

Last time we talked about two sources of evil in the cosmos.

- ◆ These are the two sources of moral evil at play in the cosmos, a rebellious devil bent on destroying God's good purpose, and a fallen humanity with a now darkened, futile and foolish heart.
- ◆ Both parties wilfully rejected the overtures of their Creator's love and provision, exercised their creaturely freewill and introduced evil into the cosmos.

If these two terrible evils weren't dire enough to contend with, there is another frightful evil waiting for them outside the security of the Garden – “natural” evil.

- ◆ We saw how the two trees were used to present Adam and Eve with the possibility of choice so as to test their faith in God's providence.
- ◆ But there was another important aspect to these two special trees and that was, their choice would determine where they would live.
- ◆ If they chose the tree of life, they would have remained in the garden under God's care and protection, safe from both moral and natural evil.
- ◆ But now as they were being marched from the garden, they discovered they would live in a totally different landscape to the one they enjoyed in the garden.
- ◆ In keeping with their decision to determine for themselves what was good and what was evil, this new landscape would provide them with that ominous prospect.
- ◆ Dark forces in opposition to God ruled this landscape.
- ◆ And instead of having the comfort and security of faithfully relying on their Creator and Father, they would now have to rely on their own wits for survival.

Natural evil has been described as the dark side of God's good creation.

- ◆ It is the evil that comes from natural causes such as earthquakes, floods, volcanos, droughts, disease epidemics, birth defects, etc.
- ◆ They are part of the natural processes of the environment that originate independently of human motives or decisions.
- ◆ Modern science has made great strides in both explaining and countering some of the harmful effects of natural evil, but nevertheless, it remains a serious threat to the well being of the inhabitants of our planet.
- ◆ We have to be realistic and face the fact there is a structural evil inherent in nature as pain and destruction are part of the natural order.
- ◆ And again the question arises, as to the source of this “naturally” occurring evil.
- ◆ To attribute this source of evil to God, again seems so out of sync with His character.
- ◆ The Garden of Eden was more in sync with God's character.

Yet it is not just humans alone who suffer at the hands of nature.

- ◆ The animal kingdom is made up of both predators and prey.
- ◆ Survival of the fittest reigns in the animal kingdom.
- ◆ It seems Alfred Tennyson's memorial phrase, nature is “red in tooth and claw” reflects the reality of life in the wild.
- ◆ Yet this seems to have been the nature of things long before humans arrived on the planet.
- ◆ The fossil record reveals a pre-humanoid world of terrifying flesh-eating dinosaurs that roamed the earth millions of years ago devouring other creatures.
- ◆ Flesh-eating dinosaurs weren't the only threat as the fossil record reveals many came to a premature end through natural causes such as meteorites, volcanic activity, mud slides, earthquakes, tar pits and dramatic climate change.
- ◆ Even though the earth was “cursed” after the fall of man, this seems to be the existing state of affairs prior to the arrival of man on the scene (Genesis 3:17-19).
- ◆ To claim nature only started behaving in this hostile manner as a result of the fall, how then do we explain the paleontological record of a violent earth preceding the fall?
- ◆ To attribute this hostile and violent state of affairs to a benevolent omnipotent Creator who describes His creation as “good” is inconsistent with His character.
- ◆ Especially when He cares for the animal kingdom and commands us to do the same (Deuteronomy 25:4; Proverbs 12:10; 27:23; Jonah 4:9-11).

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- ◆ There seems to be a disconnect between the animals God created and brought to Adam to name and what we see in the world today, as the animals in the garden were originally vegetarian (Genesis 1:29-30).

So one has to ask the question, Are these menacing aspects part of God's original "good" creation, or has something interfered with these naturally occurring laws that have led to there now threatening state?

