

Why did it have to be this way?

Suffering, death, evil—we know the question already. Why did God create the world in such an imperfect way with so many things going wrong? Surely He could have made it a much better place?

I believe the answer is that God had no other option, and I would like to suggest that given just two pieces of information, much of life as we know it simply has to be this way. This includes the creation of heaven and earth, the existence of angels and humans, death, the problem of evil and suffering generally, the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Law, salvation through faith, the resurrection of humans, the destruction of the existing heaven and earth, the Judgment, and the new heaven and earth. All these things have to come to pass and perhaps more things as well.

What are the two things we need to know? Firstly, God is who He is—one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, holy and righteous, loving and merciful; and secondly, God decided to create individuals with their own will to live with Him forever.

The aim of this article is to show these two things alone constrain God into creating the world the way we find it.

God is limited in what He can do

I guess many people will be of the opinion that God could create the world anyway He wanted and therefore He had an infinite number of options open to Him. After all, the Bible says, *I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?* (Jeremiah 32:27). However, maybe not everyone appreciates there are some things He cannot do and also there are some things He has to do. He cannot lie for instance (Titus 1:2) or change in anyway (Malachi 3:6), and He can never stop being God. God is limited to act in a way consistent with His nature. In particular, He has to remain holy, a limitation which greatly affects the way He can create the world.

The problem of living with God

God is perfectly holy. And completely holy. But not just that—He is infinitely holy. A very hard thing indeed for us to

grasp. We are told the spiritual beings who live around the throne of God never stop saying “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty*” (Revelation 4:8).

The consequences of God being so holy are truly profound. If He overlooked the smallest possible wrongdoing anywhere in His creation, He would no longer be perfectly holy. Also, because He is infinitely holy, He has to deal with sin in the strongest way possible. He cannot be half-hearted about it. When someone sins, God is obliged to destroy them.

Given the fact God is so holy, how can anyone live with Him forever? Out of all the fundamental questions of life that can be asked, I believe this question is the most important. God had to address it before creating anyone, as given a long enough time it is inevitable individuals will sin against Him.

In solving this problem, God set in course a plan covering the creation of the world to its eventual destruction and replacement. A plan where He can express His love, mercy and forgiveness so individuals

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can live in His presence eternally and safely. A plan where He can forgive sin and yet remain holy.

The sovereign choice of God in creating angels (and other spiritual beings)

The plan begins with God deciding, without any compulsion or necessity, to create individuals (in this instance, angels) with the ability to think and make decisions independently of Himself. He also wanted the individuals to enjoy fellowship and company with Him forever, so He created them immortal. Once God made this sovereign decision, as we shall see, many other decisions would then have to be made out of necessity in order to fulfil His aim.

The inevitability of an angel rebelling against God and the need for hell

Because angels have the freedom to rebel, it is inevitable that at some point in time, someone would. It turns out Satan was the first and he probably encouraged many others to do likewise. We are told his motive was pride (1 Timothy 3:6), and the Bible suggests that even though God had given him an exalted position in heaven, he desired more (Isaiah 14:12–17; Ezekiel 28:12–19).

When the devil first sinned, he should have resolved never to sin again. Instead, he decided to pursue wickedness with all of his heart. This suggests that whenever someone sins in God's presence, their own nature is permanently changed for the worse. To deliberately sin in the

sight of an infinitely holy God is a fearful thing indeed.

Because God is holy, He has to destroy the devil and the angels that sinned. However, because He created them with the ability to live forever, He cannot do this. Instead, He is compelled to create a place for them where they will be banished from His presence forever and effectively be continually destroyed (Matthew 25:41). A place we know to be hell.

Although (as we shall shortly see) God could not forgive the devil or the angels that sinned, He has to have a way to express his forgiveness towards sinners. God is not just holy, but loving and merciful as well. And his mercy is perfect, complete and infinite too. He also could not leave the good angels in a state of permanent tension. They would be living in fear wondering if they would be the next one to sin and be sent to hell. There has to come a time when they could rest safely and securely in God's presence. God therefore needed to create another class of individuals so He could deal with the problem of sin once and for all.

The necessity of creating individuals who cannot see God ('mankind')

If God is to forgive sin, He has to create a class of individuals (mankind) who cannot see Him directly.

