

WHY IS THERE DEATH & SUFFERING?

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Death and suffering is everywhere!

“Over 170,000 perish in Asian tsunami”

“Ten girls shot in Amish school massacre”

“Hurricane Katrina devastates Gulf Coast”

“Hundreds of thousands die in Darfur”

Tragedy is constantly in our news, including large-scale “senseless” disasters that snuff out the lives of thousands. The vivid images of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York’s World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Flight 93 will remain with us through the rest of our lives.



On CNN television in early 2005, former U.S. presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton were interviewed by Larry King about the December 2004 tsunami tragedy.

The presidents were asked questions concerning their religious faith and how people should understand what happened in Asia in terms of the existence of a loving God. Generic statements such as “life isn’t easy” were uttered. And both presidents said that such tragedies strengthened their “faith” (though what this “faith” entails was not defined on the program). Sadly, no real answers were provided.

These men, who at one time held the most powerful office in the world, chose not to use the Bible and its very first book to present an answer. Indeed, it is in the Bible’s first three chapters where Christians can offer a questioning world the explanation of the meaning of death and suffering—and why a loving God allows them to happen.

Without taking anything at all away from the anguish and grief resulting from terrible catastrophes, in an ultimate sense tragedies happen on a daily basis ... and they are the consequence of an event that occurred on the saddest day in the

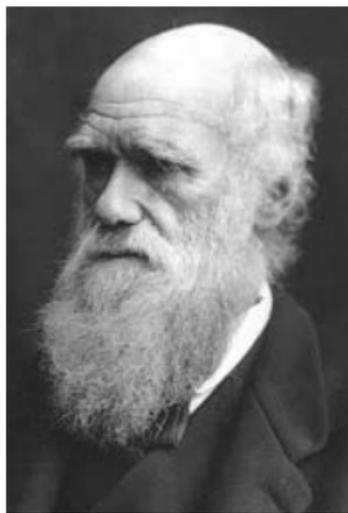
history of the universe: when the first man Adam rebelled against the Creator, thus bringing sin and death into a once-perfect world.

When a major tragedy captures global attention, there's usually much discussion in the media concerning how such things can be understood in terms of a loving God. While some Christian leaders are asked for their response (and usually falter, sad to report), atheists will often chime in and claim that there can't be a loving God because of such a horrible calamity.

Tragedies, of course, are not confined to today. It wasn't too long ago when an evil regime wiped out six million Jews and many others. In addition to the headline events, each of us suffers pain at one time or another—illness, headaches, accidents, and eventually death. It's not surprising when the burdens become too great, that people cry out to God in anguish, “Why don't you do anything? Don't you care?”

It has been written of the daughter of one famous man that “Annie's cruel death destroyed Charles's tatters of beliefs in a moral, just universe. Later he would say that this period chimed the final death-knell for his Christianity. . . . Charles [Darwin] now took his stand as an unbeliever.”²

When Darwin wrote his famous book *On the Origin of Species*, he was in essence writing a history concerning death and struggle. In the conclusion of his chapter entitled “On the imperfections of the geological record,” Darwin wrote: “Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows.”³

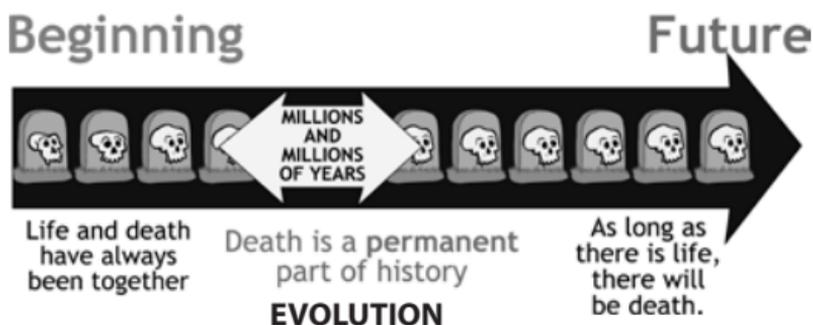


From his evolutionary perspective on the origin of life, Darwin recognized that death had to be a permanent part of the world. Undoubtedly, he struggled with this issue as he sought to reconcile some sort of belief in God with the death and suffering he observed all around him, and which he believed had gone on for millions of years.