- ◆ Although when considered alone, nature is an impersonal force, the reality is scripture reveals it does not exist alone.
- ◆ Something has interfered with God's original good creation and made it the threatening place it is today.
- ◆ Just as there are invisible, supernatural, evil forces at work influencing human behaviour; scripture reveals these same evil forces to some degree exert their influence on nature itself.
- ◆ We have already identified a menacing force in opposition to God who is called both the "prince" and "god" of this age who exercises a significant degree of control over the affairs of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9).
- ◆ It should not be surprising then to see this cosmic "roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8) "red in tooth and claw" exercising a certain amount of authority over the natural order in much the same way humans have the ability to corrupt nature.
- ◆ We see this capacity over nature exercised when the magicians in Pharaoh's court were able to replicate the miracles and plagues of Moses and Aaron to a certain degree (Exodus 7:9-12, 19-22; 8:5-7, 16-19).
- ◆ In the Lord's testing of Job, we see the devil's capacity to inflict natural calamity on Job's possessions, family and his health, but again within God defined guidelines (Job 1:12-19; 2:3-7).
- ◆ Satan may be the prince and god of this world, but he is not God of the cosmos.
- ◆ Prior to Christ's return, the devil will use supernatural displays of power to deceive the wicked (2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 6:7-8).
- ◆ When the God of the cosmos became incarnate, He had no hesitation in attributing the source of disease and deformity to Satan and his demons, never to the natural features of His Father's creation (Mark 9:25; Luke 11:14; 13:11, 16; Acts 10:38).
- ◆ ***Acts 10:38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.***
- ◆ Although the following is speculative, it would seem to make a lot more sense to attribute the sinister qualities of nature to a powerful and rebellious spirit than a benevolent God of love, peace, order and perfection (2 Thessalonians 2:9).
- ◆ Attributing evil in nature to Satan and his demons may also explain the violent and hostile nature of the world prior to the arrival of man and the need for God to restore it in preparation for the creation of mankind (Genesis 1:1-3).
- ◆ As mentioned earlier, at some point in the prehistoric past, Satan and his angels unsuccessfully attempted to take over God's throne.
- ◆ In the ensuing cosmic battle, the devil was defeated and he and his demons were cast down to this earth.
- ◆ Exhibiting a menacing characteristic later described in the book of Revelation (Revelation 12:12-13), the devil, in a fit of rage, unleashed his significant power on God's good creation twisting and corrupting the laws of nature resulting in the perverted environment of the violent and hostile world of the dinosaurs.
- ◆ It was on this corrupt and deformed environment upon which the Spirit of God moved to restore God's good creation (Genesis 1:1).
- ◆ Things would have remained in this "good" state of the refashioned paradise had Adam and Eve chosen of the tree of life and remained in the garden under God's good provision and protection.
- ◆ However, as they had rejected reliance on their Creator and Father, and instead to be their own gods, choosing to rely on themselves to discover "the knowledge of good and evil," they now found themselves living their choice, one God was obligated to honour because of His decision to grant them freewill.
- ◆ By their rejection, they exposed both themselves and the earth to the same corrupting forces of evil that had perverted the previous age.
- ◆ Satan and his demons began to distort nature in much the same way they have perverted human nature.
- ◆ In a relatively short period of time we see the lifespan of humans significantly reduced, the animal kingdom again turning violent preying on the weak, and humans who were originally created to love God and

fellowman, now acting in self-interest and even resorting to deadly violence in order to get their way (Genesis 6:5).

- ◆ Living in this hostile environment was the curse mankind brought on itself for rejecting God's overtures of love.
- ◆ ***Genesis 3:17-19 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken for dust you are and to dust you will return."***
- ◆ We have lost an authority we were once given to rule over the animal kingdom and subjugate and protect the earth (Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:15).

But rather than being in a world completely under the control of Satan and his demons as appears to be the case in the pre-humanoid world, this new environment had to reflect both aspects of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and this is why our present earth is both a combination of both good and evil aspects.

