

“God’s Problem”: The Bible and Human Suffering

A Distinguished Scholar Seminar Featuring Bart D. Ehrman,
James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies

February 8-9, 2008 4:30 p.m., Friday, through 12:00 p.m., Saturday

One of Carolina’s most prominent scholars returns to Adventures in Ideas with another challenging topic – the problem of suffering as portrayed in the Bible. In this seminar, Professor Bart D. Ehrman will analyze what he calls “the varied and contradictory biblical explanations for why an all-powerful God allows us to suffer.”



The seminar will explore an array of fascinating questions, including but not limited to the following: If an all-knowing and ostensibly benevolent god is not responsible for war, disease, natural disasters, abuse, pain, and death, who’s to blame? How can a loving god permit the innocent to suffer? What does Scripture say about suffering and what does suffering have to do with divine purposes on Earth? What

does human suffering have to do with sin, redemption, and salvation? What does the Bible have to say about the Devil and human suffering? If the God of the Bible is powerless to prevent suffering, how can he be characterized as omnipotent? If, on the other hand, the Biblical God wants people to suffer, how can we characterize him as good? As we will see, sacred texts such as the Book of Job and Ecclesiastes not only offer different answers to such momentous questions, they often stand at odds with one another in their treatment of some of the most penetrating and significant problems of human existence.

Bart D. Ehrman is James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies. The author or editor of twenty books, he has published extensively in the fields of New Testament and Early Christianity. Professor Ehrman is also the winner of numerous teaching awards. His new book is entitled *God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question – Why We Suffer*.

Wayne Pond: This seminar like several others that Bart does evolved from a book that he is about to publish. *God’s Problem*. Here is a pre-pub: Tomorrow morning, we will have a table set up, many of Bart’s books on that table for you to purchase. I want to thank our sponsors. Mr. Ashley from the Herald Sun published our brochure. Investors’ Trust. Tony Pall Real Estate and Alumni Association. This program is indebted to Fearington Village, for the use of this barn, and their staff. I want to point them out. ...I want to recognize advisory

board members...I want to recognize Martha Rogers who came out from CA to hear Bart again. Guess she qualifies as a 'Bart groupie' now. We'll have dinner at 6, then 7:15-8:30 we will have the evening session. The rest of our spring seminars are listed in the folder. Many of them are already sold out. . At last count this is the 21st book, college level, anthologies, patristic writings, Greek/English classical library of the patristic fathers. Let's suffer together – here's Bart.

Friday 1st Session

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God: Suffering as Punishment

All right, thank you, Wayne, for that generous introduction. Thank you for coming, first time I have done this set of lectures so we will suffer through together. The book is coming out in 2 weeks. We hoped to have them available, but you can get it.

A topic I've had a longstanding interest in, how different authors of the Bible try to explain. At Rutgers, I was the low man and taught what they told me to teach. One semester I taught biblical views of suffering. I had a class of 30 students, they were bright, typical Rutgers not that different from UNC except they didn't grow up in the Bible Belt. But basically comparable to Chapel Hill, mid 1980's. They were in college to learn how to make a lot of money, not get educated, thought it would be easy and they could pad their GPA.

The students don't realize there is a problem. What's the problem with suffering? It made me shift gears. I had to convince them it is a problem. There was an Ethiopian family with a deplorable incident where hundreds of thousands died in famine, so I resorted to bringing in pictures of child on the mother's breast starving to death. After about 30 of these, they got the point that there is a problem, especially if you're talking about God. Why did God create this mess? An issue that the Bible is interested in. I will talk about different answers.

People heard I was writing this book and heard from news stories that it was a personal problem from me, I get emails every day from somebody giving me the answer. They understand I have a problem so it's as if I hadn't thought of that before! I've thought about it for well over 20 years.

The Term Theodicy: A Literally "God's (theos) justice (dike) [justice or righteousness

The problem of explaining how God can be just in view of the pain and suffering in the world. How can he be fair and just given all the suffering in the world?

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) came up with the term, 'theodicy.' Part of his explanation that people tell me, if you have free will you can do good or bad, and if you do bad, people will suffer.

The Problem of Suffering: How can all three that individually seem to be true all be true at the same time. The first is an affirmation in Western society most people agree that God is all loving, then he doesn't want people to suffer. You don't want friends and children to suffer. That is the first statement.

- **God is all loving (and so does not want people to suffer.)**
- **God is all-powerful and so is able to prevent suffering.** He is Lord of the universe, if he wants he can prevent suffering.
- **There is suffering.** Not too many want to deny that. There is suffering. How can this be? How to explain it? One way to solve it is to deny one of the three propositions.

Some would say God is not all-loving. Some say even he is demonic, if he created this mess, with famine, drought, war? That is one way.

A second way is to say he is not all powerful, what Rabbi Kushner says in his book when Bad things happen to Good People. Some of my students began to call it when Bad things happen to bad writers. If you trust him, he can't stop the suffering. It is a solution, but the problem is he relies on the Book of Job and that ain't the teaching of Job.

Some get around it by saying no such thing as suffering. Most who have had a toothache won't deny suffering. So how can all three be true at once?

When the class ended, I thought I would like to write about it but I was 30 and thought I was too young. A couple years ago, I thought about it, no you're still too young. You are always too young to write on this one. A lot happened in twenty years between teaching at Rutgers, some suffering in my personal life, witnessing lives of family friends, cancer, war, car accidents, birth defects, suicide. You can look back on your past twenty years and find it too. One of the things that happened to me I lost my faith. I was an evangelical Christian back then, felt that God was answering prayer and helping people who suffer. I no longer believe that. Ultimately the problem of suffering did me in. I read a lot of books, and researching this book, I read a lot of scholars, self-help books, some of these crazy little books from Christian bookstores that are simplistic – and they sell – I find them somewhat offensive because I take suffering seriously. For me, personally, I can no longer believe a God is active in this world, sovereign over it given the state of this world. If God answers prayer, where is he? I am not going to try to convert anybody to this point of view. Where is he, a child dies of starvation 720 an hour one every five seconds. By the time I'm up to dinner, 900 will have died. 7,000 people a day die of malaria. Also suffering in the past. It is flu season now but in 1918 influenza killed more Americans than all the wars

combined. Half a million Americans died, 30 million around the world, far more than WWI itself. In November 1985 when I was teaching a mudslide in Columbia that killed 30,000 people asleep in their houses. In comparison what happened in 2004 when the tsunami hit and 300,000 were killed. Katrina was awful but pales in comparison to what happened in Asia. Where is God in this? It led me to lose my Christian faith. I won't talk about that much but you need to know how it affected my life.

If one wants to talk about it, it is not possible to not talk about issues that bring it up, look at the Holocaust, took 6 million Jews and 5 million others just murdered. The people murdered taken off the train to the furnaces may have been better off than the ones that were not gassed, as we know from accounts of survivors. I will read a couple of chunks. The thing we think about are the killings of the holocaust, 3 million from Poland, 1-½ million from Russia, from Budapest 400,000. In Romania in Odessa, the city fell and 90,000 Jews killed. An SS detachment rounded them up, said that the Jews had declared the war, the grown-ups shot, the bodies set on fire, children that were still alive tossed into the flames. Second account from Nuremburg Trials, you can still read. A snippet a testimony by a polish woman, An Auschwitz detainee. She described the selection of some going to labor camps, women and children were usually taken for immediate death. She was interviewed,.. did you see them taken to the gas chambers? I could watch the tram, saw many brought, the tribunal is probably aware that women carrying children in their arms were sent in, children separated from their parents and led into gas chambers. The children were to be thrown in the oven without being asphyxiated with gas. Were they thrown in alive? Or killed by other means? They were thrown in while still alive. You could hear their cries. Any explanation has to explain screaming children. Genocides continue today.

Well, what does the Bible have to say about it? I call it “God’s problem” because in the Judeo Christian tradition, God wants people to love and worship him; that is why it is God’s problem. How can people worship a divine being? Most of you have worked this out for yourselves and I am not objecting. The biblical authors don’t give the explanations that you’d hear today; lots of different explanations in the Bible and some of them disagree with one another. Some can’t be reconciled with one another. So in this lecture I will be talking about a group of writers in the Hebrew bible known as the Prophets. There are the major and minor prophets. The view you get very common in the Bible, my contention – they were responding to the question why is there suffering? There were things just as great as we have today, yet they continued to believe in God.

Background to the Prophets: By going as far back as we can go in history of Ancient Israelites held to a belief they were chosen by God at a certain point in the past. They had once been enslaved in Egypt. A lot of stories in Genesis explain how that happened, then in Exodus they escape.

