

Evil & the Justice of God *by NT Wright*

WEEK 1: *Introduction — What is Evil?*

Discussion questions from *Evil* video

1. We can't honestly look at the world without realizing there is serious evil going on all the time. What are some specific instances of evil—whether political, social, natural or personal—that we see in the world around us?
2. In what ways do the “arrogance of modern life” and society's belief in progress fail to allow room for an honest assessment of evil and a genuine need for god?
3. How does labeling others as “evil” enable us to treat them as if they don't matter and even perpetrate injustice against them?
4. What steps can we take toward accepting that evil is not just “out there” in others, but in all of us as well?
5. “When people deny the humanity of others, they become evil themselves.” Explain what this statement means and how it happens.
6. What can we do to avoid being pulled along this evil pathway

Evil Is Still A Four-Letter Word: *The New Problem of Evil*

Overview Chapter 1

The scene is set for a Christian response to the Problem of evil by noting how the modern world looks at evil, how postmodernism has restated the problem of evil, what we must necessarily keep before our eyes if we are to truly approach the problem of evil, and how the church needs to approach the problem of evil.*

Important Points and Quotes

- The common modern view is that the world is a basically good place and that our problems can be solved by technology, education, and the spread of Western democracy.
- This view leads us to ignore evil until it hits home and to be surprised when it does, resulting in an immature response.
- The postmodern view of evil is dehumanizing because no one is to blame and therefore it allows for no redemption.

“These three elements—a willingness to concede that we may not have got democracy right, and that it may not be the universal panacea for all ills; a recognition of a depth-dimension to evil, a supra-personal element within it; and the acknowledgment that the line between good and evil runs through us all—are necessary, I suggest, if we are to make any headway with our understanding of evil, whether at a metaphysical, theological, political or personal level (39).”

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WEEK 2: *Old Testament Perspectives on Evil*

Discussion questions from *Evil* video

1. Why is it significant that the Bible doesn't give us a theory of evil, but rather tells us the story of evil and the actions God undertakes to deal with it?
2. How does this way of addressing the problem demonstrate a sensitivity to the way the progression of evil actually works?
3. Why might a God who had the power to act unilaterally (that is, by "waving a magic wand") to make the world right choose instead the messy, painful route of working from within his created order and allowing human free will to enter the picture?
4. What does this tell us about god and about the value of God's creation?
5. The people of Israel bore tremendous suffering throughout their existence as God's chosen ones. How is the suffering of God's people related to God's way of overcoming evil in the world?
6. In what sense might God's way of dealing with evil seem "backward" or even contradictory to us?
7. In the midst of their many years of oppression, the people of Israel began hoping for God to send a Messiah who would finally rescue them from evil and set the world right. In what ways did the prophet Isaiah transform this vision of a coming Messiah (see especially Isaiah 53)?
8. How does his vision shed light on the place of evil in the life of God's chosen people, and how does it serve to prepare the people of Israel for the coming of Jesus?

What Can God Do About Evil: *Unjust World, Just God?*

Overview Chapter 2

The stage is set for a Christian approach to the problem of evil by explaining how the Old Testament, in its overarching narrative scheme, approaches the problem of evil. Looking first of all at the universal problem of evil, as it affects all of mankind; then at how the chosen people, who were to be God's solution to the problem, became part of the problem; and, finally, at how the problem of evil is met within the lives of OT individuals.*

Important Points and Quotes

- The OT gives three descriptions of evil as a) dehumanization via idolatry b) what wicked people do c) the work of the devil
- God's plan is to renew the blessing of his good creation through Abraham.
- Evil led to abandoning knowledge of God (garden), resulting in human wickedness (flood), and human arrogance (Babel). In each instance God judges evil severely.
- God will contain and restrain evil as his plan unfolds.

“The Old Testament isn't written in order simply to ‘tell us about God’ in the abstract. It isn't designed primarily to provide information, to satisfy the inquiring mind. It's written to tell the story of what God has done, and will do about evil (45).”

“Somehow, in a way we are inclined to find offensive, God has to get his boots muddy and, it seems, to get his hands bloody, to put the world back to rights (59).”