God cannot forgive someone sinning with impunity—a deliberate act of rebellion knowing it displeases God and in full sight of Him. Such an act is an outright rejection of God. Because of this reason, God

cannot forgive the devil or any of the angels that sin.

God can, however, forgive people when they sin ignorantly. Jesus used ignorance as the basis for interceding for his persecutors, when He said, '*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*' (Luke 23:34). Paul says he received mercy because he sinned ignorantly (1 Timothy 1:13). In our physical state, we can be forgiven all manner of sins. It is only if we deliberately reject God in some way, knowing Him to be true, that we are not forgiven (Hebrews 10:26–27; Matthew 12:31).

The necessity of creating mankind temporarily mortal

Another essential condition for receiving forgiveness is that the sinner should pay in full for the consequences of their sin. The Bible tells us, *the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished* (Nahum 1:3).

As we noted earlier, God is obliged to destroy anyone who sins. Therefore, no matter how small the sin is, the penalty owed is the life of the person. It follows that the only way anyone can be forgiven is if an innocent person of equal or greater value dies on their behalf. For this possibility to happen, mankind has to be made temporarily mortal.

In order to make us temporarily mortal, God created us in two parts; body and spirit. *Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being* (Genesis 2:7). The spirit will

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always live because God is Spirit, but the body must die and be resurrected.

The necessity of creating a mortal world

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation... and all the angels shouted for joy? (Job 38:4-7).

For God to create man mortal, He had to create a world in which man can be born, live and die. This world, by definition, would have to be mortal too and eventually be destroyed.

Why evolution and the Big Bang theory cannot be true

In recent years, alternative theories to the Bible account of creation have arisen. These theories try to explain how the universe and all life as we know it came to exist, without necessarily requiring God's intervention. Given our two starting assumptions, (God is who He is, and God decided to create individuals with their own will to live with Him forever), I believe evolution and the Big Bang theory cannot hold.

Firstly, it is simply untenable that God was not involved in our creation. *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands* (Psalm 19:1), and *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made* (Psalm 139:14).

Secondly, mankind cannot evolve solely from the materials in the physical universe. His spirit has to originate from a non-physical source.

Thirdly, there can be no evolutionary link between

mankind and the animal kingdom. If there was, there would be no clear distinction between man and animal and God would then have to deal with animals in the same way as mankind, so they would have to hear the gospel and repent for their sins. Evolution assumes all life forms come from the same source, so taking this further, we would be left with the absurd thought of some trees going to heaven and others going to hell. The Bible refutes this by informing us that man, unlike animals, is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) and man and animals are made differently (1 Corinthians 15:39).

A fourth objection to these theories is if God needed billions of years to create this heaven and earth, we could be in for a very long wait indeed while He creates the new heaven and earth. I expect many people would object to this thought!

Why there can be no other life in the universe

It is impossible for an alien (with an independent will and who will potentially live forever) living on a remote planet unconnected to the earth to ever come into the presence of God. They have to come through Jesus Christ and if they do not know about Him, they will be lost forever. *Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me...'* (John 14:6).

As God is merciful, He would not create a class of people who had no hope of ever coming into His presence.

The inevitability of mankind sinning and having to die

As mentioned earlier, God had to create mankind temporarily mortal and without the ability to see Him in order to allow for the possibility of forgiveness of sins. To fulfil this purpose, He made Adam and Eve as the first husband and wife, and gave them the power to procreate, ultimately, the rest of mankind.

Although God made Adam and Eve temporarily mortal, they did not necessarily have to die. They had good natures and would not have died had they maintained their innocence.

Because Adam and Eve enjoyed a measure of independence so they could think and act against God, inevitably they would sin. Their inquisitive desire to do something they should not and to learn something they did not know would prevail over time especially when tempted by Satan. They could not understand beforehand the full consequences of their actions as they had no knowledge of good and evil.

As a result of them sinning, their nature changed and they became sinful and so had to die. However, because God kept Himself distant from them, they did not become completely and permanently evil like Satan. In their mortal state, God could forgive them. They did not die immediately, but only after a long time, growing old in the process. This aging process is a clear indication of God's mercy to us as we have advanced notice we are going to die and so we have time to prepare ourselves to meet God.

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The inevitability of evil and suffering in the world

Adam's sin had negative consequences for the world and for all of his descendants who were subsequently born with sinful natures. *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned* (Romans 5:12).

