



Part 2

Intention and happenstance: The place of God

Opening: Good and Evil Word clouds – these will be shared at the meeting.

Thinking about Good and Evil in the Bible and in the world:

Is there *natural* 'evil'? For example are Spiders, scorpions, sharks evil?

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Natural disasters are rarely mentioned in the Bible, but here are two references to an earthquake.

Amos 1.1

The words of Amos, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah... two years^[a] before the earthquake.

Zechariah 14.5

...you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

Why do these verses **not** suggest that God was responsible for the earthquakes?

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Is there *natural* 'good'? What about good weather? Good harvest?

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In this disturbing passage from Luke we read of something that we would consider evil

Luke 13.1-9

13 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4 Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

The two events are not attested anywhere else but Pilate was quite well known for his cruelty and the action described would be quite in character. The fall of the tower is one of those happenings which are (sadly) quite common in the built environment.

Why do you not think that Jesus not comment on the evilness (or otherwise) of these events?

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In the natural world are we imposing the ideas of good and evil on things that we either enjoy or find uncomfortable?

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We talk of a 'cruel wind' for instance, or 'good weather'. Is part of the 'problem of evil' also a problem of words, of language. Do we have the language we need to express the intricacies of good and evil in the world?

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Psalm 34 – an exploration of good and evil, and God’s place in them.

- ¹ I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- ² My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
- ³ O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

- ⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.
- ⁵ Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.
- ⁶ This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.
- ⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
- ⁸ O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.
- ⁹ O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.
- ¹⁰ The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

- ¹¹ Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
- ¹² Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?
- ¹³ Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.
- ¹⁴ Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.

- ¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.
- ¹⁶ The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.
- ¹⁷ When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.
- ¹⁸ The LORD is near to the broken-hearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.

- ¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD rescues them from them all.
- ²⁰ He keeps all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.
- ²¹ Evil brings death to the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
- ²² The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.



What about 'suffering'? Is it natural to suffer? Are there different kinds of suffering?

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Is the collapse of a star a natural disaster?

Is a natural disaster only a disaster if it directly affects *people*?

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Verse 10 says - 'The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.'

What do these words suggest to you?

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A last look at the Wordclouds – do we still look at them in the same way?



Read Psalm 148.

Do you feel that the words of this Psalm are intended to show us that *everything* that happens is attended to by God?

Psalm 148

- ¹ Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!
- ² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!
- ³ Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!
- ⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!
- ⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.
- ⁶ He established them for ever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. ^[a]
- ⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
- ⁸ fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!
- ⁹ Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
- ¹⁰ Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!
- ¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
- ¹² Young men and women alike,
old and young together!
- ¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.
- ¹⁴ He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.
- Praise the LORD!