

If, in His Providence, God brings about everything that takes place, does He also stand behind the bad things that happen in the world? How are we to think of evil in the context of God’s Providence?

Account 1 – Genesis 37:2-13 + 18-28 + Genesis 45:4-8 + Genesis 50:19-20

- evil committed by human agents – brothers – hated (v.4,9), jealousy (v.11), conspired (v.18-20), cast into pit (v.23-4) - the Scriptures do not hide the extent of the evil that the brothers committed
- concurrence of brothers committing evil while God was the real orchestrator to bring Joseph to Egypt
  - yet God was not blamed for the brothers’ sins (50:20)
- result was towards a good purpose – preservation of many lives during the famine

Account 2 – 2 Samuel 24:1-4, 10-17 + 1 Chronicles 21:1-4, 7-8

- 2 Sam 24:1 - God stood behind David taking a census of the people out of anger
  - why was God angry against Israel in the first place? – unclear
  - why taking a census is sinful?
    - the sin was likely self-reliance and pride on numbers (self-glory) vs. glorifying God
    - clearly it was wrong, even Joab knew this was wrong (2 Sam. 24:3; 1 Chron. 21:3,6)
- 1 Chron. 21:1 – Satan was the one who incited David to sin
  - important to recognize that Satan has a real role in evil - to visit this in the Job passage
  - most likely, Satan was God’s agent in this case (as in all cases, since Satan is not an autonomous free agent outside of God’s sovereignty) in inciting David
  - and God clearly showed displeasure against the sin that has been committed (1 Chron. 21:7)
    - in all this, God was never blamed for any wrongdoing
- David’s culpability (2 Sam 24:10,17; 1 Chron. 21:8)
- God’s punishment of the sin with pestilence/disease
- the effects of one person’s sin/evil on the community (remember Achan’s sin in Joshua 7)
- David’s choice of pestilence, recognizing that
  - a. it is directly mediated by the angel of the Lord (1 Chron. 21:12)
  - b. the fact that the angel of the Lord (God Himself) is sovereignly merciful (2 Sam. 24:14), according to David’s understanding

Account 3 – Amos 3:6, 4:6-11 (Lamentations 3:37-39)

- God is sovereign even over “natural” events (even though “natural” causes may be elucidated)
- Amos recounts the history of God’s **punishment/judgment** against the Israelites’ rebellion
  - demonstration of His righteousness and justice
- God was never faulted/attributed wrongdoing in bringing about these disasters
- the purpose: on one hand is judgment, on the other hand is a **call to repentance**
  - note the repetition of the phrase “yet you did not return to me”
- \*caution\* - while saying that God does use natural disasters as punishment, it is certainly not up to us to decide whether this is the case with all disasters
  - eg. some have said that hurricane Katrina was God’s judgment on New Orleans – maybe, but not ours to pronounce; we do NOT sit in that judgment seat
  - the fact is that, apart from Christ, we’re all guilty and stand in the place of judgment
    - these disasters should be the occasion to call people to repentance

Account 4 – Jonah 1:1-16

- natural disasters brought on by God (v.4)
- God’s sovereignty as demonstrated in the outcome of the lot-casting (v.7)
- Jonah’s disobedience resulted in this particular punishment from God (v.10)

- effect of Jonah's sin on the disaster that befell others (v.10)
- even in disaster, God brings Himself glory by drawing the mariners to a knowledge of Him (v.6, 14-16)

#### Account 5 – Job 1:6-22, 2:1-10, 42:1-6

- Satan's involvement – under the jurisdiction of God and not "free" to do as he pleases
- ultimately God stands behind all of this (1:21, 2:10)
  - but God is not charged with wrongdoing (1:22)
- note that nowhere did God "felt that He was in the wrong" for what took place
  - God gave Job no explanation as to why all of this happened to him
  - He simply says that this is what happened and I brought it about
- Job admits that he did not fully understand the purposes of God
  - yet he recognizes that God is purposeful and His purposes cannot be thwarted (42:2)
  - he confessed that he really had no right to question the Almighty (43:3)

#### Select NT passages – James 1:13,16; Luke 13:1-5

- James passage – God is not tempted by evil, but we are; rather, God gives good and perfect gifts
- Luke passage – wakeup call to repentance