Exodus Events: They were being enslaved, God raised up Moses empowered to do miracles and so God saved them, the ten plagues, first child of every household will die. Moses says let my people go; they go to the Red Sea; Pharaoh chases them; the whole Charlton Heston deal – A terrific story. As a result they had a certain theology.

The Resulting Theology: Our God is on our side and is superior to other gods, the view of many ancient Israelites.

The Challenges of History: In all sorts of areas, over time it didn't look like God was intervening for his people any more – political, economic, social, and especially military problems. Many foreign opponents and they usually lost, if you trace it for a thousand years. Overrun by Assyrians, 150 years the Babylonians, 50 years by Persians, 200 years later the Greeks, then the Syrians, not surprising if you look at the geography. Anyone wants to control the Fertile Crescent, little Israel is caught in between, so they constantly went through. What happened to God protecting us?

The Prophetic response: About 800 BCE prophets came along with an explanation. I'll tell you in a nutshell, the prophetic explanation: God is your god, on your side, he will protect you, but you have sinned against him and he is going to punish him. Your suffering is a punishment for sin. If you return and keep Moses' law and stop oppressing your neighbor and do what he commands then the good times will roll and if not, things will get nasty. All of the prophets have this same message.

Crystal Ball Gazers or Proclaimers of God's Word to the Present?

The fundamentalists think it is predicting the future but they tell you exactly when they are prophesying, they had a word of God to people in their own time. Suffering comes to people of God as punishment for sin. It didn't die out with the Prophets. People now say "why me"? That presupposes a reason why you, what did I do to deserve this, which predisposes you are being treated as guilty. Then if you're suffering it is your punishment.

Suffering as a Punishment for Sin: The Prophet Amos

I like the other prophets but especially like the little book of Amos who was one of our earliest prophets, in the 8th century BCE, from the southern part of Israel but prophesying to the north because on the horizon was the potential of a military invasion. Israel was doing well, peace and prosperity. There are two separate countries, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Amos came from Judah but prophesying to the northern Israelites. If the Assyrians come through they will attack Israel first, he says there will be hell to pay if they don't get it together because God has punished other people for not doing right.

Amos starts going to countries around Judah and Israel, God is going to punish you. Israel says yeah he will nail those guys, in chapter 2 goes to not them but us. Transgressions of Judah...not kept the statutes...I will send a fire on Judah. Then he turns from Judah to Israel. They sell the poor for a pair of sandals. He is not going to revoke the punishment, especially for Israel and Judah, because they are the chosen people brought out of the land of Egypt. Amos insists they will be punished because they were chosen. One of my favorite chapters is chapter 3. 'You alone have I known among the families of the earth', followed by a string of rhetorical questions all answered by 'no' till you get to the end with the punch? For Amos the disaster will come from God himself. But the people were warned all along. Chapter 4:6, the most amazing verses in Poetic language. 'I gave you clean teeth (starvation) so you would come back; I withheld rain from you, yet you didn't return to me. I struck you with blight, laid waste your vineyards, a pestilence, killed your young men with the sword, yet you didn't return to me.' God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah 'yet you didn't return, thus I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God.' This is not a happy idea.

The Book of Proverbs: Not concerned about a prophet speaking to a particular situation, it is as different as you can get but has this idea that the reason people suffer is because God treats me. Chapter 3:33: The Lord's curse on the wicked, does not let the righteous go hungry. 13:21 misfortune for sinners but righteous are rewarded. If you suffer because you are wicked, and need to change. Why are Adam and Eve punished? Because they suffer. Why do they suffer, because they are punished.

Deuteronomy: Chapter 28 before entering Israel, Moses tells the children of Israel if you don't obey diligently all these curses will come on you. The Lord will make a pestilence, ...fiery heat...defeated before your enemies...your corpses food for the birds of the air...Many of my students cheer because "now that we are Christian' our God would not do that. But OT was not thrown out, it was kept, and it is not in the OT. Jesus' words say they are being punished: Matthew 5, sheep with eternal reward who did well, but the people who have not fed the hungry, clothed the naked, they are cast into eternal fire, will eternally burn.

Evaluation:

Positive: This view takes sin seriously. People who are condemned – is because they are exploiting oppressing hurting others. If people would stop sinning the world would be nicer.

And guilt: In our society the problem is getting rid of guilty, some don't realize that you feel guilty because you are guilty.

And Consequences. There are consequences that come back on your own head – that's all good.

Negative

It often blames the victim: If you are suffering, it is your fault.

It encourages false guilt: this can be horrible, as you know. A child is killed in an accident and you think God is punishing me for something I have done. It is false guilt and not true.

It can't be universalized: You can't say that all suffering comes because of sin. Is Donald Trump really the most righteous person on earth? It simply isn't true. If you are a Jew or Christian, you need to figure this out. When I teach at Chapel Hill, I never ever encourage them to change their beliefs. It is not my mission. I don't tell them my views until the end of the class. There is nothing harder to understand. It is often simply not true.

Questions

What if you took the view that God made you to be a problem solver so when you enter into the game of life you will face a lot of problems, your role is to try and help solve your problems or others? Is that a sane approach?

You are looking at your life as a gift in order to solve a problem. You try to help others and yourself in suffering. I absolutely believe in that. I am an agnostic but I do believe that is exactly what we ought to be doing. Why is there world poverty? There's far too much food in the world, so we have to figure it out. Malaria – thank God for the Gates Foundation! They might solve it. It still leaves me with the problem of God. Why couldn't the world have been created without malaria?

Do you know what Muslims say about God and suffering? No, I don't.

You mention plenty of food in the world and plenty of starving people -- isn't it man's decision not to bring them together. Why blame God for it?

If we have plenty of food, not fair to blame god. I agree with that. But why does there have to be starvation in the first place? Can't you create beings that don't need food? Today we are without excuse; there is no excuse. The problems are complex and very smart people have worked on it. Through most of history we couldn't solve it, for millions of years.

God didn't tell Hitler to kill the Jews: But of course, if you believe that God answers prayer he didn't seem to do it.

Do you think God is sad? No I don't think he exists. If he did, I think he'd be very sad indeed.

After creating everything realized that the resources were insufficient and had to create population control. Yeah, right, too many of us, so knock a few of us off. If he wanted to do that he could instantly kill us instead.

How do you account for innocent suffering? Children are a key. One of the things in my book and won't be able to deal with here, a very powerful passage in Brothers Karamazov, the Grand Inquisitor which in itself is very interesting. One of his characters tells a parable – if Christ came back, the organized church would kill him again, the church tells them what to do. Even more amazing the 2 chapters before the Grand Inquisitor, Ivan talking to his brother, talking about children suffering. He likens it to mathematicians you have two parallel lines that do not cross but in infinity they do cross. Ivan can't deny that, but refuses to accept it. It is like that for him with children suffering. If God from the last day comes up with an explanation, as to why he would make a world with this suffering, he still wouldn't accept it, just like he would not accept the two lines crossing, even if God says it. I myself think if God comes and tells me the answer as so many friendly people are trying to do, I will be the first to fall on my knees, but this is really worth reading.

If you could wave a wand and make the world pure Christianity, would that not be similar to pure communism, socialism, no private property, no possessions. We seem to accumulate a lot. He is saying wave a wand and ...wouldn't we have a communist state? Depends on what kind of Christianity you have – in the earliest they gave up their possessions, so maybe we'd all be Marxists. I decided to read all the atheist books. Sam Harris asked me to join the atheist project. Dawkins, the latest trinity. They are horrible books, they don't know anything about religion. Especially Sam Harris saying – all the violence due to religion. That is silly. You don't have to be much of a historian to remember Cambodia, Mao, Stalin.

I am just trying to thoroughly understand your position. Because there is suffering it turned you away from your Christianity, right? Yes. But you do believe there was a god? No. What happens, I turned from Christianity first, still thinking there was a God. I turned from God because of problem of suffering. I don't believe there was a creator. I think we are here as a result of matter, time, and change. My students are good church kids, never seen anything like me before. I don't teach this stuff in class. I am not making agnostics of all your children! I have informal office hours at a grill, 300 students in a class. When you give office hours nobody shows up. I go to the Armadillo Grill on Wednesday evening 5:30-6:30, you can come talk. Several times with students about evolution. I am surprised at how scientifically naïve. They think it is "just a theory." They get these crazy ideas with not much to support it. One incident with incredulous students, 'you believe in evolution...we came from lower form of primates'? Yeah, but I also think we came from rocks – that is a problem!

