

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

MANY people ask the question “How can there be a loving God, if He allows thousands of people to die as a result of natural disasters? Or how can He look on while someone dies a slow and painful death, or while men kill each other?”

The ‘blame culture’ in which we live seems to demand that, when some tragedy happens, we pin the fault on someone. When we can’t, we call such events “acts of God”!

Cause and Effect

When God created the world, He established natural laws that involve cause and effect. For example, gravity is essential, or things would float upwards. But it has a side effect: if we drop things, we are likely to damage them. Again, we depend upon water for life; but water can also drown us or flood our houses. We’re grateful for the heat we get from fire; but if we’re not careful, fire will burn us.

Would we be prepared to go without water or fire on ‘health and safety’ grounds? Or do we not take for granted the principle



of cause and effect, and try to be careful how we use them? Life is sometimes like that. Some tragedies can be put down simply to cause and effect.

Much suffering is preventable because it is the result of our own actions. If we smoke, we are likely to end up with lung cancer. If we exceed the speed limit, we may kill someone, or ourselves. Join the armed forces and you might be shot dead. Increasingly we are finding that so-called “natural” disasters are, in fact, the results of our mistreatment of the planet.

God has given us free will, to enable us to choose our own behaviour – for better or worse. Do we wish to blame God for that? Would we rather He took away our free will altogether, so that we become robots?

Wrong Place, Wrong Time

The affairs of this life are very uncertain. Things don’t turn out the way we expect them to. As the Bible puts it:

I returned and saw under the sun that—the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of

skill; but time and chance happen to them all. For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them (Ecclesiastes 9:11–12).

So, being caught up in a disaster or in an unfortunate accident might be a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, like those fish swimming near a fishing net.

The Bible tells of an incident in the life of Jesus, when two local tragedies happened. Firstly, the



Roman governor had killed several Jews from Galilee. Secondly, a tower had collapsed, killing eighteen people. The first was an act of

wickedness; the second was an accident. Jesus was asked what these people had done to deserve death. His reply was unexpected:

Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:2–5).

Notice how Jesus accepted the principle of “in the wrong place at the wrong time” and drew a moral lesson from it. So, it’s time to look at what the Bible teaches about death.

Moral Cause and Effect

When God created the first man and the first woman, He also put into place moral laws

involving cause and effect. If they disobeyed Him, they would suffer certain consequences.

We can understand this, when we consider how necessary it is for parents to lay down rules for their children. These rules are to teach them the difference between right and wrong, and to ensure harmony within the family. Experts tell us that children need to know the boundaries of their behaviour, without which they become unruly, with devastating effects in later life on themselves and others.

The main punishment that God decreed was, and still is, death. You will find the record of this in Genesis chapters 2–3, which are the foundation for everything that the Bible is about. The law came from God, but it is human behaviour that is to blame for the punishment, not Him. We have all committed sin, so we all die.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (5:12).

For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. All



go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust (Ecclesiastes 3:19–20).

One way or another we're going to die. It may be when we are young, or when we are old. We may be struck down, or we may die naturally. The question is not, "Why does God allow it?" It should be, "What can I learn from it?", as Jesus taught the people of his day.

A Lesson for Life

The uncertainty of life is designed to remind us of the urgency of turning to God, while we still have time.

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

We should therefore turn to God and read the Bible ourselves so that we can learn about His commandments and His promises to those who choose to obey Him. In His love, God wants to forgive our sins.

We may want to make much of God's love, but let's not forget that He is just, too. A magistrate does not let everyone off: those who are found guilty are punished. God does feel anger towards those who WILFULLY ignore or disobey Him. In the Bible we read of Him showing that anger in the past and punishing people for their sins, so there is every reason to think that He does so now – it's just that He does not tell us when and where. And the time will soon be here when God's justice will be fully on display, because Jesus Christ will return to earth and one of his tasks will be to judge the wicked.

On the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed



them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:29–30).

The Removal of All Suffering

The day is coming when God will intervene and put an end to suffering and death.

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4).

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing (Isaiah 35:5–6).

It's not a question of "why?" or "why me?" and blaming God for everything that goes wrong. Sometimes it takes hardship or tragedy to make people think about what life is all about. It can develop character, teach dependence on God and test the faith and staying power of those who turn to God through Jesus Christ.

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