

## Job 1:6-7 - Spirits, Sin, and Sovereignty

This morning we are wading into very deep water. And it's deep water on many levels.

There's the issue of spiritual warfare: how are we to understand God's role in calamity and Satan's role in calamity? Does God do evil or allow evil? How does this come about?

There's the issue of extreme suffering in the life of Job: we can get so caught up in the details of this chapter that we might overlook the bigger picture of this poor man suffering incredible loss. Is God just playing games with this man's life to make a point? Does God just play games with our lives to make a point?

Then there's the problem of evil. The problem of evil is basically this: how can God who is all-powerful, all knowing, and all good allow evil to exist? If you want the nerdy word this is called theodicy. How is God good and evil still exists?

I first heard about the problem of evil when I was in high school. There was a kid named Robert who claimed to have been a Christian at one time but rejected Christianity because of the problem of evil. He knew evil existed - all you have to do is read a newspaper to know that. But he couldn't accept the reality of a good God because of so much evil.

This is a common objection to Christianity and as Christians we need to have an answer.

The short answer is that God is so glorious and powerful that he can even use evil people to accomplish his purposes **and** he is still good and still worthy of worship **and** he will hold those very people he used to account for their sin.

The fact that evil exists doesn't put God's existence into question. In reality, a person can't objectively define good or evil apart from a divine lawgiver. You can't even call someone or something good or evil unless you have an objective standard. Atheists and agnostics and relativists have no ability to define good and evil.

If someone who denies the existence of God tells you something is wrong, politely ask them on what basis is it wrong? How do they decide what is good and evil?

Is it what society thinks? Because society changes. Is it what the government tells us? Because government changes. Is it what feels right? That's all subjective.

The only reason the so-called problem of evil exists is because God does in fact exist and as the divine law-giver there is a sense in which he's written his moral code on every person's heart. Unbelievers do actually know the difference between right and wrong - at least until their conscience is seared - and that's why there's the rub.

Romans 1 says they know there is a God. They know he exists. Romans 2 says they know right and wrong. But because their view of God is so limited they can't reconcile what little they know about God.

But much of the discussion about the problem of evil revolves around the spiritual world. We see the spiritual world meet the physical world in the very opening chapters of Genesis where Adam and Eve are tempted by the serpent. We see it again several chapters later when the sons of God take the daughters of men to themselves in marriage. There's a constant conflict happening in the spiritual world that is really on full display in the ministry of Jesus as he casts out tens of thousands of demons over the course of 3 years. And of course part of the grand finale of history is the beast, the man of sin and Satan being tossed into the Lake of Fire forever. Why is that such a victory? Because John says he had deceived the nations. He had influenced and blinded them. Whole nations. That's a lot of power.

When things go wrong on the world stage, who's at fault? When things go wrong in our lives, who's at fault? We will wrestle with the problem of evil proper next week, this morning though we need to lay some groundwork about spiritual beings and spiral activity.

So let's dive in. We're going to begin by talking about the spiritual world maybe in ways you haven't considered before. And we see a glimpse of that here in the first few verses. **Read 6-7**

So what in the world is going on here? Why are all these sons of God reporting for duty to God? Who are they, what are they doing?

What seems to be happening here is a meeting of what scholars often call the divine council. The divine council is a group of spiritual beings that God has created to help him rule over the spiritual world and they often influence the physical world.

And you might say, "Wait a minute: God needs help ruling the world?" The answer is no, God doesn't need help for anything. But it seems as though God has created at least some spiritual beings to help him rule the spiritual world in a similar way that he has created humans to rule over the physical world.

Remember when God created Adam and Eve he created them to be his image bearers: they were to have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen. 1:26).

Now, no one says "Wait a minute: God needs help ruling over the earth?" Of course not. God rules over all the earth but he has created men and women in his image specifically to have dominion over the planet. He shares his authority and delegates his authority to us and we are accountable to him. There are structures and systems as well as individual responsibilities we are all held accountable for.

Well, the best we can tell from the Bible, this is true in the spiritual world as well. God has created all kinds of spiritual beings with various jobs and descriptions and levels of authority.

**Eph. 6:12:** We do not wrestle against flesh and blood - so our primary battle in the world is not against people. What does Paul say? "But against rulers, against authorities, against cosmic powers over this present darkness, against spiritual forces in the heavenly places."

