

How Sin And Suffering Began

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We face a distraught and unhappy world. All over the world, catastrophes sweep over helpless and innocent peoples. Seldom, if ever, has suffering and heartache been more intense than in recent years. Have you laid away a companion or a child and asked God "Why?" Has trouble swept over your life unexpectedly, to blight your hopes and plans? Have you asked: "Why, Lord?"

There are few questions that have been asked more often than the one we are discussing in this article. Why do innocent people suffer? To many, the greatest obstacle to Christian belief and faith, is this problem of evil, pain, and suffering. Is there an answer-a satisfying and reasonable answer? While none of us can fully understand the mind of God, yet we believe there is an answer to be found in God's Book, the Bible; and with God's help we shall endeavor to share it with you.

Who Is Responsible?

Now first of all, it is extremely important that we know who is responsible to blame for all the evil in the world. Who really is responsible for all that disrupts life and happiness?

There are at least two sources from which trouble comes. First, some of us get into trouble by our own poor judgment. We abuse our bodies by disobedience to the laws of health. Then nature rebels and we reap a harvest of illness. Surely we cannot blame God for that which automatically results from our own ignorance or carelessness. Galatians 6:7 says: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap."

The other source to which we can charge our troubles is the enemy of God-Satan, who originated all evil. It has ever been Satan's design, however, that God should be blamed; but remember this please-God is not in the business of trouble-making.

A Personal Devil

This statement concerning a personal devil doubtless comes as a surprise to some, for the idea is quite widespread that evil is just a state of mind, or that it is merely a "principle." But anyone with respect for the Bible knows that the Scripture teaches the fact of a personal devil, from Genesis to Revelation. One thing is certain-no evil, no trouble, comes of itself. Evil, in the estimation of some, may be unreal and imaginary. But when it comes close home it is very, very real. When the woman who lives next door is robbed of her money, evil is real. When you are called to follow a funeral procession, heartache is very, very real. If trouble is real, it simply follows that the cause of it is equally real.

Satan Described

Nowhere in the Bible is there a picture of a hideous monster with giant claws, fiery eyes, and red skin. Such was the invention of the superstitious during the Middle Ages-and what a clever trap this has been. Because of this grotesque conception, many intelligent people cast the whole matter aside with disgust. But, please notice the amazing revelation that the Scriptures give of his appearance and background, in the words of Jesus: "And he said unto them, 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.'" Luke 10:18. (Emphasis our own.)

Here Jesus points out Satan and calls him by name. Jesus saw Satan fall. Are you able to see an influence, or an essence, or a state of mind? No! Jesus actually saw a person fall. Notice Christ's description in John 8:44: "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

Satan is a "liar," he is a "murderer." And he "abode not in the truth." This is a certain sign that he was once in the truth, or in the faith. Jesus said He saw Satan fall from heaven, therefore Satan must have been there at one time. Yes, friend, the Scriptures make it clear that Satan was once a mighty angel in the heaven above, but that through pride and sin he fell, and has become the arch-enemy of God ever since.

Let us read Isaiah 14:12-14: "How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How are you cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit 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."

What a different view of Satan! He stood high in the courts of heaven, until sin was found in him. Notice Ezekiel 28:12-15. "Thus said the Lord God; You sealed up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. You have been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering. You are the anointed cherub that covered: and I have set you so; You were upon the holy mountain of God; You have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity was found in you."

Rather than a two-horned monster we find that we are dealing with one of the greatest beings in God's created universe. The scripture says that he was a covering cherub. Do you realize what that means? It simply means that he occupied the honored position of one of the two angels who stood overshadowing the throne of God; and yet through pride he fell, and with him fell one-third of the angels, as John tells us in Revelation. Is it any wonder that Paul says: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Ephesians 6:12.

