

Job 1:6-2:10: A Sovereign God and Severe Tragedy

So last week we took a longer look at the reality that there is a spiritual world all around us that operates and affects the world we live in. That spiritual beings have a very real and concrete effect on the physical world. The Bible doesn't hide that fact or ignore that fact or - to be honest - even give a defense for that. It just assumes that the spiritual world intersects with the physical world.

As believers we don't need to be afraid of the spiritual world or spiritual beings, because Jesus who died for us is sovereign over them. But that actually leads to the big \$64k question: If God is sovereign over all things, isn't he responsible for evil? That's the problem of evil I mentioned last week - also known as theodicy: how can a good, all-powerful God allow evil to exist.

Our instinct is to say no, God is not responsible for evil. That's a good instinct:

Jas. 1:13-14: Let no one say when he is tempted "I am being tempted by God" for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.

So God is not evil and is not directly responsible for any evil that exists. But I think we have to at least acknowledge that that's a legitimate question. And we need to have an answer. So what I want to do this morning is walk through this passage and then put some pieces together.

1) God is sovereign over evil agents. **Rear 6-8**

So I want us to notice a couple of things here. Who mentioned Job first? Satan or the Lord? The Lord mentioned Job first. A lot of times we assume Satan just had a grudge against Job so he asked God permission to attack Job. But it's actually God who begins the dialog about Job. He initiates this whole situation.

Which is pretty amazing, if you think about it. God knows the outcome of this whole situation. He knows what's going to happen. Satan doesn't yet know. Job certainly has no clue. His wife doesn't. His friends don't.

But God knows the outcome of the story from before the beginning. He also knows **why** it's going to happen. Job never learns why. We sure don't know why. We may never know why. But God does.

I say all that to remind us that this wasn't haphazard. This wasn't God playing with Job's life on a whim. From all eternity past God had designed this man to go through this ordeal in this way for God's own glory and Job's own good.

And he designed the temptation setup with Satan. He initiated it and was sovereign over it. It is God who gives Satan the boundaries of the temptation: "You can touch everything he has, but you can't touch him." Well, at least not yet.

See, Satan can only do what God has placed in his hand. That's the wording that God uses in **Vs. 12**. He placed these things in the hand of Satan. **God gave** this man's life to Satan. Satan is not in control.

In the Star Wars universe the 2 sides of the force are in constant battle for who's stronger. And I think that mentality even gets picked up in Christian circles where people view Satan as an equal opposing force to God. And that's simply not true. Satan - and spiritual beings in general - are described as being much more powerful than we are, but they are nothing in comparison to God. Maybe we're like a measuring cup of water in terms of power, and Satan and demons are a 5 gallon bucket. But God is an infinite ocean of power - there's no contest about who is in control.

Whether it's Judas, whom God used to deliver Jesus over to Pilate. Or Nebuchadnezzar whom God used to bring the Jews into captivity or Pharaoh whom God could have utterly destroyed in a fell swoop but instead strung Pharaoh along - God is sovereign over all evil agents.

Side: Did you notice Satan's accusation of God? **Read 9-11**

That's a loaded accusation. As one commentator said: Satan is basically accusing God of buying worship (Alden, *Job*) That God is not great and mighty and glorious enough to be worshipped through thick and thin. No, God must earn the favor of his people.

Can I just say something: I wonder if that's not our functional theology many times. "God I'll worship you and love my neighbor as long as things are going well. As long as my health is good, money's coming in, relatively little drama in life. But if you touch my stuff or my health I'm out." I think we are prone to wander and leave God in those times.

There are many people who have claimed the name of Jesus, claimed to love him, claimed to follow his commands, claimed to love others, but when blessing was taken away what they really worshipped was a false god who didn't give them the toys on their Christmas list.

The real God is sovereign and glorious whether he is moving things in the direction we like or not.

2) God is sovereign over all calamity. Read 13-19

So Satan unleashes every type of disaster we can imagine. And I want to emphasize that Satan unleashes these disasters. I say that because in our culture we're so accustomed to scientific explanations or rationalistic explanations we functionally forget the spiritual world exists.

The Sabeans steal the oxen and kill the servants - we could call that human evil. The devil stirred up the hearts of the Sabaens. He also stirred up the hearts of the Chaldeans to steal the camels and kill those servants.

If we were alive back then we'd hear all kinds of pundits talking about political unrest or oppression or Sebean Lives Matter. Maybe they all had mental illness or they were starving and needed the food. We'd spin it a 100 different ways.

You know what caused this? Satan. Satan stirred up 2 countries - the Sabeans and the Chaldeans - to strategically attack Job's property and people. This is human evil that Satan has created. Now, are those people responsible for their actions? Of course. But we are to understand that Satan is clearly behind all of this.