#### Overarching Principles & Responses

- while God does stand behind all that happens, He is not to be blamed for wrongdoing
  - in fact, God shows great displeasure against evil
  - we do not need to despair in the face of evil
    - know that God is WAY more displeased about evil than us – "He is on our side"
    - He does not stand aloof nor is He unaffected by the evil that happens in the world
      - He will bring judgment upon evil, and vindication for those who suffer
  - we need not "excuse" God as sovereign over even the evil that does happen
- we are responsible for our own sins/actions, and these have real consequences for both the self as well as the community, even if the effects are not blatantly obvious (they often may not be)
  - therefore, take serious responsibility for our actions/behaviours
  - flee from evil – it is real, it is to be avoided
- Satan is real and is an agent of evil, but works ONLY under the jurisdiction of God
  - Eph. 6:12 – we are at war not merely against flesh and blood, but spiritual powers
  - be aware (and on guard against) the reality of spiritual warfare (things are "more than meets the eye) and know how to overcome – Eph. 6:10-18
- however, in all things (good or evil), God accomplishes His good purposes
  - including call to repentance and to bring Himself glory
    - speak/act/live/pray to point people towards repentance and salvation in Christ
  - trust in God even in the most adverse of circumstances because He DOES have a good purpose – and this purpose is to draw us near to Himself, conform us to Christ
  - be assured that God's ultimate purposes (which are good) can never be thwarted
- discussion of God's Providence over evil must be circumscribed by God's attributes
  - God is good, and holy and great and loving...etc.
  - we may not understand the "hows" (eg. how is God still good if He incited David to sin?)
    - but we must stay within the boundaries of God's attributes in these discussions
  - reality is that God is beyond our full understanding – we can't understand him exhaustively
    - having a high view of God should compel us to worship and praise Him

Carson writes that there is an intrinsic asymmetry built into God's sovereignty: "The manner in which God stands behind evil and the manner in which he stands behind good are not precisely identical; for he is to be praised for the good, but not blamed for the evil."

## Contextual Considerations

- the Joseph account in Genesis 37-50
  - the storyline of Genesis shifts to focus on Jacob's sons, with special focus on Joseph
  - basically, Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers
  - however, Joseph's outstanding character and abilities led to His success in Egypt
  - through Joseph, God was able to preserve peoples' lives in the face of famine
  - eventually, Joseph and his family were joyfully reunited in Egypt
  
- David's census
  - one commentary says that it's simply hard to locate this account in its historical context of David's reign as recorded in 2 Samuel (ie, this account is not necessarily presented chronologically)
  - the parallel account in 1 Chronicles follows the development of the "Temple" theme
    - David's desire to build the temple for God, but Solomon, his son, will actually build it
    - materials acquired from David's military successes have been stored aside
    - now, we reach the account of the origins of the site of the Temple
  - Joab – David's military commander
  
- Amos
  - "minor" prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel
  - context of Israel at that time
    - injustice
    - growing chasm between the rich and the poor
    - ritualistic worship devoid of any true spiritual transformation
  - message was a call to righteousness – right living based on God's righteous laws
  - otherwise, judgment
  - Amos 3:2 - "you only have I known (by covenant).....therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities (ie, breaking the covenant)"
    - followed by a series of rhetorical questions that answer the question, "is there ever an effect without a cause?"
    - ie, Israel's judgment is inevitable; of course, there's a cause (Israel's sins)
  
- Jonah
  - God called Jonah to preach against the city of Nineveh (in Assyria) because of its evil
  - Jonah tried to turn the other way, but through a series of events (including the great fish), repented and did go to Nineveh to preach
  - the people actually repented but Jonah was angry
  
- Job
  - Job, a God-fearing man, was attacked by Satan under God's watch
  - followed by a lengthy conversation involving Job and his friends to discuss why this happened
  - finally, God reveals Himself to Job in a most sovereign way (ch. 38-42)
  
- Luke 13 – the passages surrounding this particular section have brought out the theme of the necessity to be "ready", to be "prepared", lest the final judgment comes and one is not ready
  
- James 1 – James begins his epistle with a discussion on trials and what are the purposes behind trials
  - this is to be distinguished against temptations which lead to sin