Why don't I label myself as atheist? I was on the Cobert report last year. He is very hard to interview with, he doesn't let you talk. He is so smart and quick, it is all about Steven Cobert. You go in thinking I don't want to get zinged. The night before I was on, I was watching it – a big mistake – this judge that wanted to put the Ten Commandments in his courtroom. Why is that? Because its the foundation of our society. Yes important for our ethics and laws. Cobert says, 'OK, list them.' The guy's eyes get real wide, do not kill, steal...this all he could do. I heard the phone and I memorized the Ten Commandments. I am on the Cobert report – a very odd introduction, introducing me as a theologian. We are talking about a book I had written. He says something about my belief. I said I am an agnostic. Isn't an agnostic an atheist without balls?

At the end of it, he was puzzled by this. He is very religious, a Roman Catholic who teaches Sunday school. He could not get a handle on me not being a believer. You don't believe the Bible was given by God? You used to believe? Yeah, that was back when I had balls.

So why don't I call myself an atheist says definitely, an agnostic says I don't know. In the face of our ignorance, I am just a mortal; if there is a god I don't think he is like the God I used to believe in. But if there is one, he is far beyond what we can imagine. After high school I went to Moody Bible Institute then to Wheaton College. I was a pastor in a Wheaton Baptist Church. When I was an Evangelical we said 'he is far beyond anything we can imagine and here is what he is like', listing the attributes of God. I really do think he is far beyond what we can imagine because I have no idea and neither do you.

If there is no god is anything possible? Do humans need God to live a civilized life? My greatest fear was it would lead me to an immoral life. What is the basis for moral life? A bogus life. I am as moral now, in some ways more so. Lots of reasons to live a moral life. This is it; this is all we have. We should live it as not a dress rehearsal for something else. We should help other people enjoy what they've got. I should grab all the gusto and help others do it too. If I have resources I should share with others.

How about the new trend toward more scientific ideas of cosmic ideas of big bang, stardust. I think I am done for now. Thank you.

Friday 2nd Session

Suffering Infused with Meaning: Redemptive Suffering in the Bible

This lecture I will have some time at the end. It will be a little more than an hour, then time for lots of questions. I will start on a down note, I am sorry to say, with some aspect of suffering we encounter – some of it ourselves, some what we know about the world. Some of what I came to know about that happened to somebody I knew who went through intense suffering before I knew him. I was

the pastor of the Princeton Baptist Church for a year. In high school I had a 'Born Again' experience. That is why I went to Moody, because I wanted to learn more about the faith. The person said, who led me to Christ, I would not go to Kansas University where I went for the debate team but go to Moody because I wanted to be serious about my faith. My first semester I took a NT class. I was 17 and I knew I wanted to teach NT... what I wanted to do with my life. That is generally a very bad idea at 17. My kids are 25 and 27 and still trying to figure it out and that is more normal. When I graduated I went to Wheaton in English Literature and Greek. I went out to Princeton where the degree was to become a minister. The guy was Presbyterian. They needed an interim and I substituted in, while I was teaching at Rutgers. So when the year was up they found a pastor. I wasn't sure I could be in ministry any more, still a believer but having doubts. If you don't have the conviction it is not a happy situation. But I wanted some kind of ministry, learned about the Lutheran Social Ministries instructing refugees, English as a second language. Marcet Nou was a Cambodian and he and his family more or less escaped from the killing fields of Cambodia. I don't know if you remember what happened to them in the 1960's. A genocide sponsored by Camir Rouge after the Americans pulled out. The war was going on in Viet Nam. A good deal of what was called "collateral damage" due to Americans killing Viets was killing Cambodians, probably 750,000 of them. After the war in 1975, civil unrest grew; Pol Poc took over. Another 150,000 Cambodians killed then the real nastiness began. They emptied out the capital area, taking the population in to rural areas into camps constructed as forced labor camps. The opposition was all killed, all protestors killed. Anyone known to be well educated was killed. Anyone known to wear glasses and potentially educated was killed, many others by starvation. They killed off 2 million people. Nearly half the population killed.

Marcet Nou had a wife, 2 kids, an amateur poet in Cambodia. He was intelligent. When Camir Rouge took over he destroyed his glasses, burned his books, got rid of everything. They were driven out and taken to forced labor camps and separated, his wife Sophie and 2 kids to one, and he to another. She had the worst of it, a tree nursery, had to work outside in every condition and sleep in standing water. He was in another slave-labor camp. When he reported it to me it was when the movie the Killing Fields came out. He escaped at night and got to her camp, found her and the kids miraculously and they got out into deep rural area. Their only hope was to go over the mountains to Thailand to a refugee camp where they stayed till the Lutheran Social Services picked them to come to Trenton NJ where I met him. He was in a cockroach-infested apartment in Trenton, which was paradise to him, working at a Duke Gardens. A very hard worker, a small community of them, he worked for them to make it. Made money to send back to people in the camp. It was nothing. I spent 3 hours a week with him and his wife to improve their English skills so they could go on with their lives. For months they did not talk about what happened.

For them I was on this pedestal, a demagogue professor, when we left NJ for the job in Chapel Hill, he took us for a traditional Cambodian meal, which he couldn't

afford. Kids in school, thriving, learning American slang, spoke without an accent. I had no idea about their lives.

But eventually they told me the story I just narrated to you. What kind of human beings do this to other human beings? The holocaust happened, we go to WA and to the museum and we say never again, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Sudan, we don't mean never again. Why do we bother to say it? Sam Harris, I respect him, but I think it is wrong to say religion is at fault for this. Pol Poc was a communist and it wasn't religion. You can't blame religion for everything. In Marcet's case the suffering was not for his sin; I just don't believe it. The world doesn't work that way, but much of the Bible says it does. A believer has to do something with that. You can't say I don't believe that part.

I hope you see I am not trashing religion. But if you are a religious person you need to be a thinking person. I don't care if Muslim, every religion requires it. Judeo-Christians have a serious problem with suffering. There are plenty of people who are smarter than me who know about these problems. My wife, Sarah, a professor of medieval English at Duke. She is off the chart smart – not like us other mortals – a different realm, scary smart. She went to Ash Wednesday and got the ashes on her forehead. She read my book and just rolled her eyes!

If you are a thinking person, I try to get my students to think. Why teach NT in the South if you are not a believer? If the goal is to get people to think, with people raised in Baptist church with firm commitments and know nothing about it. My wife teaches classes on Chaucer and doesn't need to challenge their presuppositions of the Miller's Tale. But with the NT, this is perfect! I am covering 4 options that I think are the most prominent.

Suffering Infused with Meaning: Redemptive Suffering in the Bible:

The killing fields of Cambodia: Is this a punishment for sin?

Redemptive purpose for suffering in the Bible where something good comes out of it for yourself or somebody else. (That is a major theme in both OT and NT, that something good can come out of suffering. This doesn't explain why you suffer, but in the Bible sometimes it is precisely so something good can come of it. No place is it illustrated better than in Genesis.

Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50): Sometimes God is at work behind the scenes and terrible things have salvific results. Awful suffering can lead to salvation. It may be familiar to some of you but I will review it for a few minutes. Joseph is one of the youngest sons of his father, Jacob, who has 12 sons. Joseph is the 2nd youngest and the favorite, Joseph with the Technicolor coat. Father gave him this coat. The Hebrew probably doesn't mean multicolor but long sleeves. Chapter 37 in Genesis – he and brothers have been out in the

fields harvesting wheat into sheaves. He tells them he had a dream, that the sheaves of his brothers stood up and bowed down before his sheaves. I don't think they like this dream. Then he says 'I had another dream, that the sun, moon, and 11 stars bowed down before me.' His father said you mean we are going to bow down before you? His brothers are ticked off. This creep needs to go, so it is arranged. They were together and they conspired to sell him into slavery. A caravan passing by. They had thrown him into a pit. They take the coat, blood of an animal spread on it taken to Jacob. 'Sorry, he is dead.' The caravan is going to Egypt and sold him into slavery. Potifer's wife tries to put the make on him, then screams rape when he runs. Potifer thinks he is trying to rape her, so more suffering – he is thrown into prison. He is empowered to interpret dreams. One fellow killed, one gets out of prison as predicted in the dreams. Pharaoh was told this fellow in jail can interpret. Seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine.

Joseph becomes Pharaoh's right-hand man. He becomes very prominent. It [famine] hits the Promised Land where his brothers are. They say there's food in Egypt and they come to beg for food, bowing down in front of Joseph. He puts them through the ringer a bit, after lots of in and outs, he reveals himself to them. They can't believe he is Pharaoh's right-hand man. They bring their families to Egypt where Joseph will provide, the preservation of the nation of Israel. Enslaved there, and this story was to tell how they got there. Joseph's brothers worried after the father died.

They get all nervous and fall down weeping, we are your slaves, do what you will. Joseph (50:19) says don't be afraid. Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, to preserve a people as he is doing today. This is what I call redemptive suffering. He is sold into slavery, thrown in prison and God brings some good from it. This is the kind of story you find in the Bible.

