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Book description

Which would you prefer: a judgemental God who causes suffering to sinners, or a reality where there is no justice at all? Calvin: "Do you believe in the Devil... dedicated to the temptation corruption, and destruction of man?" Hobbes: "I'm not sure man needs the help." This short story is a rational exploration of supernatural belief. As an earnest teen, I remember being told that "Hell is the absence of God". I think it was meant to be more unsettling than fire and brimstone. Perhaps it was, but only for as long as I strived to believe in God. Like many sincere would-be believers I couldn't get past the issue of why a loving, omnipotent, and omniscient God allows suffering at all, particularly of the righteous (Theodicy). Angels intermittently visit this version of earth, trailing miracles and accidental tragedy in their wake, and people are sometimes glimpsed ascending to Heaven

or descending to Hell. Even the non-devout see and acknowledge this, and the authorities collect stats. People seek patterns and meaning in these apparently random events. After each one, "scores of people became devout worshippers... either out of gratitude or terror". The occasional fallen angels always answer the inevitable questions about God with "Decide for yourselves". Neil Fisk is a rationalist who doesn't blame God for his minor congenital leg deformity. He marries the devout (belief) but not especially religious (church) Sarah, and is utterly devastated when she dies in an angelic accident. He knows she has gone to Heaven, so wants more than anything to come to love God so that he will eventually be reunited with her. He attends a support group for those blessed or bereaved by the visitation that killed Sarah. It's like an Alpha Course studying The Book of Job. William Blake's illustration, Satan Smiting Job with Boils (Job 2:7). Job was a devout, wealthy, healthy man, blessed with sons. He lost everything, and was ostracised by all, who assumed God was punishing him for sins unknown to them. (Really, it was just a test of faith, to settle an argument between God and the Devil!) He railed against his unjust suffering, but ultimately accepted God's greater power, and was rewarded. In contrast, Neil is a good man, but not devout. He doesn't want to be angry at God; he just wants to love him. But how can he? It's like a kidnapper demanding unconditional love as ransom. The ending packs a punch. I'm not sure what the devout will feel about it. For other stories in the collection, Stories of Your Life, see my review [HERE](#). Image sources Satan Smiting Job with Boils: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William...> Calvin and Hobbes Discuss the Devil: <http://theologyandchurch.com/wp-conte...>

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