

Spring 2014 Newsletter
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WHEN WILL GOD STOP THE SUFFERING?

*"Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering,
and plenteous in mercy and truth." Psalm 86:15*

"In all their affliction he[God] was afflicted." Isaiah 63:9

THE HEADLINES READ: Bloody civil war in Syria rages on.—Russia invades eastern Ukraine and takes the Crimea against Ukraine's protests.—Airliner missing over the Indian Ocean, defies efforts searchers to find it. Families live in suspense over the fate of their loved ones.—California UPS truck crashes into school bus, 10 killed—Student in Pennsylvania school stabs 20 teens and one adult.—Washington State landslide buries homes and kills 36, leaving dozens still missing.—Detroit mother stabs her 8 year old daughter to death. Says she was drunk and high on drugs.

Crime, drug abuse, ethnic animosities, natural disasters, economic insecurity, armed aggression, mental and physical suffering, death! The pages of our newspapers are filled with one horror after another. In the face of such calamities no question is more universally asked than, Why doesn't God stop the suffering?

Even for those who staunchly avow the existence of God and bear the name Christian, a failure to fully understand

his plan leaves so many questions unanswered. Why did God permit the present reign of evil? Why did he permit Satan to present the temptation to our first parents, after having created them perfect and upright? Why did he allow the forbidden tree to have a place among the good? Why do we all suffer for the sin of Adam? Despite all attempts to turn it aside, the question will obtrude itself—Could not God have prevented all possibility of man's fall? Since God did not prevent man's fall, will he really punish man eternally for falling?

This subject, therefore, not only takes in all tragedies, natural and man-made, and all human ailments, sorrows, pains, weaknesses and death, but goes back of all these to consider their primary cause—sin—and its remedy. Since sin is the cause of evil, its removal is the only method of permanently curing the malady.

God could have prevented the entrance of sin, but such interference would have prevented the accomplishment of his own purposes—to make manifest the perfection,

majesty and righteous authority of his law, and to prove both to men, and to angels, the evil consequences resulting from its violation.

God's plan, when seen in its completeness, will prove his wisdom in permitting evil for man's instruction. Then man will know "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." (Romans 11:33) However things may appear, God is not out of control. The Psalmist says: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." (Psalm 76:10)

Besides, some things are impossible even with God, as the Scriptures state. It is "impossible for God to lie." (Hebrews 6:18) "He cannot deny himself." (2 Timothy 2:13) He cannot do wrong, and therefore he could not choose any but the wisest and best plan for introducing his creatures into life, even though our short-sighted vision might for a time fail to discern the hidden springs of infinite wisdom.

God could have made mankind devoid of ability to choose between right and wrong, or able only to do right. To have made him so would have been to make man merely a living machine, and certainly not a being in the mental image of his Creator. He might have made man perfect and a free agent, as he did, and have guarded him from Satan's wiles. In that case, man's experience being limited to good, he would have been continually susceptible to suggestions of evil from without, or to ambitions from within. This would have made the everlasting future uncertain, and an outbreak of disobedience and disorder would always have been a possibility.

That perfection of physical nature was no protection against following an evil suggestion was proven in Eden by Adam, who until that time knew only goodness and beauty, but risked it all to follow Eve into disobedience. (1 Timothy 2:14) It is also a characteristic human trait that good is never so highly appreciated except as it is when contrasted with evil. Therefore, God has given man the "knowledge of good and evil" so in due time he will be able to choose the good and forever reject the evil.

The long period of human experience with sickness, sin, and death that began in Eden, is characterized in the Bible as a time of darkness, a nighttime. But God did not plan to leave man forever under the curse of death. The promises of the Bible assure us that this "night" is to terminate in a morning of joy. The prophet wrote,

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." – Psalm 30:5

The question might arise, Was it fair to make all mankind suffer for the sin of one man? God, foreseeing the course man would take if left free to choose for himself, did not hinder him from tasting sin and its bitter results, but he began even before his fall to provide a means for his recovery by providing a Redeemer, a great Savior, Jesus,—"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Revelation 13:8)—able to save to the uttermost all who would return unto God through him. God's standard of justice is "life for life." (Deuteronomy 19:21; Exodus 21:23) Since one man had sinned, one man could stand as his substitute; the just equivalent for Adam. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." (Romans 5:19)

To this end—that man might have a free will and yet be enabled to profit by his first failure in its misuse—God has provided not only a ransom for all, but also that a knowledge of the opportunity thus offered of reconciliation with himself shall be testified to all in due time, when all are given a knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:3-6) By no other means could the wisdom, justice, love and power of God be so thoroughly demonstrated.

The prophecies reveal that the daytime of divine blessing for mankind will dawn at the second coming of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom, which pictorially is described as the rising of the "Sun of Righteousness." (Malachi 4:2) In this prophecy we are promised that as a result of the rising of this "Sun" the people will be healed of their diseases. What a beautiful and reassuring illustration this is that the long, dark night of suffering is not to last forever—that a "morning cometh."

It was indeed a dark world into which Jesus came, but he said "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12) He came to be the "King of kings," but first he must be the "Lamb of God" who by the sacrifice of his life "taketh away the sin [singular--Adam's sin] of the world." (John 1:29) The Bible tells us that he "tasted death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9), and because of this "all who are in their graves will hear his voice and shall come forth." (John 5:28,29) By his faithfulness, he purchased the entire race of mankind out of the prison-house of death. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22-26)

The scriptures tell us that during his earthly ministry Jesus "went about all Galilee teaching...and preaching the gospel of the kingdom." (Matthew 4:23). The promise of the Kingdom was the central point of his earthly ministry, for in this kingdom all mankind will be blessed and all the enemies of righteousness will be destroyed. Jesus healed many people, but told his disciples they would do greater works than these because he would give his life for the life of the world. (John 14:12; 6:51) The day is coming when "the knowledge of the glory of God will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea," (Habakkuk 2:14) "he shall speak peace unto the heathen," (Zechariah 9:10) and all the nations shall be healed. (Revelation 22:1-3)

The Book of Psalms gives us a glimpse of the glorious result of Christ's reign and the wonderful conditions that will prevail:

Psalm 2:6-8 all nations are to become the inheritance of God's Son.

Psalm 72:8 defines this dominion as reaching "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."

Psalm 72 further notes that the king will rule in equity and bring justice to the people. "he shall save the children of the needy and shall break in pieces the oppressor;" "all nations shall call him blessed."

Psalm 46:9 tells of how "He maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth."

Psalm 9:8,9 "He shall judge the world in righteousness...The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed."

Psalm 67:4-6 "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for thou shalt judge the people righteously and govern the nations upon earth... Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us."

A beautiful picture of the Kingdom is found in Isaiah 35. "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not behold your God will come with vengeance, ... he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out and streams in the desert. ... And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

In Revelation 20 we learn the fate of Satan, the deceiver and author of all sin and corruption. "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the

dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season." (vss. 1-3) So during the kingdom there is no tempter to lead the people astray. Then after Satan is allowed to once again attempt to deceive, he will be destroyed in the lake of fire (second death). vss.10,14

Then the 21st chapter of Revelation, tells us what the world will be like. "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." (vs. 4)

Just as a parent will sometimes allow a willful child to suffer the consequences of his actions so he will learn to trust the wisdom of his parent, so God is allowing man to learn the lesson of the heavy cost of sin so when offered the blessings of the kingdom, he will not be tempted again to choose evil. God's will "will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10) when Christ rules as king over all the earth.

*"Even so, come, Lord Jesus."
Revelation 22:10*

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