It has been Satan's studied purpose to minimize the truth regarding his past. If men could only continue casting the whole question of evil aside by a wave of the hand and a description of a fork-tailed monster, he would be happy. It is evident that as the label is made tame and mild and ridiculous, evil becomes much more dangerous. If I should call a bottle of strychnine "oil of peppermint," you can readily see how much more dangerous it would become. No friend! The Scriptures made it very clear that the enemy of God has lost none of his original powers, and that today he "goes about as a roaring lion" because he knows that his time is short. (1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:12.)

Did God Create Evil?

No doubt someone is asking, "If Satan is a created being, is not God indirectly responsible for creating evil?" Certainly not. God created Lucifer, a magnificent angel. It was Lucifer who made a devil out of himself. If you should see an unfortunate drunken specimen of humanity lying in the gutter, would you go to his mother and accuse her of giving birth to a derelict of society? Of course not. When that man was a baby he was just as pure and sweet as any other baby. But he chose to do evil. He made a drunkard out of himself.

Through the Eyes of God

But someone is reasoning: "If God foresaw the author of sin, if He foreknew the trail of trouble to be caused by Satan, why did He not destroy him in the beginning?" Ah! That's a big question! That God allows Satan to exist and go about his business seems, at first thought, to be a contradiction of God's power and wisdom. But can you for a moment with me, try to look at our problem through the eyes of God? He says: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, said the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8, 9.

God always has a good reason for everything that He does, and, when it is for our own good, He reveals the reason to the reverent student of His Word. On this little planet we are apt to think in terms of our world, and forget that we are but one of a vast family of both men and angels.

Revelation 5:11 speaks of at least one hundred million angels in God's house. But what about the billions of blazing suns with their worlds sweeping forever about them? Would God create a system so vast and so orderly, yet leave this tiny planet as the only abode of life? Isaiah 45:18 says: "For thus said the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else."

In other words, had this world not been inhabited, its creation would have been in vain. Did God make many houses to inhabit only one? Are the heavens a vast desert of infinite loneliness? Many prominent astronomers agree that it is unimaginable to consider our planet as the only one with life.

So in dealing with Satan and his rebellious host, God had to take into account the millions of angels and perhaps billions of other created beings who could not see the full and final cost of Lucifer's rebellion. The word "sin" was not in their vocabulary. Men were not able to know its deadly nature. Had God blotted out Lucifer, the chief angel, He would have appeared as a ruthless tyrant, and God's universe would thereafter have served Him from fear.

Do you see what I mean? When God created men and angels He took a terrible chance, for He created them with the power of choice. There was always the possibility of someone choosing wrong, and Lucifer was that one. Do you see? There was only one way that God could handle the situation. The result of Lucifer's course of action must be demonstrated. It must be permitted to run its full and final course-and what a demonstration it has been! Angels and men look on as the great controversy rages; but thank God there is a way out. Satan's destiny is sealed, and all who find victory in Christ may have the thrilling privilege of vindicating God's name before the universe as men and women "saved by grace."

Behind the Curtain

Now may I draw aside the curtain? We shall look with interest into this controversy between Christ and Satan. We shall see, in fact, the clearest illustration in the Scriptures that it is the enemy of God that brings trouble, and in turn leads men to blame God. It is found in Job.

In the book of Job, chapters one and two, we find that Satan makes his way to the parliament of -the heavens as a representative of this world. After falling to earth, he had succeeded in wresting from Adam the dominion of this world. He therefore boldly comes to represent it in the parliament of the universe. Read these two chapters carefully and you will discover that the Lord asks Satan some pointed questions regarding His servant, Job. Satan charges God with putting a hedge around Job, so that no evil can befall him. So God promises to take away that hedge to reveal to Satan that Job is not serving Him just because of the protection he receives, but because Job loves God. And then trouble falls upon Job. His sheep are burned. His children are destroyed. He is visited by disaster after disaster. But it is said of Job: "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." Job 1:22.