You see it in all kinds of passages.

David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12): In this story King David his descendant supposed to become the Messiah but he is a bit of a culprit. Nowhere more obvious than in the incident with Bathsheba. Sees this gorgeous woman bathing, she is brought over to the palace. They have sex and she gets pregnant. She is married and he is off at war for David. David arranges for a furlough for her husband, Uriah. He comes back, says to him 'go sleep with your wife.' I can't, we are at war, I can't do that while my colleagues are fighting. 'No, really, go sleep with your wife.' David feels his hands are tied. Writes the commander to attack the enemy full force, have everybody fall back but don't tell Uriah. He is left standing fighting an entire army and gets hacked to death, so David marries her and they cover up that she was pregnant before they married. Heller's book – he wrote the "Catch 22" book, another book on David and Bathsheba. God decides he should be punished.

The child is going to die – not very nice for the child. Reason people think suffering occurs is to ennoble us, make us appreciate our food. Somebody else dying to punish or reward you makes no sense to me. The child dies and David is very upset, but he gets Bathsheba pregnant again. The son is Solomon. Out of evil, something good comes, in the Davidic line and Jesus comes from the Solomonic line, something good out of something evil.

It shows up in the Hebrew Bible in Isaiah. Let me say a few things.

The Suffering Servant of Isaiah (Isaiah 53): about the same time as Amos, who prophesied like him, that people needed to repent, there would be huge problems if they didn't. After Isaiah died there continued to be people with similar messages. Assyrians destroyed the 10 tribes in the northern Israel. Jews trace their lineage from Judah, not the northern part. Assyrians wiped out the North in 721 BCE. 40 years later Babylonians attacked burned down the Temple, took people back to Babylon in 586 BCE. Jerusalem was wiped out, people taken into exile. They had prophets; one sounded a lot like Isaiah 150 years later. Later put in the same scroll as Isaiah, not indicating a different prophet, so actually it has the writing of 2 prophets, Isaiah 8th century BCE and another 6th century BCE and it turns out there's a third one.

2nd Isaiah now in 40-55 because these chapters were not written in the 8th century but a prophet in exile in the 6th century. He says now that you have been punished you will be restored. Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, says your God, speak tenderly ...her penalty has been paid. Unlike 1st Isaiah it is after they have suffered and he says that their suffering will end. It talks about the Suffering Servant of the Lord, who has suffered for sin. Because of his suffering God is going to save the people. Christians have taken it as a prophecy as to what would happen to Jesus, somebody tortured where good results came from it, he was crucified and rose from the dead. Jews resisted this because the Messiah is never mentioned. The Jews took the suffering servant as Israel. The language is graphic, sounds like an individual. Surely he has borne our infirmities...he was wounded for our transgressions... upon him was the punishment that makes us whole. That is why Christians have taken this, but within Judaism is that it is Judaism who is seen here. Isaiah 49:3 said to me 'you are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.' Israel is likened to the servant. Not salvation in the afterlife, but being restored into the present life, the Temple will be restored and Israel will become a sovereign state.

It was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When the early Christians started referring to him, they wrote the gospels with this passage in mind, so they make reference to it. To some extent, in this passage somebody or a group suffers for the sake of another and redemption comes. He suffers and leads to redemption of others. In early Christianity they believed Jesus suffered for the sake of others – suffering brings redemption.

Nowhere better seen than in Mark. Matthew was a favorite, so put at the beginning and John also so put at the end. Mark is my favorite because it is terse, very nuanced. It doesn't beat you over the head with its theology, a brilliant book in terms of its narrative, is quite striking. The portrayal of the death of Jesus --- too bad that Mel Gibson made that movie – for many reasons. He says he told it like the Bible did. He gets beaten to a bloody pulp for 20 minutes, then gets up again. His pain is your gain. The Gospel says, He was flogged. Nothing stopping them giving a blow by blow because it was not the point. They want you to know he suffered but not this kind of suffering pornography you get in Mel's movie. He wants suffering to have a redemptive purpose, but much more subtle.

Mark says Jesus was betrayed by one of his own, Judas Iscariot. Jesus handed over to the authorities. They find him guilty of blasphemy and put on trial. He says virtually nothing. Are you the king of the Jews? 'You say so.' He finds him guilty, they lead him out. Says nothing on the way. When they crucify him, on the cross no conversation, quiet to the very end. Then everybody has seen him, mocked him, the leaders, the robbers, the passerby's. His only words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And he dies. That is it. A powerful moment, filled with pathos. He feels forsaken by God, his countrymen, disciples, 2 criminals, authorities, roman and Jewish, and he says 'Why have you forsaken me?'

In Luke's Gospel, he isn't quiet on the way to crucifixion. He sees women, 'daughters don't weep for me but for yourselves,' more concerned for them than himself. Gets crucified, 'father forgive them they don't know what they are doing.' Hanging on the cross and has an intelligent conversation with the 2 thieves. 'Truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise.' He knows what is happening, what will happen after and he will wake up in paradise. Not 'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me.' He says, 'I commend my spirit into your hands.' They are smashed together, then you throw in the other 2 and get seven last words, he doesn't say any of it. What you have done is create your own gospel, unlike any NT gospel.

If we just look at Mark, he died forsaken by God. He died. Then what happens strikes the reader. The temple curtain rips in half, the centurion says 'surely he was the son of God.' Both important, the curtain divided the holy of holies from the rest of the temple where no one can go because God lives there. Once a year the priest could go in on Yom Kippur to sacrifice. Not available to normal people, but the curtain ripped so God is available to people. The centurion says he is son of God when nobody else knows who he is, disciples don't know what he's talking about, no one understand why he says he has to suffer. When it happens the centurion realizes he is the son of God in his suffering which brings salvation. Redemption comes out of suffering. Mark's teaching cannot be more clear; sometimes suffering brings to salvation.

How does one evaluate this? Sometimes suffering has a silver lining. I don't mean this to be trivial. When I was 16, I got hepatitis, playing 2nd base on an American Legion Team, we had a trip and then came home. That ended my baseball career, and was not pleasant. But I couldn't go outside or do anything. I have been on the debate team, maybe I will do research for debate. I was bored, so I did and got more and more interested. Pretty soon, lots of hours. The school year came, I got over hepatitis and I got better and better in debates. We won the regional and the state tournaments, ever since then I have been a workaholic. If it had not been for hepatitis I would not have become a scholar. My mom still can't believe it; only reason is because I got hepatitis. I'm glad I got hepatitis but it doesn't always happen that way.

Chapter 5 ending – in his new book: I don't believe that getting killed makes us stronger. It mars you for life, permanently, not take a glib view of suffering, and I most vehemently reject that somebody else's suffering is to help us, but I find it repulsive. Sure our own suffering may make us better people, but others don't suffer to make us better. To think others suffer diseases or starve so I can appreciate my good health or food. ...my own suffering may have something good to come out of it. A lot of suffering is not redemptive for anyone. The 86 year-old grandmother raped and killed, the 18 year-old killed on the way to the prom. There must be other answers to why we suffer. We'll look at those others tomorrow.

Bring it to modern day, 1947 the UN established Israel, a lot of people felt it was redemption for the Holocaust. He says a lot of people pointed out when Israel became a Sovereign State in 1948 a redemptive outcome of the Holocaust. I don't think anybody says the Holocaust was good.

Questions

I cannot remember the author, the 4 gospels were consolidated. How does the death of Jesus occur if you do that? The Diatesseran, he put it into one account. Where they contradict one another. The curtain rips after he dies, in Luke it rips before he dies. A guy I read when I was at Moody did this who was an evangelical, called it 'The life of Christ in stereo.' Truly you will deny me 3 times before the cock crows 2 times. Stories contradict so Peter denied Jesus 6 times, 3 times before the cock crowed...

The gospel writers are thinking of Isaiah 53 as fulfilling a prophecy ...what do you think Jesus saw his own role in light of Isaiah? My own view he didn't interpret himself in light of Isaiah. No Jew thought the Messiah would be crucified, he would be a great warrior not a crucified criminal. It didn't make sense to Jews. Christians had to go find suffering, he suffered and was raised from the dead. Jews say, no it doesn't have to do with Jesus. I think this is something after the crucifixion.

If you can't conflate them, what does a Christian do? Read Mark, get a theological lesson, Luke has a different theology, does not make it invalid. Let each have their own theology.

What about the Essenes emerging from there, so are there questions of whether John the Baptist or Jesus was Essene? The consensus is no. They were distinct thinking they had to be separate from Israel who was polluted, just the opposite of Jesus, he hung out with sinners. Christians got more from John the Baptist who said prepare for the judgment day, probably more where Christians came from.

