

# L LORD

## OF HEAVEN & EARTH:

*LESSONS ON THE NATURE AND CHARACTER  
OF THE GOD OF SCRIPTURE*

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## LORD OF HEAVEN & EARTH: Lesson Notes

**\*\*Class participants can prepare for each session by reading through the lesson notes and being prepared to discuss the Thought Questions in class\*\***

# LESSONS

## 1. TOTHEPRAISEOFHISGLORY

A lesson on Christian theology as a basis for praise to God

## 2. ETERNAL POWER & DIVINE NATURE

A lesson on the results and limitations of recognizing God in nature

## 3. MAKER OF HEAVEN & EARTH

A lesson on the identity of God revealed in the act of creation

## 4. HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

A lesson on the transcendent nature of God

## 5. THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

A lesson on the immanent character of God

## 6. HOW LONG, O LORD?

A lesson on God and the problem of evil

## 7. THE GOD OF ISRAEL

A lesson on the story of Yahweh, Israel, and the blessing of the world

## 8. GOD WITH US

A lesson on the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth

## 9. FATHER, SON & SPIRIT

A lesson on the Trinity revealed in salvation

## 10. ALPHA & OMEGA

A lesson on the God who makes all things new

# LORD OF HEAVEN & EARTH: Lesson Notes

## LESSON 6: HOW LONG, O LORD? – God’s and the Problem of Evil

- ❖ The Problem of Evil: How can a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and eternally loving tolerate the existence of evil (e.g. injustice, pain, death) in the world?
- ❖ Theodicy – any theory attempting to vindicate God from the existence of evil
  - from Gr. *theos* (God) and *dike* (judgement)
- ❖ Approaches to Theodicy
  - All theodicies inevitably deal with the complex issues of divine determinism and human free will. To some extent, any attempt to explain God’s permission of evil either sacrifices something about God’s power, or God’s love
  - ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY – God controls all things in the world. Any sense of human agency is reducible to the irrevocable determination of God. Hence, evil exists because God (for reasons only known to God) ordained it to exist.
  - SPIRITUAL GROWTH DEFENSE – God creates the world in such a way that evil exists for the purpose of human development. Humans are intentionally created incomplete, and only reach full spiritual maturity through the experience of pain. Thus, evil exists are part of the process of God’s redemption of human beings.
  - OPEN THEISM – reduces God’s omniscience to only the past and present. God is not able to see or determine the future, which comes about only through the free choices of human beings. Thus, it also reduces God’s power to the sphere of influence, rather than coercion. In many accounts, power by coercion is incompatible with God’s love. Thus, evil is entirely the responsibility of humans, and God cannot be held responsible, but nor can he ever finally and fully stop it.
  - FREE-WILL DEFENSE – all evil is the result of the misuse of human freedom to act against the will and purposes of God. God can still act in the world, but only by ‘secondary causes’ which are corrupted. Thus, God acts perfectly, but humans can distort his actions. Humans are responsible for moral evils, but it is unclear of the cause of ‘natural evils’ (e.g. earthquakes, hurricanes, diseases, etc.)
- ❖ God in the Whirlwind
  - The Book of Job is the most profound treatment of the Problem of Evil in Scripture. In it, God allows Job to suffer the loss of all of his family and livelihood. Job and his friends debate about the potential reasons why these tragedies have occurred. His friends insist Job has done something to deserve it, but Job maintains his righteousness.
  - In Job 38, Job eventually calls on God to answer for why he has suffered. However, God’s appearance in the whirlwind does not answer Job’s questions. Instead, God overwhelms Job with the complexity of the universe. The point of this is to say that God’s knowledge and purposes are above human comprehension.
  - The takeaway is that no theodicy works on its own. Attempts to answer ‘why’ God ultimately allows evil are unproductive and nonsense in God’s eyes. The proper response is to trust that God has his purposes, and will make all things right in the end.

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### ❖ Sin, Death & 'The Satan'

- If God must eventually overcome evil, he must overcome Sin, Death, and the dark powers of the world
- Sin – The Scriptural concept of sin acknowledges human freedom to act contrary to and deny God's will. The Hebrew term *khata* [kha-TAH] means to 'miss the mark,' which means to fail to live up to the goal of reflecting God's image into the world. The Greek terms *hamartia* [ha-mar-TEE-uh] is used by the Apostle Paul to describe an enslaving force who draws its power from people who fail to serve God (Rom. 6:8-11). Actions against God's will are manifestations of both senses of the term. Therefore, sin contributes to the corruption of the self and the world, and cause much of our pain and suffering.
- Death – Death is the height of human pain and suffering, and God's mandated outcome for sinful human nature (Rom. 6:23). Death, being the separation of life or spirit from the body, is an undoing of God's creation of human beings in Eden (Gen. 2). And death refers to the ongoing state of being 'non-living,' in which a person stays 'dead.'
- Satan & Demons – In Scripture, 'The Satan' (meaning 'the adversary') is a figure who deliberately opposes the purposes of God. He works to undermine the glory of God in the world by sowing hatred and division among humans. Other beings that have a similar purpose are demons, who are pictured as The Satan's subjects. Demons work on both personal and societal levels to exploit human selfishness and frailty to bring about sin and death. Although Scripture is not clear about why The Satan and Demons exist, there are hints that they may have been a member of God's Divine Council who rebelled against God (see Is. 14:12-14, Ez. 28:14-18, Gen. 6:1-4). It is important to see that these beings are fallen creatures, not co-divine beings who engage in an eternal struggle with God.

❖ The Problem of Evil is God's problem to solve, not just an argument against God. Only the Transcendent and Immanent God of Scripture can solve the problem and make all things right. This is the thrust of our belief in God's Salvation and Redemption of humankind and the world.

❖ In the face of present evil until God Scripture offers us his PROVIDENCE through a triple tradition of Lament, Remembrance, and Hope.

- Lament is a human call to God for rescue.
- Remembrance is the human reminder of God's saving actions for all his people.
- Hope is the human awaiting for God to appear to rescue us.

### ❖ In Praise of God

- Psalm 89 (esp. v. 49-52) / Psalm 22: 1-5

### ❖ Thought Questions

- Which of the four theodicy sketches seems to align most closely with God's response to Job when he questioned God's justice?
- In what ways is the biblical attitude of lament useful for Christians who are experiencing pain and suffering?
- What purpose does God's Providence (that is, that through his foreknowledge and power, he provides for the physical and spiritual benefits of humanity) have within God's solution to the problem of evil? Does providence have limitations?