Then on another occasion when Satan appeared before the Lord, God brought up the matter again. And Satan charged God that he was not permitted to touch Job's body. He declared that if Job felt pain he would curse God to His face. And so to demonstrate Job's loyalty, God removed the protecting hand about Job, and the record says that Satan infected Job with boils from the "sole of his foot to the crown of his head." Job still remained steadfast, but notice what his wife said: "Then said his wife unto him, Do you still retain your integrity? Curse God, and die." Job 2:9.

Isn't that typical of the reaction of men and women through the ages? We see who is actually responsible for Job's trouble and yet God gets the blame!

How human! How easy it is to have our vision so distorted as to blame the innocent and let the guilty go free.

How much more rewarding to say with Job when the tests are past, "He knows the way that I take: when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Job 23:10.

Christ Shares in Our Sufferings

That brings me to one of the most encouraging points in our discussion. God says that we are not to think it strange when trial comes. We are not to read mystery, contradiction, or frustration, into suffering when it comes. Let us see why. In 1 Peter 4:12 and 13 we read: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings." (Emphasis our own.)

Some people are under the impression that a Christian is to be relieved of suffering and pain and trouble. Then when such a perfect state of protection does not materialize, discouragement -d disillusionment set in. But please know that:

"God has not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through
God has not promised Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain;
But God hath promised strength for the day;
Rest for the labor, light for the way;
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love."

We are in a world where the natural result of evil abounds on every side, and God's people as well as others are to live with it. Remember this, though: Through it all we can be partakers of Christ's sufferings. He went through suffering too, and showed us how to meet it. Please know that God never asks us to endure pain which He has not endured.

A grief-stricken father, having just heard the news of his son's death, asked the minister, "Where was God last night when my son was killed?"

The minister quietly replied: "He was in the same place He was when His Son was killed."

Yes, God has actually entered directly into the tragedy Himself, and that for two reasons First that He might know how to comfort and strengthen all who place their trust in Him. And secondly that He might seal forever the destiny of the destroyer.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that though death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." Hebrews 2:14, 18.

Because of the victory of the cross, Satan is permitted to go only so far in his destructive plan against the children of God. Satan is never allowed to bring into your life and mine more than God sees we can bear. Notice 1 Corinthians 10:13: "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 of escape; that ye may be able to bear it."

No, it is not God who brings temptation: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts he any man." James 1: 13. It is not God's desire to see His children in trouble: "For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." Lamentations 3:33.

Do you see, there is a vital difference between what God allows and what He intends. If God intended "trouble and suffering, it would be a different matter entirely. But God allows a certain amount of it to come, even in the life of a Christian, but with it comes a blessing if it is met in the right spirit. The darkest hours in my life, the most difficult experiences, the pain and the suffering, all have made me a kinder man, and more understanding of the needs of others. However little I might have understood God's plan at the time, He has a wonderful way of under girding by His sustaining strength, and working all things "together for good."

There are floods of healing, floods of grace, available for everyone in a world wherein the enemy of God "goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour," there is a greater power waiting to sustain and help you, and turn apparent defeats and shattered hopes into glorious victories.

I have good news for you. While sin and its author, Satan, will eventually be destroyed, it is not necessary to wait until Satan is destroyed before I can live right. There is victory for everyone in Christ. You and I are in the midst of a mighty conflict. Without doubt, you are conscious of that conflict in your life. The outcome of this conflict depends on what you do with Jesus. May I recall the words of Martin Luther's great hymn:

"Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing."
"Just ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He,
Lord Sabaoth His name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle."

Do you like the note of victory in those noble lines? Who would shrink from the privilege of vindicating the character of God? We may have this privilege by remaining steadfast and true in a time of crisis. Give yourself completely to Him, and you will find His sustaining grace and power sufficient for every need. And what is more, in the end you will find yourself among the saved in God's kingdom when trouble and human suffering will forever be in the past. Then "God shall wipe away all tears from their 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.

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