All we know from that passage is that there are different levels of authority and seemingly different stations of power that different spiritual beings hold. We'll flesh that out more in a few minutes but just know that just like there are people and systems of government and power in the physical world, it seems clear that that is the case in the spiritual world as well. And the spiritual realities in the heavenly realm are really often what animate the physical realities of our world.

Let me just pause and say that we all nod at that verse and then go on our way thinking that our real problem in the world is Trump or Biden or McConnell or Pelosi or Putin or Xi Jinping or whoever. Those are real people, of course, who make real decisions for which they will give an account. But really our concern should be with the spiritual world.

If you don't think there's demonic activity influencing what's happening on both sides of the isle in Washington D.C. or Olympia or downtown Spokane - I don't know what to tell you. The Bible makes it so clear that it doesn't even give a defense for it, it just simply describes it as it is.

**Look** over at **Psalm 82** - this is really an interesting Psalm. What we see here is that God takes his place in the divine council, which are these spiritual beings. And as we read it you'll notice it's hard to tell if God is talking about spiritual beings whom he calls gods or if he's talking about earthly rulers. **Read**

So first note that God has convened his divine council which seems to include all spiritual beings.

NIV: great assembly..."gods"

KJV: congregation of the mighty...gods

NASB: his own congregation...rulers (footnote)

This is where people get the phrasing divine council - because that's what it is. It's like a heavenly city council meeting. He even calls these spiritual beings gods, not as in divine beings but as in powerful spiritual rulers. Sometimes human rulers in the Bible are called gods in the sense that they have a lot of authority, not in the sense that they are actual deities.

But did you notice how he talks to them but then holds them accountable for injustice done on the earth?

**Read 2-3, 6-7**

What seems to be happening is that God is holding spiritual beings accountable for the wickedness going on on the earth. These sons of the Most High - or Job calls them sons of God - are actually spiritual beings that influence what really happens on earth. The weak and the poor and the fatherless are injured because of how these spiritual beings influence justice.

But then what's amazing is that at the very end the plea of the psalmist is for God to judge the earth. **Read 8**

Whatever is going on in the spiritual world is affecting the physical world, but he asks God to judge the earth for its wickedness. He wants judgment to come to rulers and authorities. And God will do that.

You remember Flip Wilson - the comedian back in the day who had the whole "devil made me do it" schtick? That we don't have to accept responsibility for our sin because apparently Satan made us do something? That's not true. The devil can influence us, tempt us, devour us, incite us against each other. Demons can have extraordinary power over peoples' lives and actions - just read through the gospels. But the reality is that God will hold both the devil and us responsible for our sin.

It's like when you've got 2 kids who are into trouble and one of them says "They told me to do it." Yea, they're both in trouble, aren't they? Apparently the devil did make Flip Wilson do some things because when he was 48 he was arrested for cocaine possession, oddly enough it was Flip who was arrested not Satan.

**Look back at 1 Kings 22.** This is one of my favorite OT stories. It's a crazy situation in the OT that almost mirrors what happened with Job. There's this divine council going on. And, we will see that the problem of evil is present here just like to was present in Job.

So this takes place long after David and Solomon. The Jews are divided between Israel in the north and Judah in the south and many times the 2 nations are at war with each other. But here, the 2 kings are aligned together. And both are pagans, they don't really worship Yahweh even though they give lip service to him.

So there's Jehoshaphat who is king of Judah in the south and wicked Ahab who is king of Israel in the north and they're talking about making a treaty and going to war together against the king of Syria. **Read 5-28**

Did you get all that? Micaiah had a vision of the heavenly council, all the spiritual beings presented before God and God needed someone to entice Ahab and demon steps up and says I'll make all his prophets lie to him. God says, Getter done. And it happens because God gives this spirit success.

This is an evil spirit that God is sovereign over and uses to accomplish his purpose of sending Ahab out to war so that he'll die.

**Side:** And I call them spiritual beings rather than angels because angel is just one type of spiritual being. There are seraphim and cherubim and at least one arch angel. Some look like people, some look like animals, some look like a hybrid of animals. There are some pretty crazy descriptions of these beings throughout the Bible that don't fit our little Precious Moments holiday statues idea of what spiritual beings look like.

In any case, they have real power to influence what happens on the earth. All these prophets are lying to Ahab because the success of this spirit. By the way, Ahab does die in the very next section.

