

Hartford Bible Students

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Why Has God Permitted Suffering?

To believe in God, one must develop in faith and learn that He is loving and wise—providing all things for man’s eternal welfare. God, whose character is supreme love, would not have permitted evil to reign over His creation without a useful purpose and, ultimately, a grand outcome. (1 John 4:8)

To understand why God permits suffering, we must first realize the difference between permitting and causing. God has permitted man to have a temporary experience with evil, but He did not cause the evil. No, Satan, the “god of this world,” is the great first cause of all evil in the universe. He is the unrelenting enemy of God and God’s creation. (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2)

Our Heavenly Father desires mankind to live in peace, health, and happiness, but He now allows Satan to have his rule of evil in order that each individual may learn valuable lessons, experiencing the results of evil and selfishness. “This sore travail has God given to man to be exercised therewith.” (Ecclesiastes 1:13)

As an illustration, although parents will try to intervene at times when a child ventures off onto a dangerous path, often it takes the hard lessons of a rebellious life to learn that trust and obedience would have saved much pain and suffering. Just as the loving parents were waiting—ready to take back the child with love and open arms—so God is longsuffering with humanity. He knew that Adam and Eve would not comprehend His warning about sin and its dire consequences. Out of love, God formulated a plan whereby Adam’s disobedience might provide a valuable, though difficult, lesson.

Free Will: A Hard Lesson

From the beginning of creation, God desired the human family to experience the privilege of free will. This liberty of choice has, of necessity, been a hard

lesson. The planetary systems move in mechanical obedience; the animal creation is driven mainly by instinct; and God could have programmed the ideal man to be blindly obedient, but man would be no better than a robot. Instead, God created man in His own image, with the ability to love and obey by choice.

Because of the vivid lessons provided by the cruel consequences of disobedience, man is learning why obedience to God is the only option for happiness. Ultimately, under the more favorable circumstances of God’s Kingdom, man will choose to love and respect his fellow man and his environment. More importantly, he will joyfully render love, respect, and perfect obedience to his Creator, trusting in His gracious provisions.

Hope Beyond the Suffering

Jesus tells us in John 5:28: “Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good to a resurrection of life and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment.” (RSV) Note again the same pattern of sequence. All will be raised from the dead, but first “they that have done good,” the true church, faithful Christians who accepted Jesus’ sacrifice and consecrated their lives to do God’s will in this present life. During Christ’s return they will be raised to spiritual life and united with their heavenly Lord. Then will follow the resurrection of the “evil” class, all the remainder of men who, through unfavorable circumstances, did not accept Jesus’ sacrifice. These will come forth to a “resurrection of judgment.”

The King James Bible, translated in A.D. 1611, grossly mistranslated the word “judgment” with the word “damnation.” The American Revised Version in 1881 used the word “judgment,” and no translation since

has used the word “damnation.” The trial time, or “due time,” for the church is in this present life, and they gladly accept the ransom price paid on their behalf. But the trial time of the remainder of mankind will be at their resurrection in the Kingdom. There will be no obstacles in the way of salvation during the glorious reign of Christ and his Church. (Isaiah 35:8-10)

God’s Kingdom to come on earth, with Christ as King, will bring to mankind a time of restoration and renewal. Satan will be restrained during this thousand-year Kingdom, and righteousness will be the rule rather than the exception. “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 32:17; Revelation 20:2; Isaiah 11:9)

This will be the first real chance for mankind to know their loving Creator under ideal circumstances. Everyone will then have a fresh start in life, a new life. If obedient, they will live forever, and having learned, by experience, that “the wages of sin is death,” the vast majority will want no more of sin and death. They will learn to love righteousness. (Romans 6:23; Isaiah 26:9)

Sorrow and Its Everlasting Lesson

It is the severity and hopelessness of the world’s problems that prophetically mark the threshold of the promised Kingdom blessings. “Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth [shattering faith]... when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.” (Luke 21:26, 28)

Just as urban renewal requires demolition, so the full establishment of Christ’s Kingdom requires removal of an old, corrupt society. (Hebrews 12:27) At the end of the thousand-year age of restoration, mankind will stand at the threshold of eternity, looking back upon this present life of suffering and sorrow, and will rejoice in the hard lessons learned.

The Prophet Jeremiah sends a message of consolation for every grieving heart: “Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for... they [the poor groaning creation] shall come again from the

land of the enemy [the grave].” Oh, what a compassionate God we have! The Apostle Paul states that God “comforteth those that are cast down.” (2 Corinthians 7:6)

He has provided ample assurance in His Word that His chastenings are rehabilitative so that His “beloved” wayward children might be restored back to His loving favor. (John 3:16) Yes, God chastens to heal! “...they shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors [Satan, sin and death], and He shall send them a Saviour, and a great one, and He shall deliver them... and the Lord shall smite [chasten] Egypt [a picture of the world]: He shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the Lord, and He shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them.” (Isaiah 19:20, 22)

The permission of evil and suffering will have been a useless torment unless mankind is given an opportunity to use this experience to make positive choices at some future time. The Scriptures promise that those who are resurrected in God’s thousand-year Kingdom on earth will return to the days of their youth to begin again! (Job 33:24-26) All the troubles and tribulations of the past, instead of being useless sufferings, will be valuable guides. Death, the penalty for sin, is not the irrevocable end of human existence; it is the final experience of an everlasting lesson.

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“The Divine Plan of the Ages”
See Chapter VII, The Permission of Evil and Its Relation to God’s Plan **(Free of charge)**

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