How do Jews today interpret the Holocaust religiously? A wide range of interpretation. A lot of very fine reflective writings. Eli Wiesel, retranslated by his wife last year, a large number of writings. Another Levi, a different point of view, "If This Be a Man", very compelling.

Saturday 1st Session

So, this is a tricky topic. I used to think I had the perfect conversation stopper at a cocktail party, hanging around people you don't know drinking wine. What do you do? I teach at the university? What do you teach? NT. Dead silence, oh, that must be interesting. Now at the cocktail party, I am writing a book, it is on suffering. Hmm, hmm, what is your next book on? I get 2 responses when I tell people I'm doing a book on suffering, one is dead silence and one right off the bat will tell me what the answer is. Oh, the reason there is suffering is.... It is always because people have free will. The argument goes we would be robots and programmed so we couldn't really love God. That is a viable response. Another one not found much in the Bible. It does not focus on free will. You can support it if you look hard enough, the prophets get angry when people abuse others. Adam and Eve given a choice and they eat the fruit, so they suffer. There is free will but the Bible doesn't think of this option. It is a philosophical concept. We are thinking of computers and robots that do what they 're told. Ancient people did not have that in mind – they didn't know about automation. The "free will" answer is a good one. Nazi regime made full use of its free will.

But I think there are problems philosophically. One problem is most people have free will have an answer for suffering believe no suffering in the afterlife in heaven, but they also think it will not be robots in heaven. How can you resolve? It is possible to imagine a place where you don't suffer and are not a robot in the afterlife. It doesn't have to be this way because of free will is here. We create suffering because of our lack of understanding of the implications of free will, often out of ignorance of the problems we create. If we had more knowledge to perfect the world, we'd know we don't get there by oppressing people. We need more knowledge, like in heaven we will have full knowledge. If God could give us free will, why couldn't he give us full knowledge? The Bible has other answers for why there is suffering.

- Suffering is a punishment for people who sin – everybody sins, everybody suffers.
- According to the NT, death is the result of sin. Reason for that suffering is because of sin.
- A lot of current suffering is thought to be due to sin. Redemptive suffering is another.

The Last Word Belongs to God: Suffering in the Apocalyptic Tradition: I don't think we'll solve the problem of death, but other forms of suffering we can deal with, although many are far removed from us. Most of us try not to get too involved in it. Most of us don't give much thought to Malaria until the Gates Foundation was going to sponsor three grants to find a vaccine for it, which is spread by mosquitoes. It is almost completely preventable. The National Institute of Allergies and Infections estimates 900,000 children contract malaria every year. 2.7 million die of malaria every year; that is 300 people an hour, 5 every minute, so by the time I finish, 300 will have died. Most of us don't give a second thought and most of these fatalities are children. It doesn't seem that significant that African kids are dying. What if they were children from Chapel Hill? Then we might pay attention to it. You simply can't have a front page story about 7,000 people having died yesterday. It may eventually be solved with generous funding by Gates and others. It is like hydra, one finished and another surfaces that is just as severe, solve AIDS; then you have drinking water, which is a huge problem. We have bottled water delivered to our door and most of the world would be thrilled with our tap water. Global Water says there are one billion people in the world who do not have safe water to drink. Many are malnourished to begin with, and contaminated water with parasites weakens them further. They say 80% of childhood diseases affected by contaminated water. More than 25 people dying every minute of contaminated water.

While I watch a game, 3,000 people will die of contaminated water. These lectures are not intended to explain what we should be doing. There are others who could help devise solutions, but trying to get us to think about the problem, the problem of why – why at a deep philosophical level is there such pain? Not a scientific question, but a theological and religious question. How can we explain the suffering if the Bible is right and a good and loving God is in charge? Now I'll give you a fifteen second summary of this tradition.

In fact the suffering, whether mudslides or starvation: it is not the fault of humans, nor the fault of God, but evil forces that are unleashed causing suffering. That is the apocalyptic view.

Apocalyptic: From 'apocalypses' meaning an unveiling or uncovering. A common world-view among Jews around the time of the birth of Christianity. I want to talk about this world-view and how it is manifest in the NT. They thought

god had unveiled and revealed the secrets that made sense of this world, revealing the heavenly truths of this mundane world. They got explanations from God to explain things.

The Exodus Traditions: In some sense apocalyptic emerged when prophet solution was seen as no longer adequate. Not just the result of sin, so this view developed. The prophets rooted in the Exodus tradition. God had saved the Jews from slavery. God is in charge, God's on the side of the Israelites. Their suffering will be resolved because God is on their side.

The Prophetic Response: But circumstances disconfirmed those Exodus beliefs because there continued to be droughts, epidemics, warfare, starvation, lost battles, economic catastrophes, which disconfirmed that God will intervene. They said yes you are suffering because you've sinned and God is trying to get you to repent. If you repent, you will get better.

Failure of Prophecy: People returned to God, stopped oppressing people, trying to live righteously and suffering continued. They noted the righteous suffer just as, which makes no sense if the prophets are right. How do you make sense of it, why aren't the wicked suffering the most? It especially didn't make sense in Israel's history.

The Maccabean Revolt: A 40" sweep through 600 years. When Amos in 8th century BCE warning that Israel will be attacked by Assyria, and they did in 20 years. 150 years, the Temple was destroyed, put them in exile. 50 years later Persians wiped out the Babylonians. Then the Greeks in the 4th century destroyed the Persian Empire and took over. After Alexander the Great died, it fell in to the Syrians, the overlords over the Promised Land, 2nd century BCE, several kings. The worst was Antiochus Epiphanes who had control of the Promised Land. He believed that Greek culture that had been spread 150 years earlier was superior and wanted to bring Greek culture as the standard cultural norm, including Israel. He made it illegal for the Jews to follow their law. He made it illegal to keep festivals, the Sabbath, or to do circumcision of their boys, and had harsh penalties if these were violated. If a baby boy was circumcised, they'd kill the boy and hang him around the mother's neck and she was also killed. Penalties for doing what the Torah told Jews to do. They had to think about that. If the prophets were right that we suffer for our sins, now we suffer for doing what God told us to do. Maybe something else is going on with why there is suffering. Maybe it doesn't come from God, but from the enemies of God who are opposed to God, because they are siding with God. Maybe God relinquished the world temporarily and that is why there is so much suffering. Forces opposed to God who are in control and they are creating havoc.

Daniel 7: One place this appears early is in the Book of Daniel. The Book of Daniel is divided into two parts, the first 6 chapters the young Daniel in the lion's den, and other stories we hear in Vacation Bible School. The 2nd 6 chapters

records a number of visions that Daniel had, dreams, visions that are very mysterious and strange with an apocalyptic message. Scholars are reasonably certain it was not written by a person in 600 BCE. Very solid reasons to think it was written in 2nd BCE because half of it was written in Aramaic that became popular after Persia had taken over. It is a later language and strong data suggests that it was written during the Maccabean Revolt. He claims to be someone that was 400 years earlier – a very common motif in these books – allegedly written by someone earlier, so attributed to Isaiah, Abraham, one allegedly written by Adam. It was a literary style of these books where crazy things happening were foreseen by someone centuries earlier, the future history was revealed to them. Reason for doing this is hard to explain but these books lay out the course of history will transpire, how evil will be ascendant, so it looks like the various kingdoms are unfolding. The author knows they arose because he is writing after the fact, then goes on to claim of things that will happen and the reader is assured that because what he said happened, then this will happen too. The more detailed the closer it is in his own day. The kingdom of the South will marry off his daughter to the king of the North – this happened 10 years ago! What happens next is God will intervene and overthrow and set up a new kingdom! Wow, it will happen. These books are meant to comfort those who are suffering. God will overthrow evil. This is what happens in Daniel 7.

Daniel has a dream. It is a very bizarre dream while in Babylonian captivity. Four great beasts come up out of the sea, all different. The first like a lion with eagle's wings as he walked his wings plucked off, made to stand up like a human being coming out of the sea. A 2nd one like a bear raised up with 3 tusks, devouring bodies. A third one looked like a leopard...after this I saw a 4th beast. This one was terrifying as opposed to the others. Great iron teeth, stamping around what was left with its feet, coming up out of the sea. It had ten horns, then a little horn comes up and uproots the other horns. A mouth speaking arrogantly. Sees a throne in heaven with the Ancient of Days on the throne, as he watches flames are going out and a stream of fire, thousands serving him, ten thousand attendants, the books were open for judgment on the earth. As he watched he saw that one like a Son of Man came on clouds of heaven. The beasts were overthrown in a cosmic war. This one like a Son of Man was given dominion, an everlasting dominion that will never be destroyed. That was the end. He woke up and said he had a real serious headache.

