

## **Summary of God and Evil, Episode 7**

### **Why Does God Allow Suffering? | Greed & Self-Centeredness | Emanuel Swedenborg | Is Everyone a Child of God? The Key to World Peace**

—God doesn't want war, but can't prevent it at times if people are really pushing for it.

—Human beings are afflicted by the love of dominating others and the love of possessing the wealth of others.

—Only God can lead us out of this, and he can only do it if we understand how destructive these tendencies are, and want to be led out of them.

—If evil were never allowed to be expressed, it would spread like an infection and lead to much worse outcomes.

—God is working to rid the world of evil but has to do it gradually because our spirits are complex systems that wouldn't survive an abrupt change.

#### **Reflection questions:**

Do you see ways that the state of the world, and humanity, are better than in past centuries and millennia?

Can you think of examples when greater awareness of atrocities and abuse led to stronger efforts against those kinds of things?

#### **Extra book resource**

My Descent Into Death and the Message of Love That Brought Me Back, by Howard Storm

#### **Related videos to check out on YouTube**

The Meaning of Noah and the Flood - Swedenborg and Life

Why Bad Things Happen - Swedenborg and Life

#### **Quotes from this lesson in fuller context:**

##### **Divine Providence 251**

People who worship themselves and the world justify their rejection of divine providence as well when they think that wars are permitted, in which so many people are killed and their wealth plundered. It is not because of divine providence that wars happen, because wars are inseparable from murder, plunder, violence, cruelty, and other appalling evils that are diametrically opposed to Christian caring. However, it is absolutely necessary that they be permitted, because since the earliest people, the times meant by Adam and his wife (see 241 above), our life's love has become basically a love of controlling others, ultimately everyone, and of gaining possession of the world's wealth, ultimately all of it. These two loves cannot be kept in chains as long as it is the intent of divine providence that we act freely and rationally, as already explained in [71-97](#) [71-99]. There is also the fact that if it were not for this permission, the Lord could not lead us out of our evil, so we could not be reformed and saved. That is, unless evils were allowed to surface, we would not see them and therefore would not admit to them; so we could not be induced to resist them. That is why evils cannot be suppressed by some exercise of divine providence. If they were, they would stay closed in, and like the diseases called cancer and gangrene, would spread and devour everything that is alive and human.

[2] From birth, each of us is like a little hell in constant conflict with heaven. The Lord cannot rescue any of us from our hell unless we see that we are in it and want to be rescued. This cannot happen unless there are instances of permission that are caused by laws of divine providence.

This is why there are lesser and greater wars, the lesser ones between property owners and their neighbors and the greater ones between the rulers of nations and their neighbors. The only difference between the lesser and the greater ones is that the lesser ones are limited by national laws and the greater ones by international laws. There is also the fact that in both cases the participants want to violate the laws, and that the lesser ones cannot, but the greater ones can, though still not beyond the bounds of possibility.

[3] There are several reasons hidden in the treasury of divine wisdom why the greater wars, with all their inevitable murder, plunder, violence, and cruelty, are not suppressed by the Lord, acting on the monarchs and leaders, either at the outset or while the wars are in progress. They are suppressed only at the end, when the power of one side or the other has become so weak that there is a threat of extinction. Some of these reasons have been revealed to me, and one of them is that all wars, regardless of the civil issues involved, portray states of the church in heaven and are corresponding images. This was true of all the wars described in the Word, and it is true of all wars today. The wars described in the Word are the ones the Israelites waged with various nations such as the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Philistines, the Syrians, the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and the Assyrians. When the Israelites, portraying the church, departed from their precepts and laws and fell into the evils meant by these nations (each of the nations the Israelites went to war with portrayed some particular kind of evil), then they were punished by that nation. For example, when they profaned the holy practices of the church by committing gross idolatry they were punished by the Assyrians and Chaldeans, because Assyria and Chaldea stand for the profanation of what is holy. For the meaning of the wars with the Philistines, see [Teachings for the New Jerusalem on Faith 50-54](#) [[Teachings for the New Jerusalem on Faith 49-54](#)].

