



Why Is There Evil And Suffering In The World?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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Why is there evil and suffering in the world? There is no denying that evil and suffering exist in the world today. People of all ages experience death – even tragic and unexpected deaths. People even kill other people. People suffer serious injuries and experience chronic pain. People even hurt others by stealing, fornicating, lying, and cheating. In fact, just a few minutes of reading the news headlines will remind you that evil and suffering exist in the world. Once again, these facts beg the question of “Why?” “If God is really in control of all things, why would He allow suffering and evil to exist?” Let’s consider.

God Is In Control

Many people will reach a number of false conclusions when they try to answer the questions involved in human suffering. One false conclusion that is commonly reached is that God is no longer in control of the things that happen on this earth. While Satan is identified as being the “ruler of this world” (John 14:30) and the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), holding the whole world under his power (1 John 5:19); he does not possess more control over the world than God has! Instead, these passages simply indicate that the world has chosen not to listen to God. The world has decided to live according to the desires of the devil. However, there are those who have escaped the power/rule of Satan in order to follow God (see Acts 26:18)!

The Scriptures are clear that Satan does not possess unlimited power or control over this world. For instance, prior to Job being inflicted with great suffering, Satan was required to come before God – and he was not permitted to do just anything that he desired to do to Job (see Job 1). This is just one example of God having control over Satan. You could also consider the fact that if God was not in control, then Satan would be responsible for the good things that happen on this earth. However, the Scriptures teach that every “good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

Still, understanding that God is in control leaves us with questions about how an all-powerful God could allow human suffering. Therefore, some will reach the conclusion that there is no God, because a God who was in control of everything could not possibly allow all of this suffering to be experienced by His creation. So, they either will conclude that God is a cruel God and begin to blame Him for everything evil that happens to them or they will conclude that He does not exist. In fact, some have concluded that they would rather not believe in a God who would sit by and watch all of the suffering that is experienced by His creation.

Throughout this study, we will be considering some facts about suffering that (I hope) will help you overcome these conclusions. For now, just appreciate the fact that the problem of human suffering does not negate the evidence for the existence of God. For instance, Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.” All of the marvelous works of creation can still be plainly seen – and still demonstrate that there was an intelligent Designer who was responsible for them all (see also Romans 1:19-20).

God Did Not Create Evil

Everything that the Scriptures teach us about God demonstrates that God is a holy and fair God. God is said to be “light” and to have no “darkness” in Him at all (1 John 1:5). That is, God is entirely pure and righteous. There is no element of sin or evil in God at all.

Therefore, everything God has created was also good at the time of its creation. God is not capable of creating anything that is inherently evil. The Genesis account of creation shows all that God created on this earth was either “good” (Genesis 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) or “very good” (Genesis 1:31) when He created it. Once again, James 1:17 plainly states that every good thing on this earth comes from God.

In fact, a quick look into Genesis 2 reveals that God created a world that was entirely lacking evil and suffering. God placed man in the Garden of Eden that He had planted for mankind. In the garden was every tree that was “pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Genesis 2:9) and the Tree of Life (which would permit man to live forever, Genesis 3:22). God gave man everything that he needed – even creating a suitable companion for the man (a woman, Genesis 2:18-24). At that point, there was no death, evil, or suffering in this world. This is the way in which God created the world.

God Created Mankind With Free Will

With these facts being established, it should be clear that the holy and righteous God did *not* create anything that was evil. However, God *did* give free will to His creation and He *did* give laws to govern them. Therefore, both mankind and the spiritual beings God created (i.e. angels) have been created with the ability to choose their own paths – either of obedience or disobedience. God simply never desired to create mankind in such a way that would force him to serve God. Instead, God wanted His creation to choose to serve and worship Him.

Sadly, God's creation has routinely chosen a path of disobedience – including many of the angels God created. For instance, 2 Peter 2:4 says that God “did not spare the angels who sinned.” Even Satan (who was created by God as a spiritual being) was given free will and chose to sin against God. John 8:44 says that Satan “was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.” 1 John 3:8 makes it clear that “the devil has sinned from the beginning.”

