

Why human suffering? (Acts of God?)

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“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1).

When Job said these words he was experiencing human suffering. Although not all suffer to the extent of Job, it is a fact that all suffer. There are few things that challenge the Christian’s faith as much as human suffering. It causes skepticism and doubt when we see things like war, injustice, disease, birth defects, natural catastrophes and so on.

Many times, we’re tempted to blame God for all of this. Human suffering is a favorite excuse for the atheist. He says, “If your God is a loving God, why does He allow so much suffering? Either He is unable to help, He doesn’t care, or He just simply does not exist. If your God is a loving God, why does He allow so much suffering?”

Actually, that’s an excellent question. The atheist believes this question is the Christian’s Achilles heel; however, this question does have an answer, and it can be answered with one word: **Sin**. If mankind didn’t sin, we wouldn’t have suffering.

Paul states in Romans 5:12: *“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”*

Sin is so horrible that it even causes the innocent to suffer. Think about the drunk driver that smashes into a family and kills or maims even the children in the back seat. Or, think about children being born with birth defects – a direct result of a polluted gene pool because of the sins of our ancestors, sins such as pollution of the environment, substance abuse, or the disobeying of God’s marriage law spreading disease through rampant promiscuity. Our best insurance against many forms of suffering (STDs) is just to obey God’s moral laws.

Speaking of insurance, have you ever read your insurance policy where it talks about things it will either cover or not cover? There’s one phrase that you’ll see on almost every policy – an “Act of God,” referring to natural catastrophes such as floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, etc.

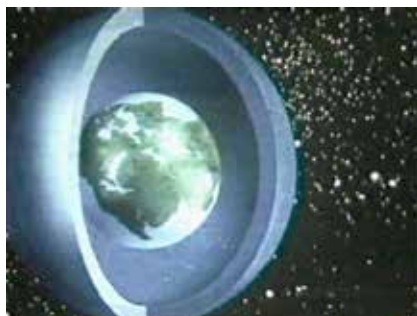
Big catastrophic events that happen in nature, they call “Acts of God.” Natural catastrophes are a big cause of human suffering. Are they, as your insurance claims, the fault of God? Or, are they a result of sin as well?

In Genesis 1:6-10 we read, “Then God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.’ Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day. Then God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear’; and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good.”

When God says something is good, it’s the same as saying it is perfect. This description of how He divided the waters in the beginning is a lot different than how we see our atmosphere operate today. He set waters above the firmament or the heavens, in the outer atmosphere as a giant canopy or a “green house” that covered the entire earth.

The famous first-century Jewish historian Josephus wrote a commentary on the book of Genesis. Quoting from Jewish tradition orally handed down through the ages, he explained these “waters above the firmament” as “a crystalline”¹ form covering the earth “around it.” It makes sense that water outside the earth’s atmosphere in space would have been frozen and would have allowed for a clear view into space, as if through a glass sphere, creating a world-wide greenhouse.

This explains, in part, how people lived such long lives in the early part of the Bible. This greenhouse canopy not only regulated a consistent world-wide tropical temperature (scientists have discovered tropical plant life frozen below the ice in Antarctica at the bottom of the world), it also filtered out the harmful UV rays from the sun that age, and burn, and deteriorate our skin, causing us to age much faster. Our God created the world this way, and He said it was good.



In Genesis 6:13 we read: “And God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.’”

Also, in Genesis 7:10-12, “And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all *the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.* And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.”

When Noah and his family stepped off the ark, the world was a much different place than it was before the flood. The fountains of the great deep broke through the mantle eventually causing the continents to break and drift. We still have earthquakes as a result of this today. Additionally, the windows of heaven opened. That great canopy that was once a protective covering became a smothering blanket for a sinful world.

When the waters subsided, the canopy was gone, the terrain was different, and the sun was allowed to beat down with much more intensity than before. Heat was allowed to escape at the polar caps causing a now constant turbulent shift of heat and cold, causing tornadoes, hurricanes and floods.

Acts of God? No – the result of our sinful ancestors. Even though God allows suffering, He is not to be blamed for it.

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. And the Lord said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ So Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.’ Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?’ So Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!’ And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.’ So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord” (Job 1:6-12).

Notice that, even though He allowed it, God was not the cause of Job’s suffering. Even though God allows such things, He has always had man’s ultimate good in mind.

“For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:6-11).

David said in Psalm 119:71, *“It is good for me that I was afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes.”* And in verse 67 he says, *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept Thy word.”*

The purpose of suffering is to bring man back to God and cause man to rely more on his Creator. God does not desire human suffering. Look at the description He gives of Heaven in Revelation 21:2-5: *“Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’ Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful.’”*

The ultimate proof that God does not desire man to suffer is the fact that He sent His Son to live and suffer as a man, to die on the cross as a perfect sacrifice (for our sin, not His own), allowing us, a rebellious people, the opportunity to spend eternity in Heaven with Him if we would believe in Him and obey His word.

God does not desire man to suffer. But when it happens, will it cause you to rely on Him?

1. Josephus, Complete works, 1960, Kregal Publications, Page 25.