[4] Wars in our own times, wherever they occur, portray the same kind of things. Everything that happens in this physical world is in response to something that is happening in the spiritual world, and everything spiritual involves the church. In this world, no one knows what countries in Christendom are the equivalents of the Moabites and the Ammonites, the Syrians and the Philistines, the Chaldeans and the Assyrians, and the other nations against whom the Israelites waged war, but their equivalents do exist.

We in this physical world are absolutely incapable of seeing what the quality of the earthly church is, and which are the particular evils it has given way to, for which it is suffering the punishments of war. This is because all that show in this world are outward matters that do not constitute the church. We can see them in the spiritual world, though, where the inner realities are visible that the real church is concerned with. All the people there form alliances in keeping with their states. Their conflicts in the spiritual world correspond to our wars; and both are correspondingly governed by the Lord according to his divine providence.

[5] Spiritual-minded people realize that the Lord is governing wars in this world by his divine providence, but materialists do not, except when a holiday is declared because of a victory. Then they may get down on their knees and thank God for giving them victory; and they may have said a few prayerful words before the battle began. When they come to their own senses, though, they credit the victory either to their leader's skill or to some decision or event in the

middle of the battle, something that they did not think about at the time, but that led to the victory.

[6] On the fact that divine providence, called "luck," is at work in even the smallest, most trivial details, see 212 above. If you recognize divine providence in these matters, you must surely recognize it in affairs of war. In everyday language, we refer to a war's progress and serendipitous events as "the fortunes of war." This is divine providence, especially in the decisions and planning of the leaders, even if at the time and afterwards they attribute everything to their own prudence. But they may do this if they want to, since they are in complete freedom to think in favor of divine providence or against it, in favor of God or against him. However, they might know that no trace of their decisions or planning comes from themselves. It all comes either from heaven or from hell--from hell by permission, and from heaven by providence.

### **Divine Providence 252**

People who worship themselves and the world justify their rejection of divine providence when they base their thinking on the observation that victories come to the prudent side and sometimes not to the just side. It does not matter, either, whether an officer is a person of integrity or not. The reason it seems as though victories come to the prudent side and sometimes not to the just side is that we judge by appearances. We lean toward one side rather than the other, and we justify the side we prefer by rationalizations. Then too, people do not know that the rightness of a cause is spiritual in heaven and earthly in this world, as has just been explained, and that these two levels are united by a connection between things past and things to come, a connection known only to the Lord.

[2] The reason it makes no difference whether the leader is a person of integrity or not is the same as the reason argued in 250, namely, that evil people are just as useful as good people and because of their fire are more avid than good people. This is true especially in wars because evil people are more skilled and ingenious than good people in devious strategizing, and because of their love for glory they find more pleasure in murdering and plundering people they recognize and identify as enemies. Good people have only care and passion for protecting, and rarely any care and passion for aggression.

It is much the same with spirits of hell and angels of heaven. Spirits of hell attack, and angels of heaven protect.

We may conclude, then, that it is appropriate for all to protect their country and their fellow citizens against invading enemies, even using evil officers; but it is not appropriate to make enemies for no cause. When the cause is one's own glory, that is essentially diabolical, since it comes from self-love.

### **Secrets of Heaven 842**

The symbolism of "and God made a wind pass over the earth, and the waters subsided," as putting everything in its proper place is established by the symbolism of the wind in the Word.

The wind is used as a metaphor, a simile, and even a name for all spirits, both good and evil. The original language uses the same word for both spirits and the winds.

During our struggles — which are the waters that subsided, as shown before [§§705, 739, 790] — it is evil spirits that flood in. They crowd in on us with their delusional thinking and stir up the same kind of thinking in us. When something banishes these spirits, or rather the hallucinations they induce, the Word describes the wind (and in fact the east wind) as the agent.

