

A Brief Excursion on the Problem of Evil and Theodicy As Reflected within the Mosaical Penal System

Within God's oracles, from the beginning when law was enforced and grace shown to Adam and Eve, to the more prescriptive Law of Moses, to the ultimate answer found in the gospel, the Holy Spirit reveals what God has done, is doing, and will do about evil past, present, and in the future.

This includes God's Law given to Moses. In discussing penalties under Mosaical Law with the confines of Theodicy and the Problem of Evil, here is what we are attempting to ask and answer. Why are criminal acts punished? What does this mean?

1. God recognizes evil exists.
2. God hates evil because it hurts.
3. God exposes evil which is necessary to deal with evil.
4. God gave laws about good and evil to instruct.
5. God uses punishment to show concern to the victims.
6. God uses punishment to encourage all to good behavior.
7. God uses punishment to heal the broken perpetrator.

These last three points show why and how the Mosaical Law distributed consequential punishments. These lessons rightly imply the purposes of punishment are multilayered. That is a lesson I didn't understand years ago when taking a philosophy class wherein the professor asked us to debate whether prison was for the purpose of punishment, deterrent, or to restorative. If I had a better understanding of the Law of Moses, I would have answered all three.

1. Deterrent (Deut.19:20)
2. Retributive (lex talionis - Lev.24:19-21)
3. Protective for Family of Guilty against Revenge (Deut.24:16)
4. Protective for Families of the Victims against Revenge (Cities of Refuge – Joshua 20)
5. Protective against Accidents/Manslaughter (Cities of Refuge – Joshua 20)
6. Restorative (Recompense) for Victim (2 Sam.12:6) (this includes even a case we would today consider abhorrent and is used by atheists to show there is no good God - rape - Deut.22:25,28-29; Ex.22:16-17).
7. Restorative (Recompense) for Perpetrator.
 - a. There were no jails under Mosaical law. Instead, the perpetrator became a slave or servant.
8. Gospel Oriented (Jubilee - Lev.25:8-13)

Jails predated Moses's Law by half a century! So, they were known, as seen in the narrative of Joseph in Egypt. They became part of Israel's culture later as seen with

Ahab (1 Kings 22:27). The question we are raising here is how does no prisons yet temporary slavery help us see the righteousness of God?

1. Shows God's concern for Law.
2. Shows God's concern for the Victims.
3. Shows God's concern for the Perpetrators.

People were forced into slavery for a maximum of 7 years if they had nothing for repayment of debts/restitution/fines to pay for their debts/crimes (Ex.21:2). While enslaved, the poor or perpetrator could still live a normal life of getting married and having children, learn a trade, and learn how to function as a part of a "family." I wonder if this was part of God's intent – to teach family values by having those who ignore them become part of the dynamic of a working family.

God's laws through Moses are often seen as derivative from other man-made laws, and unduly harsh if given by a God who is good. While there are comparisons to other cultural expressions of penal codes, the differences are striking. Just two significant ones are:

1. As for social statuses, unlike other cultures, there were not different penalties based upon financial and social positions.
2. As for harshness, while an eye for an eye is harsh, other cultures were worse. Torture was prescribed and even those who were innocent were allowed to be punished such as if a man raped another man's wife, then he could in turn rape his wife.

This short exercise is not designed to answer all our questions. Instead, the purpose is to help us see God's answers to the questions being asked in those times.

<p>THE MOSAICAL JUDICIAL SYSTEM SHOW US A BETTER QUESTION NEEDS ASKING</p>
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Have you experienced the frustration of having someone answer a question you did not ask? Or, how about not answering the question you asked? Both are confounding to communication. When it comes to the Problem of Evil and Theodicy, are people today guilty of making one or both of those errors?

I proffer that the Biblical writers are not always interested in what we are, maddeningly so. Therefore, we often ask questions they never did, sometimes unreasonably demanding texts to meet expectations not originally written to meet. Modern intellectual snobbery presumes our questions are of a higher caliber; that's because we are scientifically, philosophically, and even (possibly) theologically more educated through the effects of the advances of time. "We stand on the shoulders of giants"; but it is a mistake to not consider what those "giants" considered. I strongly suggest we become more interested in the questions asked and answered in the Bible, maybe even beyond

ours. We need to ask, "Are we asking the right questions?" Or possibly, "Are we asking worse questions?"

How does studying the Judicial system within the Mosaical Law help us ask the right question?

Why God allows evil in the world is asked by many. Is this a question asked by the Biblical writers? If asked via inspiration, then it is infrequently so and not thoroughly answered. For example, the experiment Job endured ended (for us) on a confusing note because we were expecting explanations. That is how "I" would have written the book. That apparently was not the purpose of Job, however. Therefore, we cannot put our expectations above the inspired writers.

However, one question apparently on the minds of many writers and characters is, "What is God doing about the evil in the world?" The Mosaical Judicial System shows God was not ignoring it. But there is a greater answer.

To that question there are many answers, ultimately the final answer is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ which culminates according to Romans 8 in the redemption of souls, bodies, and the removal of the curses this world suffers because of sin. What is God doing about evil is the right question, biblically.

I will close with one more observation. Could it be the modern question asking why God allows evil is inferior in one respect to the better and higher question what God is doing about evil? Think about it. If able to understand why God in his infinite wisdom and goodness permits evil to exist, what have we gain? Trust me when I say I would be awed to have this answer. But what have we gained?

Now contrast that to asking and understanding what God is doing about evil, whether within a nation or a single person. What have we gained?

The difference between the two is this. Knowing why leads to a theoretical satisfaction or dissatisfaction. It leads us to areas beyond our ability to properly process which is why dissatisfaction leads to discrediting God as being good. However, knowing what God is doing about evil leads to a practical response; and that leads to seeing God's goodness.

Who knows, maybe we should ask this one last question: Can seeing what God is doing about evil in this world lead us to a better understanding of why? That is one hope I have in struggling with this difficult topic.

In the meantime, what we do know is what God is doing about evil in the world, which is evil within me. That is why the gospel is the answer ultimately to the problem of evil.