As always happens, there's an angel standing by. What was that about? The beasts each represent a kingdom, after the 4th will be given to the Son of Man, to the Saints of the Most High. The one of the Son of Man represents a kingdom. The first beast is Babylonia, 2nd Media, 3rd Persia, 4th is Greece. It has ten horns, they represent the subsidiaries that came off the kingdom of Alexander the Great, the little horn again Antiochus Epiphanes. The kingship and dominion shall be given to the Holy Ones, an everlasting kingdom and all kingdoms will obey them. They come out of a realm that opposes God. Sea represents chaos that opposes God. By creating the sea out of chaos, God is in charge. The

beasts come out of there but the one that comes from heaven, and some thought this was the Messiah. But it represents the kingdom of Israel. Israel will survive and set up as the true kingdom on earth and all kingdoms will bow down to Israel.

I'd like to summarize this world-view, which is found in many apocalypses and later picked up by Christians.

The Tenets of Apocalypticism: Starting in 2nd century BCE, the prophetic solution was not working. There is no Bible yet but religious traditions and the Torah.

Dualism and Cosmic Views: It comes perhaps from eastern religions, two components of reality, forces of good and evil. God on one side; the Jews start thinking God has a personal opponent. In most of the Hebrew Bible you don't have the devil. The serpent that tempts Eve is not the devil but a snake, with legs and feet. At this time period, Jews start thinking 2 forces, God and the devil, each has powers aligned with him; God and angels, devil and demons. On God's side other powers, power of righteousness and the devil with the power of sin. Sin is a power that is trying to enslave you to do things that are wrong. Apocalyptic thinkers say people want to do what is right but 'what is stopping me? I can't stop myself.' I've heard people just can't control themselves. Death, and the power in the world is under the devil. Death isn't just dying, it is a power that is trying to get you, when it enslaves you, it kills you. This dualism is worked out.

Historical: A difference in the age we are in now and the age that is coming. The 4 wild beasts and the kingdom that will come, a perfect time will come. It is worked out between this age controlled by evil and the coming age, which will be controlled by good. We will not bring it in, but a cataclysmic break and the evil is overcome. A future good kingdom, both a cosmic and historical dualism.

Pessimism: they were not optimists because they thought evil was in charge, not the powers of good, so you can't improve your lot in this world. You might think by improving the welfare state, putting more teachers in class, more cops on the beat, but things will not get better. They will get worse. The ultimate powers things will get worse and worse till all hell breaks out.

Vindication: hell will break out, they think they are at the end of the age. There will be a break where God intervenes once and for all.

Judgment: God will overthrow what is wrong, he will send a Savior, whether human or Cosmic, like the Son of Man who overthrows evil and sets up God's kingdom. Those who side with evil will pay a price. Those siding with God, a theodicy, an ancient theodicy explaining how there is evil now and how it will be

resolved. At the end of the age, God will intervene. People who sided with God and suffered will be rewarded. Those who sided with evil and prospered will suffer. Your next-door neighbor --- they prosper because they side with the evil forces in this world. When God intervenes, the poor, oppressed will be exalted.

Resurrection: this is when Jews started believing in bodily resurrection. You can't side with evil, then die and get away with it. At the end, God will raise everyone bodily from the dead, and all will face judgment. Not a sweet thing you can do to prevent it. Before that you went to Sheol, a shadowy existence, or you ceased to exist.

Imminence: When will this happen? In fact, very soon. The final tenet is imminence – right around the corner – suffering is intense, it can't get any worse. 'Truly I tell you, some of you will not taste death until you see that the kingdom has come in power' (Mark 9:1). It will happen in your generation. Jesus is probably the most famous of all the Jewish Apocalypticists. He inherited it, the Pharisees, the Essenes, John the Baptist, and their followers. Go to any Christian Bookstore, it is not about Amos but what will happen in our future. Every generation thinks they are living at the end. You can trace this back. During WWII people thought Hitler was the antichrist. More recently Sadam was the antichrist. When I started teaching in 1980's the sign was the 666, the President of the university's name had 3 names with 6 letters. Our department phone number has 666 in it – Ah, there's the Beast!

The Kingdom of God: Jesus thought the Kingdom of God was soon the time has been fulfilled the kingdom of God is at hand. He's not talking about dying and going to heaven, but the kingdom will arrive on earth, uses an apocalyptic image. The time in the hourglass is almost over, the time has been fulfilled it is almost here.

The Coming of Son of Man: I don't think he thought he was the Son of Man, but layers added. He seems to talk about somebody else. Mark 8:38, 'If you are ashamed of me, the Son of Man will also be ashamed.' He seemed to be talking about someone else who would come in judgment.

Judgment: is coming. He gathers these fish, throws most of them away and keeps the good ones, many people destroyed and only a few enter the kingdom. Sheep and goats: sheep who loved God in the eternal kingdom. There will be a reversal of fortune. Those who profited will suffer and those who suffer now will be exalted.

Reversal of Fortunes: The first shall be last, the last will be first, those in power now will be taken down. Those oppressed will be rewarded.

The Need to Prepare: Trust that God will make it all right. Just as your parent does what is good for you, God will save you just as your parent tried to protect you.

Faith in God – like a good parent.

Love: you need to love your neighbor as much as yourself. If you're sick try to get yourself healed and try to help others. Treat others like yourself, clothe others, provide food, work for other people the way you work for yourself, the whole point of the law. Love of God and neighbor is the Torah in a nutshell. If you don't you will be judged.

The Kingdom Here and Now: He thought it had appeared already. Not a perfect kingdom but there will be a utopian result if you live now, a kingdom with no hunger, no loneliness, no illness; he heals now, no demons – he casts them out, you are to be implementing it right now. In Mark 4, a mustard seed turns into a huge bush. The reign of God will take over. Jesus was an apocalyptic thinker whose work became Christian.

Apostle Paul (1 Thessalonians 4-5): For Paul, Jesus had been raised from the dead and is going to come back in his own lifetime.

The Book of Revelation: All that is evil will be destroyed. A terrific book -- a lot of blood and gore -- the evil forces are taken down chapter-by-chapter, blow-by-blow, until the kingdom of God arrives at the end. The early Christians were apocalyptic.

Evaluation of apocalyptic perspective: The prophetic and apocalyptic are in contrast.

Positive: It takes suffering seriously. You can't blame God, not his fault, it is the forces of evil, beyond human power. We are helpless in the view of all this suffering. What will we do about starvation? Some things we can't control, the tsunami for example. So it is a very powerful way to look at the world. To accept it, you have to accept a mythological understanding of the world.

Negative: The mythological view of the world: You have to modify the mythological and then the view isn't recognizable any more.

The Pie in the sky: It could be seen as it will all be OK later.

Possibility of complacency and social inaction: If forces are too powerful and only God can do anything, then that may lead us to not do anything.

Questions:

How does liberation theology relate to a form of apocalyptic understanding? You could look at it a couple of ways. They look at it a bit differently, very intent on overcoming the suffering caused by people through political means. We need to oppose the oppressor and take political action now rather than thinking God will take care of it.

The Apocalypticists don't argue for action in the world, more create your own little community. Yeah, a very inward minded preserving your own little community. It can work out that way. I have friends who are very socially active and feel that God will overthrow evil, so we need to work for justice now.

This world-view implicates the negation of either tenet of either an all-loving or all-powerful God. He has allowed the world to wreak havoc. Yeah, you could read the apocalyptic as compromising but for reasons beyond our understanding, he temporarily relinquished control, holding on to the idea that he will solve it. But we are not sure why. Either Adam and Eve messed it up or Angels that fell from heaven.

Research on disasters developed in this country in small scale disasters people support one another, the problem in the current thinking we are trying to reproduce this on a world level. During the Cold War, sociological studies of disasters. Disasters hit and lead to formation, cohesion of small communities. The problem is what happens on worldwide level if it isn't localized? It is kind of hard to imagine with such immensity, such as nuclear war. The World Trade Center led to cohesion but what if there was a world-wide event?

Jesus did not see himself as the suffering servant or Son of Man. He is asking, if Jesus didn't see him as these, what motivated him to think he would be involved in this cataclysmic event at the end of the age? What led him to his actions that led to his own death? I deal with it in my book on the historical Jesus. I think Jesus understood himself as an apocalyptic prophet like others, and God would intervene in history. He thought distinctively that most of the Jewish leaders were on the wrong side, condemned them for participating in evil. I think he made his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, wanted to proclaim it during Passover, went into the Temple and overturned some tables and proclaimed this as symbolic of what God is going to do. The leaders didn't want Jesus to get many followers because they are the power players, preaching an incendiary message, so they took him out. I should say, there are a lot of books about the historical Jesus. Some scholars who are experts, but a lot of books that are not good. Ask yourself if the account of his life make sense of his death. He got crucified for insurgency. If his message didn't lead to those charges you haven't explained his life very well. Makes sense of why they killed him.

