

THE GOD OF THE BIBLE ON TRIAL

Why does God permit evil and suffering?

One of major objections to belief in God is:

If God is all powerful, and God is perfectly righteous,
how can He allow evil and suffering?

if all-powerful, He can stop it

if perfectly righteous, He certainly would

Another alternative:

Perhaps God has a perfectly good reason for permitting evil and suffering

What might the reason be?

Analogies of God as novelist, parent vs God as hotel keeper

God himself suffers with us

Is it presumptuous to say that Jesus is the only way to God? What about sincere people in other religions?

This is what Bible says about Jesus

John 14:6: I am way, truth, life...

Acts 4:12: salvation in no one else...

(Relative) sincerity is not good enough

Prov 14:12: way seems right, end is death

The person and work of Christ

Only Jesus among world's religious founders is pictured as uncreated God as well as created human.

Only Jesus could volunteer to become a creature, and thus his obedience could be given to others.

Don't the Bible and science contradict each other?

Certainly some interpretations of the Bible and nature are in conflict; some theologians and scientists disagree.

The belief that natural phenomena will account for all of reality is certainly in disagreement with biblical teaching.

The belief that the Bible teaches the earth & universe are only a few thousand years old certainly seems to disagree with scientific evidence for billions of years.

These beliefs (naturalism, young earth) are not as solid as their proponents think them to be.

How can miracles be possible?

Is the universe a closed system of cause and effect?
Analogy between actions of human minds and miraculous
Certainly miracles can be possible
Question is: what is evidence for a particular miracle?

Isn't faith blind and irrational and a psychological crutch?

Some faith *is* blind and irrational
 blind when you don't know who or what you are trusting
 irrational when you do know but object is unworthy of your trust
Faith as a psychological crutch
 perhaps all faith functions this way
 question is: do we need a crutch? will this particular crutch hold us
 up when we really need it?

Isn't being good good enough?

Yes, if you're good enough!
 Ten commandments: Jesus explains them in Sermon on Mt
 Two commandments: do you love God w/ all heart, soul,
 mind? Do you love your neighbor as yourself?
Only Jesus was good enough
Only Jesus was kind of being who could transfer to us His
 righteousness, take upon Him our sins

What about those who have never heard?

There aren't any!
 all have heard God's general revelation
 in nature: God exists, is good, powerful
 in conscience: God exists, is good, we aren't
 all are sinners
 all can cast themselves upon God for mercy
 He can only have mercy on the basis of Jesus' work
How much do you need to know about Jesus?
 perhaps nothing
 e.g., people before Jesus came
 but God would not have given NT revelation if not
 needed
Must not be depending on own goodness or on assurances of various
 (unauthorized) teachers.
Must not be presuming upon God's forgiveness even as you continue
 going your own way.

Isn't the Bible just a matter of anyone's interpretation?

No; the main message of the Bible is sufficiently clear that anyone who really wants to understand it can do so by reading and studying it. Drastic differences in understanding the Bible are due to various other forces at work: desire to have it come out your way; pressure of tradition, institution; human and superhuman sin.
Can't prove this for you; you need to read and study it yourself

Isn't the Bible full of errors?

The Bible reports many errors: "Fool has said... there is no God."
Many errors have been alleged, especially when statements are taken out of context.
Bible disagrees with many well-loved human ideas.
Bible occasionally uses paradox to get us to think:
Prov 26:4-5: Do not answer a fool acc to his folly...
Matt 19:20: first last, last first
Few thinkers have found this to be a major stumbling block.

How can I believe with all the hypocrites in the church?

If there weren't hypocrites in the church, the Bible would be in error! Acts 20:29-30; Rev 3:1.
The presence of hypocrites doesn't keep you from going to parties, sporting events, classes.
If Xy is true, there won't be any hypocrites in heaven; better to spend a few years with them here than forever with them later.
Where church discipline is properly administered, this problem is substantially alleviated.

Doesn't faith give a person a license to sin?

Many people think so, both among those who reject biblical Xy and those who profess it.
A person who thinks that profession of Xy gives him/her a license to sin merely shows that they have not had the change in inner nature that comes with real salvation.

How can I be sure I can go to heaven?

Depends on what you mean by "be sure."
If "know beyond any shadow of doubt," no humans know anything at this level, and we only deceive ourselves to think the contrary.
If "know for certain, even if the Bible is false," then this is not biblical Xy we are talking about; if we believe a false religion, there is no reason to suppose we will gain its promised benefits except by accident.

If "know, given that the Bible is true," the Bible gives us sufficient information that we need not be in doubt.

What does the Bible say?

God exists, is all-powerful and perfectly good.

We by our own choice are in rebellion against God.

We will not win against Him, but He is graciously offering us pardon if we repent.

He is able to do this and still be righteous by having paid for our sins Himself in the person of His Son Jesus Christ.

Do we really want to return to Him?

If so, pray to Him, confessing your sin, asking for His forgiveness, turning your life over to Him, and He will freely receive you.

If we don't want to return to Him, to really come to know the God who made the Universe, then we wouldn't be happy in heaven anyway, and hell is the only alternative consistent with God's justice and mercy; we won't be happy there either, but there is no final happiness apart from God.

For Further Reading:

God et al. *The Bible*. Frequently translated and reprinted. Try it; you'll either like it or hate it. But don't knock it until you've read it for yourself. It's better than its disciples.

John W. Montgomery, ed. *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question*.

Probe Books/Word Publishing, 1991. Twenty-two chapters by Cornell grads on evidence for the existence of the God of the Bible.

Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins. *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views*, 2nd ed. Baker Book House, 1989. Seven major approaches to reality compared and contrasted, with modern proponents, strengths and problems.

Herbert Schlossberg. *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and its Confrontation with American Society*. Thomas Nelson, 1983. Various replacements for God in our modern society, and the distortions and disasters they bring to our lives.

James Sire. *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible*. InterVarsity Press, 1980. One of the reasons there are so many views of what the Bible teaches is that it is often mishandled. Are you a Scripture-twister?

R. C. Sproul. *The Psychology of Atheism*. Bethany Fellowship, 1974. Is God a projection of the minds of Christians? Or are the atheists the ones doing the wishful thinking?

C. S. Lewis. *The Problem of Pain*. Macmillan, 1978 reprint. A classic discussion.