This struggle came to a climax with the death of his daughter Annie—“the final death-knell for his Christianity.”

Belief in evolution and/or millions of years necessitates that death has been a part of history since

life first appeared on this planet. The fossil layers (containing billions of dead things) supposedly represent the history of life over millions of years. As the late Carl Sagan is well known to have said, “The secrets of evolution are time and death.”⁴



Sin and death

The phrase “sin and death” sums up the history of death according to a different perspective: the one that the Bible teaches. From a perspective of the literal history of the book of Genesis, there was a perfect world to start with—described by God as “very good” (Genesis 1:31)—but it was marred because of Adam’s rebellion. Sin and its consequence of death entered the world that was once a paradise (Romans 5:12 and the verses that follow). The death of man and the animals was not part of the original creation.

The true history of death, as understood from a

literal Genesis, actually enables us to recognize a loving Creator who hates death.

Which history of death do you, the reader, accept? Is it one that makes God an ogre responsible for millions of years of death, disease, and suffering? Let's look at this a little more, including one of the most-asked questions of our modern age.

How can an all-powerful, loving God allow suffering?

As the initial shock of a traumatic event wears off, people begin asking why such things occur. Inevitably the same question is raised: "How can there be a loving, all-powerful God who permits such death and suffering?"

In fact, the widespread suffering we see is often used by atheists to attack Christianity and its claim of a "loving God." It is a legitimate question.

Multitudes have rejected God because of suffering!

Believing that the world is millions or billions of years old, some Christians will have an almost impossible task explaining the purpose behind the apparent cruelty that's seen all around.

Darwin has been only one of probably millions of people who have struggled with this issue, trying to reconcile belief in God with the death and suffering Darwin observed everywhere, which he believed had gone on for millions of years. Darwin's struggle over this issue came to an end with the death of his ill daughter.

Similarly, CNN founder and billionaire Ted Turner says that he lost his faith after his sister died. The *New York Times* ran a sobering article about him, saying, "Turner is a strident nonbeliever, having lost his faith after his sister ... died of a painful disease. ... 'I was taught that God was love and God was powerful,' Turner said, 'And I couldn't understand how someone so innocent should be made or allowed to suffer so.'" ⁵

A famous evangelist rejected Christianity, in part because of the suffering he saw. A former colleague of famed evangelist Billy Graham, the late Charles Templeton, published *Farewell to God* in 1996,^{6,7} describing his slide into unbelief and his eventual rejection of Christianity. Once listed among those "best used of God" as picked by the National Association of Evangelicals, Templeton listed several "reasons for rejecting the Christian faith."

- Geneticists, he wrote, say it is “nonsense” to believe that sin is the “reason for all the crime, poverty, suffering, and general wickedness in the world.”⁸
- The “grim and inescapable reality” is that “*all life is predicated on death*. Every carnivorous creature *must* kill and devour another creature. It has no option.”⁹

Templeton, like Darwin, had a big problem understanding how to reconcile an earth full of death, disease and suffering with the loving God of the Bible. Templeton stated:

Why does God’s grand design require creatures with teeth designed to crush spines or rend flesh, claws fashioned to seize and tear, venom to paralyze, mouths to suck blood, coils to constrict and smother—even expandable jaws so that prey may be swallowed whole and alive? ... Nature is in Tennyson’s vivid phrase, “red [with blood] in tooth and claw,” and life is a carnival of blood.¹⁰

Templeton then concludes: “How could a loving and omnipotent God create such horrors as we have been contemplating?”¹¹

Templeton is not the only person to think like this. When told that there is a God of love who made the world, embittered people often reply with something like this: “I don’t see a God of love. I just see innocent children suffering and dying. There are so many people committing terrorist attacks. Disease is everywhere. It’s a horrible world, and I don’t see your God of love. If your God does exist, He must be some sadistic ogre.”