- ◆ I am presently writing this part of the book on-board a cruise ship sailing through the spectacular Milford Sound in New Zealand enjoying the stunning natural beauty caused by massive earth shaking powers millions of years ago
- ◆ At the same time I am enjoying the beauty created by these massive earth shaking powers, Indonesians on the island of Java are frantically digging through the ruins of destroyed homes looking for loved ones buried by these same earth shaking powers.
- ◆ As mentioned earlier, just as there are good and bad aspects engineered into the moral universe, so it seems good and bad aspects are built into the natural world.
- ◆ God has left enough of His good creation in the world of nature to both inspire believers and confound the sceptics.
- ◆ Either way, both groups are left astounded by the beauty of nature and to wonder as to its origin.
- ◆ Jesus spoke of these two powers at work in the world in His parable of the "tares" or "weeds."
- ◆ ***Matthew 13:24-28 Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' ²⁸ "An enemy did this,' he replied.***
- ◆ The point of the parable is these abnormalities of nature should not be attributed to an all-powerful and benevolent Creator, but rather to "an enemy who has done this".
- ◆ Jesus, when confronted with deformities, sickness and disease during His earthly ministry considered them "unnatural" rather than natural and took the unusual step of "rebuking" them, rather than just healing them.
- ◆ It would seem strange for Him to rebuke something impersonal as nature unless there was something more sinister affecting it.
- ◆ In this parable we also see confirmation of the need to allow events to play out despite the evil as the owner of the property instructed the workers to allow the wheat and the weeds to grow together until harvest time.
- ◆ ***Matthew 13:28-29 "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' ²⁹ "No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'***
- ◆ There is a higher purpose at work than the elimination of evil at the present time as we discussed earlier.
- ◆ In order for there to be freedom of choice in this environment of good and evil there has to be viable alternatives.
- ◆ It also means it is necessary for God to maintain a certain arm's length relationship with His creation so they experience both good and evil as that is what we demanded.

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- ◆ So when people ask, “Where was God when tragedy strikes?” the answer is, “He would love to be there for us, but we have rejected Him and chosen to live life without Him!”
- ◆ This is not to say God does not reserve for Himself the right to intervene in both human and earthly affairs should He choose to do so, which He often does in order to further His purpose.
- ◆ Otherwise, Jesus’ advice to Christians to pray for our needs would be an ironic joke.
- ◆ Nevertheless, Christians are not insulated from the evils and sufferings of this world and there is no guarantee we will be given divine protection from them.
- ◆ In fact, both Jesus and Peter tell us to expect suffering, persecution and even death for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:11, 44; 16:24-25; 1 Peter 2:20-21).
- ◆ Experience confirms this to be the case. But regardless of what happens, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).

Before we leave this subject of natural evil we need to look at the part humans play in this evil as well

- ◆ In the same way both supernatural and human agents are responsible for moral evil, human agents too play their part in the natural sufferings that befall both the human and animal kingdoms.
- ◆ The first world’s refusal to share their abundant blessings to ease the suffering of the second and third world is proof of human complicity with evil.
- ◆ Drug companies for greed and profit refuse to share life-saving drugs with a sick and suffering humanity.
- ◆ Mining companies build inadequate tailing dams in the third world that sometimes burst and flood villages downstream with suffocating mud that kill hundreds.
- ◆ Developers build flimsy homes along beaches that are prone to hurricanes.
- ◆ Pollution and land clearing practices put many of the earth animal species at risk.
- ◆ Yet in many of these cases, instead of humans taking responsibility, God is blamed for these evils.
- ◆ If we cared for one another, the animal kingdom and the environment the way God intended, we would avoid much of the suffering that occurs from so called “natural” evil.

And while we are on the subject we should also avoid the mistaken claim made by some televangelists that suffering that occurs at the hands of nature is the result of divine punishment for some specific national sin.

- ◆ Jesus Himself denies certain “natural” evils were the result of divine punishment (Luke 13:4-5; John 9:1-4).
- ◆ Experience also tells us there is no discernible correlation between the amount of natural suffering a person or nation experiences and their degree of sinfulness.
- ◆ Disease and other natural disasters are indiscriminate in that they affect all peoples and all nations.
- ◆ There is enough moral and natural evil built into this carefully engineered environment of good and evil without God having to take additional steps of punishment in normal circumstances.
- ◆ However, there were exceptional cases where evil became so rampant where God did intervene to prevent total depravity from becoming a permanent feature (Genesis 6:5-7; 13:13; 18:20-21; 2 Peter 2:4-6).
- ◆ However, in these cases, supernatural forces of nature were used to annihilate the wicked, not naturally occurring ones.
- ◆ We need to be careful to whom we attribute the source of evil.