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Why Suffering and Death

Why is there so much suffering in the world? Why is there death? Who is the cause of trouble and sorrow? Is it God? Does God make people sick? Did God plan death? How can God be a God of love and allow suffering and decay? Is there any hope of release? Will it always go on like this?

Q. What kind of world did God make?

A. "God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31). Very good means that it was a world without sin, suffering, and death when it came from the hand of God.

Q. God made a perfect world. But when sin came into the world, what happened? A.

"Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16). Notice here that sorrow and pain came into the world as a result of sin. God did not create sorrow and pain; it came in as a result of sin.

Q. What else came into the world as a result of sin?

A. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Death was not planned by God; it came as a result of disobedience, which is sin. Of course, Adam did not die immediately, but his body did begin to wear out. God had given him such a perfect body that it took 930 years for it to wear out and die (see Genesis 5:5).

Q. What else came into the world as a result of sin?

A. "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:18, 19). Again, we cannot blame God for thorns, thistles, and a hot climate that makes a man sweat; these came as a result of sin.

The Devil Brought Sin into the World

Q. Are Adam and Eve the originators of sin?

A. "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning" (1 John 3:8). Read this also in John 8:44: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is not truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

Note: The devil is the one who brought murder into existence, and he is the father of all lies, which means that all lying started with him.

Q. Before the devil introduced sin into the world through Adam and Eve, where did he carry on his work of sin?

A. "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:7-9).

Note: The devil and his angels carried on their work in heaven before they came to this earth to introduce sin here. Jesus comments, "I beheld Satan as lightening fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18).

Q. How did the devil get into heaven in the first place?

A. "Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God;...the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created" (Ezekiel 28: 12, 13). Speaking of Lucifer (Satan, as he is called after his fall), under the symbol of the king of Tyrus, the Scriptures point out that Lucifer was created by God perfect in wisdom and beauty. God did not make a devil but a perfectly beautiful and all-wise angel whom he called Lucifer. Lucifer made a devil out of himself by choosing to go against God. "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee" Ezekiel 28:15). God was not the cause of sin in Lucifer, but Satan developed it by his continuously rebellious attitude toward God.

Q. What reason does God give for the fall of Lucifer from his perfect state to his sinful one?

A. "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13, 14). You see, Lucifer wanted to take God off the throne and set himself up as the ruler of the universe. Because Lucifer would not repent and return to full harmony with God, he and his fellow rebellious angels were cast out of heaven.

Q. Upon whom do the Scriptures lay the blame for sickness, suffering, and death?

A. "So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown" (Job 2:7). "And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself." "And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" (Luke 13:11, 16). Notice that Satan is the one that bound her in this sickness for all those years, but Jesus freed her.

Q. Did Jesus come to destroy lives?

A. "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:56).

God Permits Suffering

Q. Did God cause the loss of Job's property, the death of Job's children, the boils on Job's body, or did He permit the devil to do these things?

A. Take your Bible and read carefully Job 1:6-22 and Job 2:1-7. Due to lack of space, we give a summary of these verses: Satan and God are having a conversation, and God tells Satan that He has a perfect servant down on earth named Job. Satan replies, "He is a perfect servant of Yours only because You have built a hedge around him and You won't let me at him. You just let me afflict him, and he will curse You; he is serving You only for what he gets out of it rather than because he really loves You."

God suggests, "Satan, you go ahead and do what you want to do with him; only don't touch his body. I am sure he will still be My perfect servant." So the devil went out and killed all of Job's animals and his children. Job remained true to God: "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:22).

In chapter 2 God and Satan meet again. God says, "Satan, you have moved against Job, to destroy him without cause, but he is still true to Me."

"Yes, that is right," Satan replies, "but just let me at his body, and he will curse You to Your face."

God says, "OK. I will permit you to touch his body, but you cannot take his life."

"So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his feet unto his crown" (Job 2:7). But Job remained true to the very end.

Do you see? God permits suffering but does not cause it; He is not the originator of it.

Q. How much will God permit us to be tested and tried?

A. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Note: No test will be permitted beyond that which God knows will be for our benefit, and then God is right there to make a way of escape if the devil gets too mean with us.

Q. If God is stronger than Satan - and He is - then why does He permit suffering?

A. God allows suffering and troubles to come into our lives because He cannot do otherwise and be consistent with the way He has chosen to create. God created angels and men with the capacity to choose right or wrong, to obey Him or disobey. When Satan and men chose to disobey God, suffering and troubles came as a natural result, often injuring the innocent as well as the guilty. If God miraculously prevented problems from coming into our life, He would be interfering with our God-given ability to choose and to experience the consequences of our choices. Occasionally God does intervene to shield us from the consequences of sin. But if He did so consistently, no one would be able to see the real nature of sin. He must allow sin to run its course in order to eradicate it at last.

However, the way we relate ourselves to suffering and trouble makes all the difference in the world. Even though God does not want us to experience the heartaches of this world, He has made it possible for us to profit by them. We often develop strengths and virtues because of difficulties which we have experienced. We see our weaknesses

much more plainly after problems have come to us. We can sympathize with others who are experiencing the same sufferings we have known.

Q. With what attitude should men face the problems with which life confronts them?

A. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11). If we continue to trust God's love even when problems arise we will bring forth good fruit in our life - the fruit of righteousness, which is produced in the person who is "exercised thereby." In other words we must accept the affliction in the right way in order to develop a good character.

Develop the attitude of looking beyond this world. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). To see beyond the present gives courage to carry on. "God shall wipe away all tears from...[your] eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). There is a day coming in which there will be no suffering.

Q. Why didn't God do away with the devil as soon as he started to rebel in heaven and thus save us from all this heartache, sorrow, suffering, and death?

A. Had God destroyed the devil right away, the other angels in heaven would have been filled with fear and would have served God out of terror. God's desire is that His beings render obedience to Him out of love, not from forced submission. He wants voluntary reverence. Thus God chose a long-range plan, but a plan that would reveal the true character of Satan and rebellion. The plan called for a cross and the crucifixion of God's Son on that cross. When the devil had Jesus nailed upon the cross, it spoke to the entire universe that God is love and the devil is hate.

Once sin is wiped out of the earth, once the devil is burned to ashes (Malachi 4:1,3), once God speaks a new world into existence (2 Peter 3:10, 13), sin will never rise again - not because God forces men to follow Him, but because they see that sin led to the cross of Calvary. Thus God can make this promise in Naham 1:9: "What do ye imagine against the Lord? He will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time."