There's also what we would call natural disaster. The fire of God that kills the 7,000 sheep and those servants is probably lightning. How does lightning kill 7,000 sheep? Well, we don't know for sure. Most commentators speculate that while it is possible that Satan created a monster thunderstorm, it may just have been that lightning struck the ground, started a ground fire, and the fire destroyed all the animals. That's certainly possible. California right now has fires burning at an unprecedented rate - over 4 million acres have burned so far. That's 10% of the state of WA.

Last week the LA Times ran an article about just 1 CA rancher who lost 400 head of cattle - most with calves in tow - to fires (<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-10-03/wildfire-killed-this-ranchers-cattle-and-changed-his-family-legacy-he-blames-politics>). So possibly 800 animals. Interestingly no one blames natural causes like arsonists or lightning. They blame ideologies. Some blame politics, some blame climate change. No one has blamed Satan or Satan's work behind all of this.

Now - let me be very clear - we don't for 100% sure know that Satan is behind these things. And we need to be very careful declaring for certain that he is. But at the same time we're not ignorant of what the Bible teaches. It might seem like we're bumpkins for believing that Satan and demons have influence like this but actually we're just believing what the people of God have always believed: that the spiritual world has extraordinary influence on the physical world.

Of course the most tragic event here is the wind that causes the house to give way and kills all Job's children.
Read 18-22

We will come back around to the Lord giving and taking in a little bit. But for now, just understand the weight of that tragedy.

And Job has no idea why all of this is happening. He has no idea of the conversation between God and Satan. He has no idea that **he** is the strategic target because of his godliness. Unspeakable pain and tragedy all on the same day.

Job goes through the deepest mourning possible. He shaves his head in grief. He drops to the ground and simply offers worship to God. It's not complex, it's not long. It's a simple reflection that apparently he will end life exactly as he began it: naked and with nothing. And yet God is still to be praised.

But who does Job say is ultimately responsible for all of this? God. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

And where we might want to barge in and correct him: Woah, buddy. That's charging God with evil! You can't say that. That's not proper, that's not correct. It's Satan, it's the Chaldeans, it's the Sabeans.

No, Job places it all on God's lap. And **Vs. 22** is instructive. Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. Job's assessment was correct because God is sovereign over all calamity. And that's all we can call these things: calamity.

3) God is sovereign over us personally. Read 2:1-9

I love that God almost seems to be talking trash to Satan. "Have you considered my servant Job?" Of course that sends Satan in a rage. His devastating blow to Job's life did nothing to curb Job's devotion to the Lord. Job still held fast to his integrity.

Satan then moved the proverbial goalposts. Initially he was satisfied that he could get Job to curse God to his face by taking everything he had. No dice. So now, he seems to think it'll happen if he attacks Job directly.

He gives him some kind of disease that attacks his whole body. It's probably not leprosy. We don't know for any certainty what it might be. But nevertheless it's a full body assault that is painful and embarrassing and disgusting. He is literally taking broken pieces of pottery and scraping the sores.

He is so messed up that his friends don't even recognize who he is. **Read 11-13**

This is how bad the situation is. And again we are confronted with the question of who is responsible for this? We might be quick to say Satan - because we're reading the story! Or maybe it's an infection out of lab in Wuhan.

Where does Job place the ultimate responsibility? God. **Read 10**

Two times we see Job attributing these things that are evil to God. He doesn't say that God is evil. He doesn't attempt to hold God to account. He simply states the obvious: God is ultimately behind all of this.

And listen, how we often try to resolve the problem of evil is to say that God did what? He allowed these things to happen. We try to cover for God because we think if we were to say that the Lord gives and the Lord takes away that would almost seem like placing the blame on God. But that's not true.

And really, that word allow It's just backs it up a step. If God allowed it, why did he allow it? If I allow children to play with matches and the house gets burned down, no one is going to just nod their head happily when I say I just allowed it to happen. What was I thinking allowing something like that?

To be honest, when the issue of evil arises I like to use the word "orchestrate." I think the word better represents what the Bible is saying and I like the imagery. When you have a conductor orchestrating a band or symphony or whatever he is giving direction and moving the music along exactly how he wants to. People are taking their cues from him, doing what he wants. The horns and strings are interacting, the drums come in on cue - even though the conductor is not the actual one playing the music.

In the same way, God is not the actual one doing these things, the instrumentalists are. Yet he is in charge nonetheless. That's the picture we see in the Bible.

Look at Job 42:7-9. This is the aftermath where God decides to bless Job at the end of his life and the very same issues come up. As you turn over there it's interesting to note that the entire argument of the book is that God is doing these things and these knuckleheads are all trying to figure out why. The whole book assumes God is doing these things. And God never contradicts that. **Read**

What's God say? Job spoke correctly. The others were foolish. And then, of course, the hammer is in **Vs. 11** where it says they comforted him for all the evil - or disaster - that the Lord had brought upon him.

Listen, this is the hard thing we need to hang on to: in an ultimate sense, God is responsible. And these are the truths we have to cling to even if they feel like they are in tension. God is not evil, but he uses evil things and evil people for his glory and he is still worthy of all glory and honor. And at the end of the day he takes the responsibility.

