

Why Good People Suffer and Bad People Prosper

John The Baptist

If there was ever someone who approached to being a good man, it would have to have been John the Baptist. Jesus said that of all those ever born, there had not arisen a greater than John the Baptist. But this greatest prophet was cast into a loathsome dungeon by the wicked king Herod. Day after day he suffered in that prison, until he was finally beheaded. And all the while, the wicked king Herod lived splendidly.

John suffering in his cell began to ask the age old question “Why do innocent people suffer?” He even sent a delegation to Jesus to ask Him if He was truly the Christ or if they should look for another. Our study today will uncover why Jesus allowed John to suffer, and help us to understand why God allows his children to suffer today and in every age.

The Origin of Suffering

One of the greatest angels in the courts of heaven was called Lucifer. He was created to fill the highest role of responsibility in the heavenly courts.

“I ordained and anointed you as the mighty angelic guardian. You had access to the holy mountain of God and walked among the stones of fire.”
(Ezekiel 28:14 NLT-SE)

What are stones of fire?

“And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it.”
(Ezekiel 1:26 NKJV)

“For our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:29 KJV)

Sapphire is clear, so as the fire-like glory of God illuminates and reflects and refracts in the sapphire stone, it would appear to be flashing with fire.

“You were the anointed cherub who covers”
(Ezekiel 28:14 NKJV)

We thus have a picture of the most powerful angel in all heaven, created as God’s special assistant, the personal friend and the right hand man of God himself.

“You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day evil was found in you.”
(Ezekiel 28:15 NLT-SE)

What happened that evil would be found in this perfect angel?

“Your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty. Your wisdom was corrupted by your love of splendor.”
(Ezekiel 28:17 NLT-SE)

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened 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 also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.”
(Isaiah 14:12–14 NKJV)

“By your great wisdom in trade you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth.” (Ezekiel 28:5 NRSV)

“Your rich commerce led you to violence, and you sinned. So I banished you in disgrace from the mountain of God. I expelled you, O mighty guardian, from your place among the stones of fire.”
(Ezekiel 28:16 NLT-SE)

“Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”
(Revelation 12:6–9 ESV)

So we see that this perfect angel rebelled and became called the Devil, Satan.

Did God create a devil? No, he created a perfect angel with the power of choice. For God to have withheld the power of choice from any created being would have meant that being could not truly love. True love is always **chosen**. It cannot be **forced**. What God wanted most in creating others was their true love. He loves your friendship! He yearns for your fellowship!

It was not only Satan who was cast to the earth but also other angels who he had deceived in heaven. Those fallen angels are who we call demons today.

“The seven **stars** are the **angels** of the seven churches:” (Revelation 1:20 KJV)

“And his tail drew the third part of the **stars [angels]** of heaven, and did cast them to the earth:”
(Revelation 12:4 KJV)

Thus it seems that every angel was tested to see where their loyalty lay. Some chose rebellion. Likewise our world tested.

“Happy is the one who endures testing, because when he has proven to be genuine, he will receive the crown of life that God promised to those who love him.”
(James 1:3, 12 NET)

For our world, the test was extremely simple:

“And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”” (Genesis 2:16–17 NIV11-GK)

Adam and Eve ate the fruit. In doing so, they showed that they doubted the care and love of God just as Lucifer/Satan had done before them. The question in their hearts was, is God self serving? Would God actually deny himself for other’s good? Or is God perhaps selfish?

But that instance of disobedience weakened humans, so that it would be harder to resist the devil’s suggestion the next time. And every generation has become weaker still, and followed more of the devils suggestions than the previous generation. We are continually doing as Adam did.

God did not create a sinful world. The Bible says in Gen 1 that God saw everything was “**very good**”! He created humans with the capacity to love, and choose, and when choosing disobedience, they also chose all the misery that went along with that terrible decision to sin. Sin is fundamentally the cause of all suffering past, present, and future!