Everyone comes into the world with a naturally selfish nature and will do evil unless they are taught otherwise. This tendency to do evil will affect others negatively, either by causing them suffering in some way or encouraging them to do likewise.

The necessity of Jesus Christ dying for our sins

As mentioned earlier, God cannot forgive man arbitrarily, just because He was asked to do so. There has to be a penalty paid, at least equal to the value of the life of the sinner.

We will now consider what form the penalty has to take. Firstly, we cannot offer money or other valuables for our sin (1 Peter 1:18–19), and secondly we cannot sacrifice an animal— *it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins* (Hebrews 10:4). The reason in both cases is that the penalty is of less value than what we are worth and so cannot adequately act as our substitute. Thirdly, no other person can die for us because everyone has sinned (Romans 3:23), either willingly themselves or through inheriting a sinful nature. They cannot offer their life for us as they are already condemned to die. Although it can be

argued babies are innocent, they still cannot be sacrificed for sin because the act would be murder, a sin in itself. The person acting as our substitute has to do so voluntarily. Fourthly, even though angels are individually of greater value than us (Hebrews 2:6–7), they are immortal so cannot die on our behalf. None of these methods work.

The only possible form the penalty can take is for God's only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. *I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no saviour* (Isaiah 43:11). Because Jesus is the Son of God, He is of infinite value and so is worth more than all of mankind put together.

The necessity of Jesus Christ taking on a human body and living for a time on earth

Because Jesus Christ had to die, it was necessary for Him to take on a human body and to temporarily give up His God-like attributes. For this to happen, He had to be born by a woman but without being procreated through Adam's seed. He cannot be created again as He, being God, has always existed. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever* (Hebrews 13:8). He was therefore born by the Holy Spirit through Mary, while she was still a virgin.

Jesus could not be sacrificed at a young age. Because He was perfectly righteous, God could not allow Him to be harmed in any way. He had to willingly offer Himself up for our sakes and He had to be of a mature age to make that decision.

Jesus also could not be

crucified in His old age. Unlike Adam, He never sinned, so He could not die. Neither could He grow old as aging is a part of the death process. He had to be crucified at a relatively young age otherwise His youthfulness would have drawn attention to Himself that He was different.

It was also necessary that Jesus suffer a time of temptation to sin and fulfil all the demands of the Law. He had to be proved righteous and remain innocent and not deserving of death. If He was sacrificed without this proving, His death would enable us to receive forgiveness of sins but we would still need proving ourselves. His sacrifice would not give us the victory we need. Because He is proven to be righteous, we can have His righteousness imputed to us by faith (Romans 4:24). *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work* (1 John 3:8).

The necessity of Jesus Christ being raised from the dead

Just before He died, *Jesus said, 'It is finished.'* *With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit* (John 19:30). The moment He died, He had completely paid the penalty for our sins. Because there was no more penalty for Him to bear, and because He was sinless, His body could not decay and so He had to be resurrected from the grave (Acts 2:24). He was subsequently exalted back to the right hand of the Father in a position of authority over every created being receiving the glory He previously enjoyed (John 17:5).

It is necessary for us that

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Jesus was resurrected and exalted to the right hand of the Father. If He was not resurrected, we would not know for certain that His sacrifice was accepted by the Father. Also, Satan would have triumphed over Jesus when he killed Him, so we could never overcome the power of Satan, and we would keep falling back into sin.

The necessity of the Law

How do we know what is right and wrong? Unlike angels, we cannot see God and so we cannot easily ask Him for advice. We therefore need some help from God in order to make right decisions.

From God's side, He needs to communicate what standard of behaviour He expects from us. He uses the Law (the Bible, especially the Old Testament) to do this. The Law makes us accountable and is necessary for God to judge mankind. *To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law* (Romans 5:13). God also needs the Law to demonstrate Jesus is righteous.

The requirement for us to believe in Jesus to be saved

It is not possible for God to apply the atonement Jesus made for sin on our behalf. If this was so, we could sin without fearing any consequences, knowing God would automatically forgive us. This would make Him unholy. Instead, we need to take the initiative and somehow take hold of the atonement ourselves.