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WEEK 3: *New Testament Perspectives on Evil*

Discussion questions from *Evil* video

1. Why is it important to read the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in the light of the story of the people of Israel?
2. What is the significance of the fact that Jesus, just like Israel, was led into the wilderness to face the power of evil?
3. In what specific ways was Jesus tempted to be the kind of Messiah that most of God's people were expecting?
4. What can we learn from Jesus' absolute refusal to use evil to defeat evil?
5. In what ways was the kingdom of god that Jesus proclaimed in his teaching different from the vision of God's kingdom that most Jews in Jesus' time held?
6. What are some of Jesus' specific teachings that would have sounded completely backward to them?
7. In what ways do these same ideas challenge the prevailing worldviews in our own time?
8. In what ways is evil defeated, and God's faithfulness to his people and to his whole creation fully demonstrated, by the cross of Jesus?

Evil and the Crucified God

Overview Chapter 3

Wright shows how the Gospels treat the problem of evil, by showing that they see all evil as climaxing at the cross. This allows him to propose what he sees as a richer theory of atonement, and a deeper understanding of evil, and what can be done about it today.*

Important Points and Quotes

- The Gospels speak of the political powers of the world at their arrogant height, of corruption within Israel itself, of the supra personal level of evil underneath these, of evil running through the disciples, all culminate to tell the story of the downward spiral of evil.
- The death of Jesus reveals all the forces of evil coming together to destroy creation.
- The early Christians believed and reported that Jesus's death and resurrection had overthrown evil.

“Evil is the force of anti-creation, anti-life, the force which opposes and seeks to deface and destroy God's good world of space, time and matter, and above all God's image-bearing human creatures(89).”

“The story the Gospels are trying to tell is a story in which evil and its deadly power are taken utterly seriously, over against the tendency in many quarters today to cling on to an older liberal idea that there wasn't much wrong with the world in the first place(90).”

“The call of the gospel is for the church to implement the victory of God in the world through suffering love(98).”

*Chapter overviews from philosohperdhaines.blogspot.com

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WEEK 4: *What Can We Do About Evil?*

Discussion questions from *Evil* video

1. In what ways did Jesus himself live out the kingdom ethic that he proclaimed to his followers?
2. How are we to live out his teachings—turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, loving our enemies—as his followers in our own turbulent world today?
3. What characterizes God’s “new world” that came into being at the resurrection of Jesus?
4. How are we to make sense of the tension between the continued existence of the old world full of sin and death and violence, and the unfolding of the new world full of hope and resurrection and life?
5. How has the Commission for truth and reconciliation in South Africa sought to put into practice the victory accomplished by Jesus at the cross?
6. What makes the approach of the Commission so unique in our world?
7. How does the model demonstrated by the Commission pose a challenge to the leaders of the United States, Britain and other nations who claim to operate on Christian values?
8. In what ways can we work toward reconciliation, forgiveness, justice and peace in different areas of our lives, whether in the political or social sphere or in our own churches and families?

Imagine There Is No Evil: *God's Promise of a World Set Free*

and

Deliver Us From Evil: *Forgiving Myself, Forgiving Others*

Overview Chapters 4-5

Suggestions are given how we can, as Christians, begin fixing a broken world that is drowning in all kinds of evil, in anticipation of that new world that will be without evil altogether. Several practical ways that this can be done in our societies, governments, and even our personal lives are offered. It's suggested that by implementing the particularly Christian notion of forgiveness, properly understood, we can give this broken world a taste of heaven, even as we suffer evils ourselves.*

Quotes

“The New Testament invites us, then, to imagine a new world as a beautiful, healing community; to envisage it as a world vibrant with life and energy, incorruptible, beyond the reach of death and decay; to hold it in our minds' eye as a world reborn, set free from the slavery of corruption, free to be truly what it was made to be(118).”

“I now want to suggest that part of the Christian task in the present is to anticipate this eschatology to borrow from God's future in order to change the way the things are in the present, to enjoy the taste of our eventual deliverance from evil by learning how to loose the bonds of evil in the present(147).”

“When we understand forgiveness, flowing from the work of Jesus and the Spirit, as the strange, powerful thing it really is, we begin to realize that God's forgiveness of us, and our forgiveness of others, is the knife that cuts the rope by which sin, anger, fear, recrimination and death are still attached to us. Evil will have nothing to say at the last, because the victory of the cross will be fully implemented(165).”