Saturday 2nd Session

The Mysteries of the Universe: Suffering as an Inexplicable Problem

OK, let's wrap this up. A couple of questions about the antichrist during coffee, the 666. Not the weight of my lecture. Scholars think they know what 666 is. We have the Roman alphabet and Arabic numerals but their system was just one. Numerals was by alphabet, Alpha, beta, ...iota is 10, the next letter 20, 30, till you get to 90...all the letters have a numerical equivalent. When the author says the number is 666 what is he is telling you the letters in his name you will know who he is talking about.; The 6 is number for humans, 7 the perfect number = God. Humanity at its worse, completely opposed to God, is 6-6-6. It is given as 6-1-6 in some manuscripts. As all apocalyptic texts the book of Revelation is not predicting our future. You can buy a hundred books, it is talking about Muslim fundamentalists, China is going to come in. If you go back 10 years, it was Saddam, and ten years before, it was the Soviet Union. You can always go back and they will say it is all being fulfilled. That whole interpretive enterprise is bogus. Revelation was written in the first century for Christians. The enemy was the Roman emperor, Nero. Some believed he would come back and wreak havoc. When you spell Nero's name in Hebrew it adds up to 666. But 2 ways to spell his name, the 'nun' (??) or without it. It is not George W.

I have enjoyed being with you. I like doing it, and I enjoy humor, but how funny can you be when you talk about suffering? Let me start out by talking about some more disasters.

In the last lecture we talked about the free-will argument that people use today. It can explain a lot of evil, the Holocaust, 9-11, sexism, racism, white-collar crime, government corruption. But one of the biggest problems is it leaves too much out of the equation, I ask whose free will causes tsunamis? Free will doesn't explain everything. I realized this at Rutgers. Prior to that I didn't pay too much attention to natural disasters. Natural disasters didn't affect me very much until one haunted me for weeks and months.

November 13th 1985 this volcano in Columbia, the mudslides wiped out 4 villages and all were killed in their sleep, mud rushed down suffocating people sleeping in their huts. More than 30,000 people and it stuck in my mind; alive one minute and dead the next. More than ten times the people on the World Trade Center. The latter has occupied our thoughts for several years since the terrorist attack, but the other disasters we barely remember, poor souls shouldn't live under a volcano. There are hundreds of thousands affected, injured, maimed, killed, unsettled, a hell on earth. The ones closer to home are of more concern. Hurricane Katrina we mourn and scratch our heads over the federal bureaucracy. We have no problem sending ships into the Persian Gulf. Why can't we spend money on our own Gulf? Reality is, we wish New Orleans would just get on with it. Levees were poorly constructed, surely people knew it would happen – again, blaming victims. As devastating as Katrina was, it pales in comparison to December 26, 2004, an earthquake in the Indian Ocean triggering tsunamis,

destroying towns and people across Indonesia. Best estimate is 300,000 were lost, not to mention others who were affected in tangible ways. People forced to pick up the pieces, but unable to scream at the Government for its inability to deal with it.

So it goes, one after another. As I say in my book, it is enough to make an apocalypticist out of you. One issue to look at: Do we want to blame God or the devil for natural disasters? There are human and natural disasters.

Suffering as an Inexplicable Problem:

Suffering as a Test:

Job (1-2, 42): Two answers for suffering because there are 2 parts... they were written by different authors with different views. My students don't believe it until I show them. They were in different times. The part people are most familiar with is the beginning and end, most are not familiar with the middle, chapters 3-41, by another author. The beginning and end, the familiar story of a very righteous man, so God has rewarded him abundantly, 7 sons, 3 daughters, many camels, oxen, donkeys, very many servants. The richest man of the East, a very pious man. Every morning he offers a sacrifice to atone for any unintentional sin.

One day God is in heaven and his council around, and the Satan appears. Judaism doesn't have a devil yet. Satan is not the supernatural cosmic force, the literal word is 'adversary,' one of the demigods in God's council. He brags to his council about how pious Job is. He is the devil's advocate; sure he's righteous, look at all you've given him. Take it away and he will curse you to your face. God says, I don't think so. Satan says he will. On a bet, the Satan takes everything away. Oxen and donkeys stolen, servants killed, sheep killed, camels raided and taken away, so all his possessions, destroyed or stolen. Then the sons and daughters celebrating a feast at the oldest brother's house, a wind comes and knocks them down and kills them. Job says, 'the Lord gave, the Lord took away, blessed be the name of the Lord.' He did not sin. If you slaughtered his children wouldn't that be wrong? But Job doesn't think God is wrong.

God has another meeting and the Satan is there. 'See, I told you, he's not going to curse me.' 'You haven't let me touch him, cause him some pain, then he'll curse you.' 'OK, do it, but spare his life.' He inflicts him with loathsome sores. Job sits upon the ashes and takes a piece of pottery and scrapes his sores. His wife, the sensible one, says, 'do you insist in your integrity? Curse god and die.' 'You speak as any foolish woman would speak.' He did not sin with his lips, refused to curse God.

Then the three friends show up, members of different tribes. They come to comfort and console Job. They don't recognize him. They do what friends should

do; they don't come and give advice or explain, they come and weep together. They sit with him for 7 days and nights.

The prose stops and poetry begins. Job's three friends tell why he is suffering, he was sinful and so he is suffering. This is why his friends think in the poetry he suffered, something dropped out of the prose story that picks up after 38 chapters in poetry. It resumes with God talking to one of the three friends; God is angry at what he has said, so Job is supposed to make an offering for his friend, a key part of the epilogue. God restores all his assets, twice as much as before. He blessed the latter days more, not 7,000 sheep but 14,000 sheep, again, 7 sons and 3 daughters. For me this is the most offensive verse in the Bible.

I can see doubling his blessing with more sheep and cattle but how do you restore 10 children who were brutally killed so God will win a bet with Satan. But it is OK because now he has 10 new kids. I find this quite offensive. The book ends with his beautiful daughters, Job died. A view of suffering seen in other parts of the Bible, sometimes suffering comes as a test.

Job (1-2, 42)

Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 21): Abraham has been promised a multitude of descendents like the stars from his own body; he will get Sarah pregnant, which strikes him as improbable because they are in their 90's. She has a child Isaac; he will be your heir. You will have descendants as many as stars. Then God says take him up as a sacrifice of his own son, the son of the promise. He has to obey. Abraham, takes his son, several servants, a donkey loaded with wood. Abraham leaves the servants with the donkey. 'Isaac and I will go up.' 'Father where is the animal?' 'Don't worry, God will provide' (knowing full well it is Isaac). He lays the wood around, reaches out with the knife, binds him, lays him on top of the wood, ready to plunge it, and the angels says 'stop! I know you will trust God'. Then he sees a lamb, which becomes the substitute for Isaac. This is a terrifying story, a horrible, powerful story of one who will sacrifice everything to the God who demands.

A very rich history of interpretation in Jewish and Christian tradition. In Jewish tradition, Sarah doesn't speak thereafter, so she was speechless till the end of her day. In Christian circles, the sacrifice was temporarily put off and God sacrificed his son, Jesus, for sin. In either one, and there are many more, Abraham is put to the test and the mental suffering just to see if he will be obedient, much like Job. His children and health are taken to see if he will curse God. So suffering sometimes comes as a test.

I don't find this view very helpful, but some people think it helps them. I think it has some ugly implications; does he really kill children to test us? It seems like a low view of God to me.

The Poetry of Job: Another answer in the book of Job, but in my favorite book, the book of Ecclesiastes. This idea of suffering as a test to see if you will continue to bless God, not found in the center section of 38 chapters of poetry. The poetry is thought to be a different author.

Genre: Several things make scholars think, a different genre; the beginning and end are folks tales. The middle is in poetry, poetic lines.

Names of Deity: Yahweh in Prose, a personal name.

El/Eloah/Shaddai in Poetry: El and Eloah are translated to something like 'God', Shaddai is the almighty. So whoever wrote the poetry has a different name for God. Views of Job are very different between the two:

Views of Job: Patient and silent versus impatient and denying

Views of Suffering: In the prose, suffering is a test. In the poetry, it is beyond our ability to understand. There is no answer.

In the poetry, friends are on the attack, blaming Job because he sinned. Three sets of dialogues: Job complains about his suffering and one responds, then he responds, and they go on where each friend has a speech. First cycle, it is repeated in 2nd and 3rd cycles. That is how the poetry is set up.