The question then arises as

to how we should apply the atonement. Clearly, it must be something anyone can do, but at the same time it cannot be something trivial. We must appreciate the cost involved in obtaining forgiveness and not receive it lightly or half-heartedly. Our response needs to be something requiring the minimum of ability but with the maximum of intent. Any method requiring some ability (such as the giving of money) would disqualify those without that ability from being saved.

The logical conclusion to this is for us to apply the atonement using faith. Whatever God required us to do in order to be saved, for us to do that action we would need to believe Him first. Faith, therefore, is the most basic thing we can offer God. It also requires the least amount of academic ability as possible. He does not even require us to understand how He will save us (Proverbs 3:5–6). On the other hand, our resolve to be righteous and receive forgiveness can be proved.

The requirement for us to believe in Jesus before we die

If we are to receive forgiveness, we must believe in Jesus before we die. We can only have faith while we are alive on this earth. Once we die, our spirit leaves our body and we will see God clearly, and from that moment onwards we can no longer believe in Him as we will know He exists.

The necessity of mankind being resurrected from the dead

The need for us to be resurrected from the dead is linked to the way God has created us with a mortal body and an immortal spirit. He made us this way so we are able to have our sins forgiven. Once our body dies we will be incomplete as a person and so we must inherit an immortal body to go with our spirit. This must happen whether we are righteous or unrighteous (John 5:28–29). The Bible tells us that when we are resurrected, we become like the angels (Matthew 22:30).

The necessity of having a final day of judgment

The Bible says that *... people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment* (Hebrews 9:27).

God has to judge because He is holy and righteous and He cannot ignore the good and the evil people have done (Proverbs 15:3). There has to be a time when everyone (mankind and angels) are judged and the appropriate rewards given. Those people who have had their sins forgiven and the sinless angels must be rewarded for what they have done as some will have worked harder for God than others.

Those people who have not received forgiveness and those angels who have sinned must give an account for their actions and receive the appropriate punishment.

God's mercy and holiness can appear, at first sight, to clash. In order to remain holy, He must deal with sin

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fully and completely; yet in order to remain merciful, He must forgive sin. Both these attributes of God must be fully expressed and there can not be any trade off between them. Because of this, God could only allow the possibility of forgiveness for a limited time. If it was indefinitely available, He would never be able to judge sin and so His holy nature would be frustrated. On the other hand, He must show mercy. He expresses His mercy by doing anything He can in order to save us. Also, those who receive forgiveness will be able to enjoy it forever.

The necessity of a new heaven and earth

Because this current world is mortal, at some point it must come to an end and be replaced with a new world—a one where angels and mankind can come together and live forever in the presence of God. This has been God's goal all the time.

God's plan needs a solution to the possibility of our sinning in the new world. If anyone sinned in the new world, then His plan would fail. To avoid this possibility, only those who practice righteousness will be able to enter the new heaven and earth. The devil and any other tempter have to be put in a place where they can never influence the righteous to sin.

Additionally, we need to be sure that we will not exercise our freedom to rebel against God. It could be He will give us the option to limit ourselves from ever doing evil. Presumably, because both angels and redeemed mankind have fought against sin, they would readily accept this

option were it available. Adam in his innocent state chose to know good and evil and this act caused sin to enter the world. It might be possible to reverse this decision somehow. Alternatively, it might be the sight of eternal hell is sufficient to remind us what sin does and discourage us from doing evil.

However God solves this, we know it will be sufficient for us to live with Him forever, without any fear whatsoever of our falling into sin and being taken away from Him. *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:38–39).

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God's objective all along is to bring us into the Kingdom where we can live with Him forever—the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world (Matthew 25:34). Although the way He achieves this seems so involved and complicated, hopefully we can see that much, if not all, of it is necessary.

The most important part of God's plan was for Christ to die for our sins. This, along with all other aspects of His plan, was foreordained right at the beginning of time... *the lamb who was slain from the creation of the world* (Revelation 13:8). This act alone should assure us that there is no other option open to Him. If there was, then surely He would not have

chosen the most costly option.

What other options could there be? Can we think of any other way for God to create individuals with their own will to live with Him forever? I very much doubt it. God's plans are perfectly thought out and the right way to go. We should fit in with His plans rather than trying to make Him fit in with ours. We need to change our nature rather than making God change His.

In conclusion, therefore, we answer the question, '*Why did it have to be this way?*' with another question, '*What other way could it be?*'

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