

Why So Much Suffering?



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The Usual Objection

- If God is all-powerful, He is able to stop suffering, isn't He?
- If God is perfectly righteous, He would stop suffering, wouldn't He?
- But we see suffering, don't we?
- So! Either God is not all-powerful, or He isn't perfectly righteous, or He doesn't exist!



The Impact of this Argument.

e.g., among Jewish people

- Many say this is the reason they gave up believing in God.
- A good, all-powerful God would not have allowed the Holocaust.
- Rabbi Harold Kushner gives up the idea that God is all-powerful. He is doing the best He can!



Our Approach

- Is there a God?
- Is this God the God of the Bible?
- Is He loving?
- Why, then, is there suffering?
- Why so much suffering?



Is There a God?

- Evidence for a created universe
 - Cosmology points to a universe with a beginning.
 - This universe is strikingly designed.
- Evidence for created life
 - The simplest life is complex enough that the universe couldn't have made it on its own.
 - Life is astonishingly organized, far beyond the ability of mutation and natural selection to explain.
- Yes, there is a God, Creator and Designer.



Is this God the God of the Bible?

- Evidence from fulfilled prophecy
 - Nations
 - Israel
 - Messiah
- Evidence from changed lives
 - Changed individuals
 - Changed societies
- Yes, the God who exists is the God of the Bible.



The Bible's God

- The Bible pictures God as all-powerful.
- The Bible pictures God as perfectly righteous.
- The Bible indicates that evil & suffering exist.
- The Bible indicates that evil & suffering will always exist, but that one day they will be confined to Hell (the Lake of Fire) after the Last Judgment.



Is God Loving?

- What is your definition of "love"?
- If one defines "love" so that it will never, under any circumstances, allow suffering, then the God of the Bible is not loving by this definition.
- But this doesn't work even for real human love.
 - In parenting, note the recent emphasis on "tough love."



What is Biblical Love?

- Love is (1 Corinthians 13:4-7):
 - Patient, kind, not envious, not boasting,
 - Not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered,
 - Keeps no record, doesn't delight in evil,
 - Rejoices with the truth,
 - Always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres.
- God is loving in this sense.



Why, then, is there suffering?

- God is all-powerful.
- God is perfectly righteous.
- He is able to stop suffering.
- But He doesn't stop all suffering.
- Apparently, then, He must have perfectly good reasons for allowing suffering to occur and continue.
- What might these reasons be?



God as Parent

- A righteous God must punish evil.
 - Parents sometimes do this by direct action.
 - Sometimes they let events take their course.
- Suffering is often needed to encourage maturity.
 - Parents gradually let up on control so the child makes its own decisions.
 - They let up on protection so the child learns actions have consequences.
 - They let up on punishment so child does right for the right reasons.



God as Creator

- In a world of cause and effect, the action of sinners (rebels, wicked people) will cause suffering, to themselves and others.
- Without such a system of cause and effect, there is no way to experience how bad evil is.



Other Models of God

- God as hotel-keeper
 - If everything is not just right, he is not doing his job.
 - But maybe God is not a hotel-keeper.
- God as novelist
 - Can a novelist be a good person and have bad characters in his novel?
 - Can a good novelist have even the good characters in his novel experience suffering?
 - Yes! Two of my favorites are Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and Lewis' *Narnia Chronicles*.



More on God as Novelist

- What purposes might a novelist have for including evil & suffering?
 - Making money?
 - Providing entertainment?
 - Giving the reader vicarious experience?
 - Helping the reader learn about life?
- What purposes might God have?
 - Book of Job
 - Ephesians 3:10
 - Matthew 13:44-46



The Book of Job

- Do we serve God for who He is ...
- ... or for what we can get out of it?
- How do we respond to calamity in our own lives?





Ephesians 3:10

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms...



Matthew 13:44-46

44 The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.



Why So Much Suffering?

- Mankind is very sinful, so producing & reaping much suffering.
- Disaster is an advance warning of the wrath to come (Luke 13:1-9).
- There is superhuman evil in the world.
- Will there be suffering forever?
 - See Luke 16:19-31
- What about babies suffering?
 - See John 21:21-23



Luke 13

1 (NIV) Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." 6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"



Luke 16

23 (NIV) In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." 25 But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." 27 He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house..." 29 Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." 30 "No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." 31 He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."



John 21

John 21:21 (NIV) When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" 22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." 23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"



God Suffers Too

- "In all their afflictions, He was afflicted."
– Isaiah 63:9
- "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?"
– Acts 9:4-9
- "Inasmuch as you did/didn't do it to the least of these, you did/didn't do it to Me." – Matthew 25:40, 45



Conclusions

- God apparently has good reasons for allowing suffering.
- What are we doing to relieve suffering?
- We should seek to avoid eternal suffering and help others to, also.
- God has suffered more than anyone else to save us from such eternal suffering.

The End



You can escape suffering,
And help others do so as well.