil. The biblical view of evil clearly asserts that within this world there exists immense evil, and in spite of this evil there also exists immense hope and faith. “The spiritual history of the community of faith, both in the history of the Hebrews and in the life of Christ, reveals that God is present to the people of faith in the midst of suffering” (James 44). The Bible is a document of a faith journey, based in history and lived out in relationship with God. The people of Israel suffered untold evil in their journeys, through exile and slavery, and the Jewish-Christians who sprang from this Jewish tradition suffered immense evil later, in persecution and suppression. Both faiths are still alive and active as voices of witness in the world today – and evil is just as active, as well. The Jewish people of this century have faced the *Shoah*, the Holocaust, an experience of evil almost beyond comprehension. Yet, the Jews continue to stand firm in their relationship with God. How does the evil in the Bible qualify the evil in today’s world? Is such a task even possible? Perhaps Jacob Neusner can be our voice in this dilemma:

The first century found its enduring memory in one man on a hill, on a cross; the twentieth, in six million making up a Golgotha – a mountain

of skulls – of their own. Judaism has no answer to the problem of evil when that problem is framed in contemporary images. Nor should it. No Judaic answer to the question of evil, no Judaic theodicy, could ever have found an enduring fit with an age such as the one that, at the turning of the century, draws to a close. (*Evil* 118-9)

If we take the Bible as an historical document, we will fall short in our attempt to understand God's justice in the problem of evil. The Bible presents a unified view of a faith journey that begins with creation itself, and ends with the apocalyptic promise of a new beginning in a time where evil will be vanquished. The reality is that evil exists, in a world created and meant for our good by an all-powerful God who is also good. Possibly, in the end, the reality of evil is that God is good, and the world is good, and evil somehow reflects and proclaims this reality to us. As Marilyn Adams proclaims (Peterson 187), "For Christians as for others in this life, the fact of evil is a mystery. The answer is a more wonderful mystery – God himself."

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