

## The Suffering of the Righteous

The Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) reasoned thusly:

**“If God wishes to prevent evil, but cannot, He then is not all-powerful;**

**If He can prevent evil, but will not, then He is not good;**

**If He has both the power and will to eliminate evil,**

**Then why is there evil in the world?”**

The basic question being asked is directed more at the existence of God, but it can be extrapolated into many forms. For our purposes, let's rephrase it this way:

**“Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?”**

And perhaps a related question,

**“Why doesn't/didn't God answer my prayer and prevent/change this?”**

All of these revolve around the apparent incongruity of righteous people suffering: bad things happening to good people, and why a righteous God would allow it. There are some initial associated questions/concerns:

- Does such assume a *quid pro quo* basis for our relationship with God? Isn't this what Satan charged regarding God and Job, cf. Job 1:10-11; 2:3-5?
- Does suffering have no benefit or purpose, cf. Jas.1:2-8?
- If suffering were eliminated- even just for the righteous, would they desire heaven?

Aside from these considerations, let's back up just a bit to the *root cause(s)* of suffering. **What causes human suffering?**

1. **Sinful choices made by the individual cause suffering, Gen.3:1-6,16-19,23-24; 3:8-16.** Eve, Adam, and Cain all suffered as a direct result of their own sinful choices. When we violate God's law, the very nature of the flesh brings about consequences, cf. Gal.5:15-21; 6:7-8a; Prov.13:15; 29:6.
2. **Sinful choices made by someone else can cause suffering, Gen.37; 39; 40; 41:1.** It wasn't Joseph's fault he was born to his father's favorite wife in his old age. Joseph had the prophetic dream, but it was surely sent to him by God. Joseph did nothing wrong to Potiphar or his wife. Joseph served the king's butler and cupbearer faithfully in prison, and accurately interpreted their dreams. Yet he was hated, mistreated, and sold into slavery by his brothers; unfairly accused by Potiphar's wife and unlawfully jailed by Potiphar; and was forgotten and left there for two full years by chief cupbearer despite his promise, 40:14-15.
3. **“Natural” Disasters cause suffering, Gen.6:1-17.** Though this destruction was wrought by nature, it was not a “natural” disaster. It was a punishment for sin levied by God against mankind. But, were there any “natural disasters” (hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, mudslides, lightening strikes, earthquakes, etc.) in the Garden of Eden, cf. Gen.2:5-17. Are “natural disasters” then caused by sin?

Originally and generally, “yes”- currently and specifically, “no.” But forces of nature that cause “natural disasters” were originally set in motion because of sin, and remain with us as a consequence, just like....

4. **Death (and getting to it) causes suffering, Gen.3:19-24.** Originally, man had access to the “*tree of life*”- only the “*tree of knowledge of good and evil*” was forbidden, cf. Gen.2:9-17. Death came as a consequence of sin. Lest we blame Adam/Eve too harshly, remember our own sins, Rom.3:23; 6:23. So, once removed from the *tree of life*, man could no longer live forever, cf. Gen.3:22, and old age and disease began to take their toll, Heb.9:27; Psa.90:4. Such is not always pretty or painless. Much suffering is often endured in the process of dying- both for the deceasing and those who care for him.
5. **Satan causes suffering, Job 1:12; 2:6-7.** In addition to the case of Job, think about this: As you read the gospels, was it “Jesus possession” or “demon possession” that caused human suffering?

**Do these *causes* for suffering mean that ALL suffering is caused by sin- that if I suffer, either I or someone else sinned to specifically cause it?**

No, cf. John 9:1-3; Luke 13:1-5. Though all suffering can *generally* traced by to sin *originally*, it does not follow that all *current* suffering is necessarily *specifically* caused by sin. I don’t believe at all that “natural disasters” (floods, hurricanes, etc.) are an act of God to punish sin because *righteous* people are “punished” along with *wicked* ones in these cases, and such is not God’s way, cf. Gen.6:5-8!

**“So why doesn’t God *prevent* the suffering of the righteous?”**

- The *decaying* of the *outer man* is necessary for the *renewal* of the *inner man*, 2Cor.4:16. We have to die in order to enter heaven (1Cor.15:36-37,42-41).
- We wouldn’t desire heaven as we should, 2Cor.4:17.
- We wouldn’t look correctly at either the *temporal* or the *eternal*, 2Cor.4:18.
- Through the *testing of our faith by trials*, we are *perfected*, Jas.1:2-4,12.
- Because *love* allows *freedom of choice*, but with *freedom of choice*, comes *wrong choices* and their *consequences*, Rom.11:22-23, 33-36.

**If God used the wrong choices of a nation and the extreme but temporary suffering of one Man to provide the opportunity of eternal salvation for all of mankind, then He also knows how to utilize whatever suffering you endure to produce good in and through you.**

**I’m not saying all suffering has a reason- but I am saying that most suffering *can* help us to see things more clearly, and grow to maturity, if we endure it with faith and patience.**