Romans 8:28: God is working - actively - all things for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

I want to make one devotional point here before we look at some other passages. There is something God calls Job in this passage 3 times: my servant. **Read 7-8**

God himself calls Job his servant! He actually calls Job his servant several times in chapters 1 and 2 as well as the trials go on. And the simple point I want to make is this: Wouldn't it be amazing if you knew that in the midst of your calamity God was up in heaven bragging on you, talking trash to Satan, and calling you his servant.

"That's my girl down there!!" She holds to her integrity! She speaks what is right about me. I could take away everything from her and she would still love me. Her love for me is not based on stuff. Her love for me is not based on happiness in this life. Or even people. Her love is based on my love for her and my care for her.

We see that same language in the parable of the Talents where God gives us talents - gifts or stations in life - and we just do the best we can with what we have and at the end the only commendation we're looking for is "Well done, good and faithful what? Servant." That's what we want to hear.

Now, with the time we have left, I want to show you that God being sovereign over evil is found cover to cover in the Bible. **Turn to Gen. 50:20.**

This is the end of the Joseph story. Remember his 11 brothers had sold Joseph into slavery because they were jealous of him. They had considered killing him because they hated him so much, but they decided to sell him instead and then lie to their father about what happened. Well, fast forward to the end and Joseph is ruling on the throne, Jacob has died and the brothers are worried that Joseph is going to punish them because now they have no protection from their father. **Read 15-21**

All that stuff you meant for evil: the lying, the murder, the stealing, the selling, the jealousy - God meant for God. The very same things that were in fact sin for the brothers, God meant and brought along for good. What good? The entire clan of Israel was spared. Joseph is a type of Jesus. All of his brothers plotted to kill him, and in a sense he was dead to them, but rose to power and saved their lives. God meant all of that - he orchestrated all of that - to spare them.

Turn to Prov. 16. If you want a chapter that will twist your brain, it's this chapter. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are mashed up in several verses and there's really no explanation as to how it all works. **Read 1, 4, 33**

There's nothing outside of God's control. The lot is cast into the lap? Lots were kind of like dice - the point of dice is that they are random. God says he controls the things we think are random.

Vs. 1 says even the answer on our tongue belongs to God. But it's **Vs. 4** that we're wrestling with. God has made the wicked for the day of trouble. He uses wicked people to bring forth even wicked things. Is he evil? Of course not. But he has made this.

Let me give you a few passages to jot down here. To look over.

Isa. 45:7 God says: I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity. I am the Lord who does all these things.

God creates calamity - the NIV says "disaster."
The word is just a catchall for "bad things" or "evil."

Lam. 3:37-38: Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?

Amos 3:6: Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it?

This is a paradox - two truths that are not contradictory, but we don't know how to fit them together. God's not bashful about these truths. And if we're honest, it really doesn't make sense that God would only be in control of good things and not bad things. Who determines what's good and bad? Was Joseph being sold into slavery bad? Was it good? Seems like it was both.

And in fact, these truths get to the very core of our salvation in Jesus Christ. **Turn to Acts 2:22-24.**

We need to understand that the most sinful act ever committed - the crucifixion of Jesus Christ - was planned and predetermined by God. It was not a back up plan. It was not something out of God's control or something he simply allowed. Everything about our salvation - including the most heinous part of it - was sovereignly orchestrated by God. **Read 2:22-24**

Here Peter says that Jesus was delivered up and crucified according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. Foreknowledge doesn't simply mean that God knew in advance. When you look up foreknowledge it's really a loving determination to do something.

This was God's plan. Does that eliminate the responsibility of the Jews who screamed for his murder or Pilate who ordered it or the soldiers who carried it out? Or us, who sinned in the first place to need it? Of course not. Both things are true.

Look at Acts 4:27-28. This is part of a prayer for boldness that the disciples are praying. The gospel is spreading and persecution is heating up. **Read**

Herod, Pilate, the Jews, the Gentiles all conspiring against Jesus but doing exactly what God had planned and predestined to take place.

Isa. 53:10 says it pleased the Lord to crush Him. It wasn't a back up plan or something God just figured out on the fly how to use in a good way.

Do you realize every aspect of our salvation revolves around a good and loving God purposely planning the most evil act ever to bring us to him and to bring him glory? This is how big our triune God is. He is not evil but he uses evil and endures evil for the sake of his glory and for the sake of our salvation.

And if Jesus himself endured such hatred and evil, don't think that somehow we will be exempt. We are no better than he. The way of God and Jesus is a way of humble suffering and difficulty. It's saying "God you are my all in all; you really are my everything and if you choose to take everything else and all I have is you that will be more than enough."

And we can endure everything to the glory of God because we know a day is coming when all that is wrong will be made right. All that is evil will be destroyed and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Every injustice will be made right. Every hardship will be calmed. And we will only know joy and peace and grace and love.

In the meantime, we bless the Lord - whether he gives or takes away.

Pray