Satan enters the Bible story in Genesis chapter 3 – when he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. God had given Adam and Eve one law to abide by during their time in the garden. Genesis 2:16-17 says, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” Satan (taking the form of a serpent), tempted the woman to disregard the instructions of God and fulfill her own desires to eat of the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3:1-5.

Then, Genesis 3:6 records a decision that forever changed the course of life on this earth: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.” As a result of their choices to fulfill their own desires rather than being content with what God had provided for them and obey His commandment, God punished them (see Genesis 3:14-24). Included in these punishments was suffering, being cast out of the Garden of Eden, and being separated from the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22-24).

After this sin, the Bible story begins to explain how sin spread and how suffering and death were now present in this world. It was only after this that we read about the suffering Cain caused Abel. In Genesis 4, two sons of Adam and Eve (Cain and Abel) both brought offerings to the Lord. However, God was only pleased with Abel's offering. As a result of Cain's anger, he “rose up against Abel his brother and killed him” (Genesis 4:8). Later, Cain then received a punishment from God that he believed to be greater than he could bear (Genesis 4:13). Then, in Genesis 4:23, a man named Lamech spoke about killing a young man for hurting him. In Genesis 5, you can read about the geologies of many of the first people to live on this earth – including many of the first deaths. And, by the time you come into Genesis chapter 6, man had become so wicked that God was ready to destroy them all from the face of the earth. Over chapters 6-8, you can read about how God accomplished this by means of the flood and only spared Noah and his family.

Evil And Suffering Are Now In The World

Clearly, evil and suffering are now in full effect in this world. We are constantly reminded of the brevity of life and routinely experience suffering. While we do *not* inherit our sin from Adam, we do live in the “fallen” world that has resulted from Adam and Eve's sin. We no longer live in the paradise of the Garden of Eden. We no longer live in a world that is free from evil. We no longer live in a world in which we have access to the Tree of Life. All of this means that we will experience suffering and death.

There are some fundamental things that we must absolutely understand about the suffering we do experience on this earth. Consider both of these points carefully. (1) Evil and suffering are not because of God. That is, it is not here because it was God's original design for this world. However, this does *not* mean that God never uses suffering to accomplish His purposes. Instead, this simply means that God did not design this world in such a way that He wanted its inhabitants to experience suffering and death. As we saw, this was a consequence of His creation choosing to pursue their own desires over obedience to His will.

(2) Evil and suffering are not entirely connected with our righteousness or unrighteousness. It is common for folks to attribute every bad thing that happens to people on this earth with some sinful activity. There are several Bible examples of this. (1) Whenever Job was suffering, his friends kept insisting that his suffering resulted from sin he had committed. However, the Bible reveals that Job's suffering did not result from any unrighteousness in Job (read the book of Job). (2) In Luke 13:1-5, Jesus corrects this kind of thinking in some. There were some people who evidently believed that some Galileans who were killed by Pilate and some who were killed by a tower in Siloam were worse sinners than others. However, Jesus told them that unless they would repent, they would all perish. (3) When Jesus' disciples saw a blind man, they questioned, "who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). However, Jesus responded that their sin was not the reason for his blindness. (4) When Paul was on the island of Malta, he was bitten by a poisonous snake. After witnessing this, the native people of the island concluded that Paul must have been a murderer and that he was bitten by this snake because justice would not permit him to live. However, Paul demonstrates a great miracle by surviving this snake bite and shows that the thing did not happen because of sin that was in his life (Acts 28:1-10).

Conclusion

The Bible teaches that both the righteous and the unrighteous will suffer during their time on this earth. Ultimately, the Bible promises that we will all experience death. Hebrews 9:27 says that it is "appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." Please embrace these fundamental facts about evil and suffering on this earth. And, recognize that God is not the one who is responsible for evil and suffering. Instead, it is the result of sin!

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