I will read you a bit to see what Job thinks versus his friends: 3:1, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. Verse 11, why didn't I die at birth? Why was I not buried like a stillborn? Job wishes he had never been born. Too much for his friend, Eliphaz, 'your words have supported people who were stumbling; it has to do with you and now you are impatient.' Verse 4:7: 'Who was innocent who perished? Those who sow trouble reap the same. Not the innocent who suffer. If you suffer, then you are guilty.' Well, some friends. Chapter 5:8: 'As for me I would seek God and to him commit my cause.' Verse 17: 'How happy is the one God reproves. Don't despise God's discipline. He will deliver you... your fault, you should be happy, come back to God and it will be fine.' Chapter 6, Job answers. Skip to verse 6:24: 'Teach me and I'll be silent, how did I go wrong? Is there any wrong on my tongue? If I've done some wrong wouldn't I know it?' Chapter 7:1: 'If I go to sleep won't be aware of and then you, God, terrify me with dreams. I loathe my life. I would not live forever. Let me alone.'

The 2nd friend – Bildad's responds: 'How long will you say these things? Does God pervert justice? If you will seek God, pure and upright, he will restore you.' Chapter 9: Job says, 'I know this is so; how can a mortal be just before

God? God will not turn back his anger.’ Verse 14: ‘Though I am innocent I can’t appeal.’ Verse 16: ‘He crushes me with a tempest, in a contest God is the strongest one. You can’t go to court with God, even if you’re innocent because he will make you complain, you are guilty.’ Verse 23: No umpire between us.

3rd friend – Zophar responds even more harshly. ‘You say you are pure in God’s sight; you should know God exacts less of you than you deserve.’ Job protests his innocence and his friends say he is guilty. He asks, ‘What makes you so righteous that I am suffering and you are not?’

Chapter 14:11-12: ‘As a river wastes, so a mortal will not be raised to be rewarded, your death is final.’ ... A powerful back and forth between Job and his accusers.

Job finally demands a presence with God. ‘At least I can profess my blamelessness.’ God doesn’t show up. A 4th friend, Elihu shows up. He is upset thinking the three friends haven’t made the case strong enough that the problem is Job; he has blown it, so God is punishing him. You would expect God would answer his question and explain why he is suffering, but he does not. He overwhelms him with his power, how can he... makes him grovel. Chapter 38, God answers him out of the whirlwind. ‘Gird up your loins like a man; where were you when the world was made? Who are you in comparison with me, that you can question me’ He goes on and on. ‘Is it your command that the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high?’ Chapter 40: The Lord said, ‘Who will contend with the Lord God Almighty. I am of small account; how shall I answer? I lay my hand on my mouth.’ He cannot question God, but God isn’t finished. Chapter 40:6, ‘Gird up your loins like a man; do you condemn me that you will be justified?’ God goes on for a chapter, then Job answers in chapter 42: ‘No purpose of yours can be thwarted. I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.’ He finally repents, one wonders for what? Repents of claiming his innocence? He was innocent. He was blameless, but God forces him to admit he is a mere mortal, so he repents.

This book ends there. A very striking portrayal. The idea seems to be that God doesn’t have to give an answer. You have no right to ask. ‘Why am I suffering?’ You have no right to ask. I am Almighty. The answer is no answer will be given. Some people find this satisfying. God is Almighty, he can do what he wants. Others wonder, does might make right? Can somebody powerful do what they want? What other standard do we have? Where do we get our standards, our sense of right and wrong, where did we get one? If killing children isn’t wrong, what is wrong?

Job’s problem: he holds to views like Amos, Proverbs, those who are righteous are rewarded, but it is clear it is not the righteous who are rewarded, but they suffer. Job shouldn’t be reading Proverbs. He should have been reading Ecclesiastes. I think it gives a more satisfying answer.

Book of Ecclesiastes: We are in the world a short time, that will be the end of the story and ultimately none of it matters. It doesn't matter what we accomplish, accumulate; you will die. Yes, leave an inheritance to my kids, they will die, and their children and you will not be remembered; your life will not matter. That is a pleasant idea. ...Someone claiming to be Solomon but written hundreds of years later.

'Vanity of vanities', the Hebrew word is *hebel*, the mist that disappears, here for a moment. It is not vanity like doing your make-up; it is transient. What do people gain? The sun rises and goes down, the wind blows round and round. What has been is what will be; what has been done, nothing new under the sun. It has already been in the past ages. People of long ago nor of people yet to come – will not be remembered.

Solomon tries to make meaning, accumulates wisdom. He indulges in pleasure, 'I am going to die what does it matter?' He accumulates possessions but will die and lose them. Accumulate wisdom but you die anyway. All days are full of pain and vexation; it is all vanity. This author does not think the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished; he sees that the opposite happens. 7:15 'In my vain life I have seen everything...We are mortal final beings and it will be over.'

It might lead one to extreme measures, but it is not a suicidal thought to this author. He thinks in fact since this is all there is, you should enjoy it for as long as you can. Nothing better than eat, drink, and benefit from your toil. Nothing better than to enjoy your work. 5:18 It is fitting to eat and drink for the few days God gives us. 8:15 'I commend enjoyment, nothing better under the sun.' You should enjoy it for as long as you have it, because this is all you have.

I tell students I am a Bible believer, I believe in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Some resonate with it; others find it disturbing. I find it somewhat liberating. This life is all there is, an occasion not for despair but a source of joy and dreams... A joy for the moment, dreams of making the world a better place both for ourselves and for others.

Making the place better means working to alleviate suffering and to bring hope. We can do more with the problems in the world to help them live, do more about poverty, unclean water; no reason for people to sleep on the street. No reason for villages dying of starvation, elderly don't have to go weeks without a visitor. A living wage, not just an idea of wide-eyed liberal college professors. We don't have to be bigots or racists. Make the world the most pleasing thing we can, love and be loved, cherish family, make money and spend money – the more the better –order out and order steak, drink beer, drive nice cars, make love, have babies. Do what we can; it is a gift, not with us for long. We should work hard to make the world pleasing for others, visit friend in the hospital, international relief

effort, voting for politicians concerned about problems. What we have is all there is.

In the end, I stake my final opinion. We may not know the whys and wherefores; just because we have no answer to suffering doesn't mean we can do nothing about it. That's it, thank you.

Questions

There will be a repeat of this program at the end of May. We encourage you to call and put your name on the waiting list for this seminar.

A comment the rabbis are concerned about the book, they reconcile ...[he didn't repeat...I missed this]

Two parts of Job were written, but when? The way they are typically dated, you look for reference to an external event. If you have reference to Babylonians destroying the Temple, but neither part has external events. The standard is the beginning and end was very early. Job is not an Israelite; it's a Mediterranean folk tale. The poetry plays out a different view, somebody, later poetry may be 2nd, 3rd, 4th century and put them together.

As I get older I struggle with labels. You describe yourself as an agnostic, but in your last comment you seem to describe yourself as a humanist. I am a humanist with respect to people and agnostic with respect to God. If he does exist he is beyond what we can imagine. Since I don't think God tells me how to behave I have to have other grounds to behave.

In the book of Job another explanation is where suffering is instruction from God. Yes, in Proverbs – kind of a parental discipline as a way of getting them to learn better the nature of the world, to teach them something. Yes, another biblical explanation.

Talking about Abraham and Isaac, in the Genesis passage it is the angel that stopped his hand. All these passages where the Angel of the Lord showed up, it is confusing if God or the angel. Even if it is the angel, clearly the representative.

Was Job written against the traditional wisdom literature? I think half right. Traditional, was Proverbs a connection between what you do and what you get. Job clearly is written against that position. What I don't think is right is that the three friends have different views, but basically the same point of view.

I was taught in Sunday School, the 7 sons lost are the same he is given back? That solves that problem!

One view of suffering is that it was entertainment; you're able to watch sinners in hell. Right, I did not mention that. I know you do get biblical authors that are happy with suffering. One, Psalm 137, 'By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept.' The last verse talks about how angry he is that the people who have destroyed Jerusalem, 'Blessed is he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rocks.'

Is it possible that the 3 kings parallel to the 3 friends of job? One problem we know, is Matthew doesn't say 3 *kings*, but *Wise Men* with 3 gifts. It is left ambiguous if one gift per person. Different traditions of the numbers.

Some of the evils people suffer now, like malaria, were not treatable in the past because the science was not there. At the same time the ability to kill the entire human race didn't exist. What is the relationship of science to the problem of evil? Science doesn't kill; it is the people who may misuse it.

In your study of scripture is it a culture of history that your view a human product, not a divine one? Yes, different points of view, different times; when you try to make it say one thing. They all need to be taken seriously but they don't say the same thing. It is liberating for me to see it as a collection of different points of view.

I'd like to make a comment. In the Bible it is the flood. God had the ability to flood. When I was at Moody, the question of the fossils was 'Tnicholasdeverehe devil put them there to confuse us'.

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