Remember king Saul? **1 Sam. 16:14ff** says that the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him.

Remember the messenger angel in Daniel 10 who talks about having to battle the prince of Persia for 21 days until Michael, a chief prince helps him out so that he's not left alone with the kings of Persia? What in the world is going on out there?

When we see these spiritual forces explicitly at work in the Bible it often happens at the highest levels of power.

Remember when Satan tempts Jesus and says he'll give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus will just worship him? That's a legit offer because Satan has a vast measure of power over the world.

**Look** over at **Acts 13** for a moment. This section doesn't record spiritual forces explicitly. But it does talk about false prophets. False prophets are animated by demonic activity. There's usually some sort of spiritual force behind what they do.

In fact, God explicitly says in **Deut 13:1-12** that false prophets are sent by him to his people as a test to see whether they will truly follow the Lord. Those false prophets have the ability to do signs and wonders and miracles. Who do you think empowers those signs? Satan.

But look here - this is a false prophet at work in the highest ranks of government. This is literally stop number one on Paul and Barnabas's very first missionary journey. **Read 13:4-12**

So Paul and Barnabas go and somehow find themselves with Elymas - a false prophet who attended to Sergius Paulus. Sergius Paulus was a proconsul - basically equivalent to a modern day senator. And proconsuls back then often had, among their advisors, an astrologer. That's probably what Bar-Jesus was. And Paul blinds him, stripping him of all power and credibility. And Sergius Paulus comes to faith in Jesus!

This is like one of the good old-fashioned OT show down between the prophets. It's like Moses verses the Egyptian prophets or Elijah versus the prophets of Baal - just NT version. And who wins? Paul does. It's so astonishing that if this weren't from the Holy Spirit we'd think this was something from Harry Potter: Boom, you're blind!

Now, we've covered a lot of ground and barely made any headway into Job. But I think it's helpful for us to remember these spiritual realities exist and not just take them for granted.

So, I rarely do this, but let me give you just a few take-always from all of this.

1) A lot of what goes on around us - especially in places of political power - is because of spiritual activity, both good and bad. Job is attacked because of his godliness, but he's also a leader in Uz, he's a counselor and benefactor. His 3 friends talk about how he used to give advice and help others - people looked to him as a source of godly counsel as a civic leader.

The angel - or whoever - in Daniel says he opposed the prince of the Kingdom of Persia for 21 days. The good angel...cherubim...whoever won that battle! It's not always demonic activity that prevails. Sometimes good spiritual activity prevails. I don't want to get all This Present Darkness on you, but these are the simple realities that the Bible paints as no-brainers going on all around us all throughout history and all over the world.

2) We don't get into all sorts of weird practices casting out territorial spirits and trying to discern who's influenced by what spiritual force. Going on prayer walks casting out local demons, those sorts of things...the Bible never tells us to do that.

So if you have books on spiritual warfare by Neil T Anderson, Mark Brubeck, Thomas White, Rebecca brown, Fred Dickason, John Dawson...those kind of people, go throw them away. They are garbage. In fact, Frank Peretti who wrote This Present Darkness is a Pentecostal and influenced many of the practices of modern day spiritual warfare nonsense.

If you want a good book on true spiritual warfare read *Truth or Territory* by Jim Osman. He elaborates on how we are to faithfully approach spiritual warfare.

We don't go down the rabbit hole of weird practices, but we do preach the gospel.

3) Know that Jesus who loves us, died for us, keeps us and will one day glorify us, rules over the entire spiritual realm. **Turn to Col. 2.**

It's easy to get scared or superstitious about spiritual things. Or to dismiss them altogether.

But these spiritual realities do exist but we don't need to worry about them because Jesus rules over all of them. If you're a believer, look what Jesus has done for you. **Read 2:8-15**

Christ, who is God, is the head of all rule and authority. And he has disarmed the rulers and authorities that might thwart us. How? By trampling over them through his death and resurrection. Spiritual forces are powerful but they wield no true power over believers.

Satan is no longer deceiving the nations because the gospel is going out to all the nations. Jesus is building his church, the gospel is exploding, every rule and authority that opposes him is being torn down, and it's only a matter of time until the adversary who so long ago trashed Job's life, and often torments us, is thrown into the eternal lake of fire and our praise for our Savior goes on for eternity.

**Pray**