One star of hope illumined the dark and dismal future. God said to the Satan (personified in the serpent he had used to tempt Eve),

“And the Lord God said to the serpent... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring; He will bruise and tread your head underfoot, and you will lie in wait and bruise His heel.” (Genesis 3:14–15 AMP)

Jesus came to this earth, lived a life of unceasing and perpetual self sacrifice. Christ showed the character of the Father, that God’s entire government was built on the principle of denying himself to do others good. That to give is to live! Jesus showed that there was infinite self sacrifice with God, that His entire existence is bound up in self sacrifice.

Jesus lived a life constantly doing others good. He could always be found healing, teaching, caring and serving. Yet He was among the most persecuted in all history. If there was ever a Good Person who suffered, it was Jesus.

See Jesus brought before Pilate, as the priests and solders plant the crown of thorns on his brow! Yet the sufferer was such a Good Man! See him as the mighty whip barbed with broken pieces of glass and metal is lashed across his back 40 times, twice! Why should the worlds Greatest Man suffer so! See him as fainting he falls beneath the cross, and burden too heavy for him to bear. Why is He, of all men, the Mighty Sufferer? See him with hands outstretched on the cross, with pain of soul too deep for words, as he cries out those agonizing tones, “My God, why have you forsaken me!” See him as he cries out “I thirst”! Friend, he thirsted not merely for water but he thirsted for your soul! It was for this reason that he suffered! It was for you! It was to bear your sin, to open for you an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of God!

Was Jesus innocent? He is the only person who was ever completely innocent!

“Who do good people suffer and bad people prosper” is really a **false question**. Because evil people don’t really prosper inside, wicked people may appear to live happily but their hearts are filled with unhappiness, hopelessness and meaninglessness. And there’s no one truly good except God! Apart from Christ, I am not good! In that sense, a better question is why does such an undeserving person as me not suffer far more than I do!

Back to our original story, Herod, while he may appear to have prospered in reality lived a terrified miserable life.

Herod's sin was ever before him. Herod could find no rest. Engaged in the affairs of the state, receiving honors from men, he bore a smiling face, while he concealed an anxious heart, ever oppressed with the fear that a curse was upon him.

No one is truly good except Jesus. And yet he suffered more than anyone will ever suffer! Here we see God willing to enter into our pain! He understands us! And He promises that He is about to make all things, even the worst things, work together for our good if we give our lives to him!

“And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose,”
(Romans 8:28 NET)

“I have refined you, but not as silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering.” (Isaiah 48:10 NLT-SE)

Where is God when we suffer? He is WITH US! He is bering the pain WITH US! He is is there to comfort and strengthen us that we may not faint or loose heart!

Matthew 28:20: “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

God has promised that after a few short years of testing on this earth he has an eternity of unparalleled bliss and unalloyed pleasure for those who love him.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And 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. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.” (Revelation 21:1–5 KJV)

He is working out a great plan that when finished will bring the world back to His original ideal. Wouldn't it be wise for us to refrain from judging the legitimacy of this plan, based on the experiences that we have while the plan is still incomplete?

Why didn't Jesus rescue John

One century old commentary I read had a thought that may be valuable:

“But for the sake of thousands who in after years must pass from prison to death, John was to drink the cup of martyrdom. As the followers of Jesus should languish in lonely cells, or perish by the sword, the rack, or the fagot, apparently forsaken by God and man, what a stay to their hearts would be the thought that John the Baptist, to whose faithfulness Christ Himself had borne witness, had passed through a similar experience! ... God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him. Not Enoch, who was translated to heaven, not Elijah, who ascended in a chariot of fire, was greater or more honored than John the Baptist, who perished alone in the dungeon. “Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Philippians 1:29. And of all the gifts that Heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor.” Conflict Commentary, Vol 3, p 224

The next time you suffer, consider if that suffering could be used by God as a blessing in disguise. Consider if your experience could be an object lesson to millions of angels who are seeking to gain a deeper understanding of God's great plan to make all things right in the end. What if your testimony of how God sustained you and comforted you with his blessed presence amidst suffering, was instrumental in saving some other person? Would suffering be too much to pay for such a recompense of reward?

“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”
(2 Corinthians 4:17–18 ESV)