

Why So Much Suffering?



The following notes contain some of the material presented in the series "Is God for Real?"

This is perhaps the most challenging question any believer has to address. For the unbeliever it is easier to answer. Why so much suffering? Why not? There is no why. Suffering just is, so deal with it. But for the believer it is a more challenging question. If God is love, as the Bible claims, and God is all powerful, why doesn't He do something about pain, suffering and evil? Many conclude that either He can't – therefore He is not all powerful – or He doesn't care to – therefore He can't be all loving. But is there another side to the story that we may have overlooked? Is there an explanation that makes sense of the suffering we see today, and that still allows God to be almighty and all loving? In this study we will attempt to begin to answer these questions.

On Channel Nine in 2008, a 60 Minutes story called 'The Fire Bug' focussed on those who deliberately start bush fires, and the consequences of those acts. It showed the memorial plaque of someone who had been killed in a bush fire. Under his name it said, 'Tragically taken by God's hand.' Further investigation revealed that this man died in a fire deliberately lit by a fire bug. Why is it that disaster, destruction and death are so often labelled 'Acts of God?' Like the fire bug, is there another active agent in the world today causing mayhem and misery? – then pointing the finger at God, and saying, 'He's to blame.' The Bible reveals that there is an adversary called the Devil and Satan who is intent on destroying God's creatures and also God's reputation. In fact, the word Satan actually means 'adversary', and the word Devil means 'false accuser' or 'slanderer.' Many do not believe the Devil is a real being, and that's just how he likes it. If people think he doesn't exist then there's no one left to blame but God.

But if such a being exists why hasn't God destroyed him yet? In fact, why hasn't God destroyed all evil people along with the Devil? To begin answering these questions it is helpful to read what Jesus said in one of His parables, or stories, to His disciples (Matthew 13:24-30; 37-39). In this parable it seems that evil and good are not always easily distinguishable to begin with. Even today some things that are regarded as evil by one group, are seen as acceptable by another. Only when they have 'ripened' is it easy to tell which is which.

So, if the Devil does exist, how did he get here? What does the Bible reveal about him? In Revelation 12:7-9 the Bible reveals there was a war in heaven between God's angels and the Devil and his angels, with the Devil and his angels eventually being cast out of heaven. So how did this war begin? Isaiah 14:12-14 tells us that Lucifer (another name for the Devil) wanted to be God. Although God had given him great privileges, he wasn't satisfied; he wanted more. Ezekiel 28:12-17 reveals that Lucifer was a created angel who was perfect until he chose to rebel against God. Some wonder if God made a mistake with Lucifer. How could he go so wrong if God created him perfect? The answer is that God created Lucifer with free will. Parents understand that when they have children, they take a risk that their children may not love them as much as they love their children. The children have free will to choose. Likewise, Lucifer chose to take a different path from the one that God had planned for him, and ultimately led a destructive rebellion against God and his kingdom.

But why didn't God just destroy Lucifer at the beginning? Remember the parable of the wheat and the tares that Jesus told? Had God destroyed Lucifer at the beginning, his accusations may have been believed by others. They may not have rebelled, but may have served God only through fear of

destruction. God desires that His creatures should love Him freely and trust Him implicitly, so in His wisdom He allowed Lucifer's rebellion to mature so that all in the universe would see its results.

After being cast out of heaven the Devil continued his rebellion on earth, tempting Eve to distrust God and believe the lies of the serpent instead, (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:4). In choosing to believe the word of the Devil over the Word of God, Adam and Eve effectively gave dominion of this planet over to Satan. God had originally given dominion of the earth to Adam and Eve, (Genesis 1:28), but they had now yielded to the authority of Satan. In a sense they had voted for Satan instead of God, however God, through Christ has given us an opportunity to vote again. Who will we vote for this time?

There is another story in the Bible that helps us to understand the great battle we are involved in between good and evil. In Job 1:6-7 we read about a meeting that takes place somewhere outside of the earth between the Lord and the Sons of God. In Luke 3:38 Adam is described as the son of God, in that God was his only Father. Could these sons of God be the unfallen 'Adams' of other worlds in the galaxy? With Satan now representing planet earth because Adam has died? We might think of it as a meeting of the G20 – the Galactic 20! In the first two chapters of Job we are able to see how Satan seeks to destroy Job's faith in God by attacking his livestock, his business, his servants and his children. Finally, Satan even attacks Job's health. In spite of all this, Job remains faithful to God (Job 1:22; 13:15), and reminds us that when trials and tragedy come we are better to draw nearer to God rather than push Him away.

In answer to the question, 'Why is there so much suffering in the world?' the Bible provides at least three responses. Firstly, because of sin, we live in a broken world. Our world doesn't operate the way God originally planned it. Solomon reminds us in Ecclesiastes 9:11 that 'time and chance happen to everyone.' So, you may be the most faithful believer in the world and tragedy can still strike in a moment. Secondly, we have an active adversary, Satan, who 'goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour,' (1Peter 5:8). The story in Job is great testimony to this fact. Thirdly, there is suffering in the world because of human selfishness. We don't like to admit it, but much of the world's misery is man-made. So, whilst we want God to eradicate evil, we don't want Him to eradicate us. God loves human beings, but He doesn't always love what we do. God wants us to let Him into our lives so that He can deal with the sin problem we all have. In the New Testament, Peter reminds us that God, 'is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance,' (2 Peter 3:9).

Notice in that last verse that God is 'longsuffering.' God suffers too. In actual fact when we consider the cross and the suffering that Christ endured before it as well, we recognise that both the Father and the Son suffered together. Jesus bore the sins of the whole world on the cross, and in that sense has experienced suffering on a deeper level than anyone before or since. The prophet Isaiah reminds us that, 'the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,' (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus suffered separation from God so that we don't have to. God has done, is doing, and will do, everything He can to ensure you and I get to heaven, a place where sin, suffering and pain are no more (Revelation 21:4). Through Jesus, God demonstrated His great love for us. The question for us is do we love Him? Do we trust Him? God asks us to put our faith and trust in Him so that He can ultimately put an end to suffering in our lives and bring in everlasting peace.

If you would like to know more about this subject, or others in the series, 'Is God for Real?' then please contact one of our staff and they will be happy to help you.