[2] For an individual who is being tested, the circumstances surrounding the end of the struggle's commotions (or waters) are the same as those for a larger collection of people, as I have learned from much experience. Evil spirits in the world of spirits sometimes form gangs and cause disturbances, but they are dispersed by other groups of spirits that generally approach from the right and so from the east. These groups strike such fear and terror into the evil spirits that they cannot think about anything but running away. Though they had ganged together, they scatter in all directions, and this is the way in which such coalitions of spirits mobbing together for evil purposes are dissolved. The groups of spirits who disperse them by this method are called an east wind. Countless other ways of disbanding them exist, and these too are called east winds. With the Lord's divine mercy, they will be described below [§§1398, 2128, 4793:5, 7679:1]. When the evil spirits have scattered, and the mob and its agitation are past, a calm or silence occurs.

The case is similar for an individual during times of trial. In those periods, the person is surrounded by a crowd of the same type of spirits as above, and after they have been driven off or dispelled, there is a kind of calm — the first step in putting everything where it belongs.

[3] Before being reduced to order, it is very common for everything to fall into confusion or seeming chaos. This allows things that cling together poorly to separate, and when they have separated, the Lord arranges them in their place.

Nature offers parallels, since in it too each and every thing first falls into some degree of disorder before being put in order. If the skies did not storm, causing unlike elements to scatter, the air would never clear; destructive forces would amass and wreak havoc.

The human body displays the same characteristic. Unless all the components of the blood, whether compound or pure, were continuously and cyclically combined and pumped into a single heart first and mingled there, the fluid component would coagulate in a fatal way. The individual elements would never be distributed to perform their proper functions. **2**

It is the same with a person who is regenerating.

[4] The wind — specifically the east wind — simply symbolizes the dispersal of falsity and evil (or, what is the same, of evil spirits and demons) and the organizing of them that follows. This can be seen in the Word, as, for instance, in Isaiah:

You will disperse them, and the wind will carry them off, and a storm will scatter them. And you will rejoice in Jehovah; in the Holy One of Israel you will glory. (Isaiah 41:16)

The dispersal (of evil) is compared here to a wind and the scattering to a storm. When this occurs, those who are reborn will rejoice in Jehovah. In David:

Look! The monarchs assembled; they passed by together; they saw. So they were stupefied; they were bewildered; they rushed away. Terror seized them there — pain like that of one in labor. With an east wind you will shatter them. 3 ([Psalms 48:4, 5, 6-7](#))

This describes the terror and confusion that the east wind brings over such spirits. The description stems from things that happen in the world of spirits, because the Word's inner meaning involves such things.

[5] In Jeremiah:

It will make their land something shocking; like an east wind I will scatter them before their enemy. I will turn toward them with my neck and not my face on the day of their disaster. ([Jeremiah 18:16-17](#))

Here again the east wind stands for the dispersal of falsity. Something similar is represented by the east wind that dried up the Suph Sea 4 to allow the children of Israel to cross, as mentioned in Exodus:

Jehovah drew back the Suph Sea by means of a powerful east wind the whole night, and he made the sea into dry land, and the water was divided. ([Exodus 14:21](#))

The water of the Suph Sea represented something much like what the waters of the Flood do in the present verse. This can be seen from the fact that the Egyptians, who represented the wicked, drowned, while the children of Israel, who represented the regenerate (as Noah does in the present verse), walked across. The Suph Sea, like the Flood, represented damnation and also times of trial. So the east wind represented the dispersal of the water, that is, the abatement of damnation's evils or a person's trials. The parallels can also be seen in the Song of Moses, which he sang after the Israelites had crossed that sea ([Exodus 15:1-19](#)), and in Isaiah:

Jehovah will exterminate the tongue of Egypt's sea and wave his hand over the river in the fierceness of his wind and strike it into seven rivers and make way [for them as they walk] in their shoes. And there will be a path for the survivors of his people who will remain from Assyria, as there was for Israel when he went up from the land of Egypt. ([Isaiah 11:15-16](#))

The path for the survivors of the people left from Assyria stands for the process of putting things in their proper place.