Does an atheist really have a case?

It can be useful to ask such a questioner to justify the validity of his own question *under his own belief system*. You see, for an atheist to complain that the God of the Bible is “evil,” he must provide a standard of good and evil by which to judge Him. But if we are simply evolved pond scum, as a consistent atheist must believe, where can we find an objective standard of right and wrong?

Ultimately, our ideas of right and wrong, under this system, are merely the outcome of some chemical processes that occur in the brain, which happened to give a survival advantage on our supposed ape-like ancestors. But did Hitler’s brain obey the same chemical laws as those in humanitarian Mother Teresa’s? So on what grounds are

the latter's actions "better" than the other's? Also, why should the terrorist attacks massacring thousands of people on 9/11 be more terrible than a frog killing thousands of flies?

A Christian, however, believes there is an objective standard of morality because it is set by an objective moral Lawgiver who is our Creator. When you think about it, an atheist's argument against God because of objective evil concedes (inadvertently) the very point he or she is trying to argue against!

Such questions about God stem from a wrong view of history

Belief in evolution and/or millions of years of history necessitates that death has been a part of history since life first appeared on this planet. If you believe that the fossil layers (containing billions of dead things) represent the history of life over millions of years, it's a very ugly record—full of death, disease, and suffering.

Sagan's phrase that the "secrets of evolution are time and death" encapsulates the most widely accepted history of death in our world.¹² According to this view, 1.) death, suffering and disease over millions of years led to man's emergence; 2.) death, suffering, and disease exist in this present



world; and 3.) death, suffering, and disease will continue into the future. Death is a permanent part of history, and death is our evolutionary *ally* in the “creation” of life.

Implications about suffering, if you accept this view of history

If a person believes in millions of years, then our world has *always* been a deadly place. The question that should be naturally asked is: “Who caused the cancer, disease, and violence represented in the fossil record?” Christians who believe in millions of years of history have a serious problem. The Bible plainly says that God is the Creator, and He called *everything* that He had made before the fall of Adam and Eve “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

This situation is represented in the following:



As soon as Christians allow for death, suffering, and disease before Adam's sin (which they automatically *must* if they believe in millions of years), then they've raised a serious question about their precious gospel message. What, then, has sin done to the world, we need to ask them? According to Christian teaching, death is the penalty for sin (Romans 6:23)—and this fact is the foundation of the gospel



The wrong view!

(1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45)! Moreover, how can all things be “restored” to a state with no death, pain or tears in the future (Revelation 21:4) if there never was a time free of death and suffering?

The whole message of the gospel falls apart if you have a view of history with death existing before Adam. It would also mean that God is to blame for death.

The Bible gives the *right* view of history— and the right view of God!

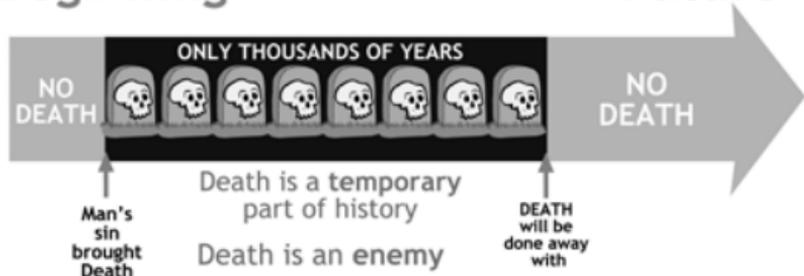
Thankfully, God has given us a different account of the history of death than evolution/millions of years, and it’s recorded in His Word, the Bible. This reliable historical document connects to the real issues of life, and it fully explains why horrible things happen.

In fact, God’s Word has much to say about death.

“Sin and death”—this phrase sums up the true history of death, as recorded in Genesis. As stated before, God originally created a perfect world, described by God as “very good” (Genesis 1:31). People and animals ate plants, not other animals (Genesis 1:29–30). There was no violence or pain in this “very good” world.

Beginning

Future



But this sinless world was marred by the rebellion of the first man, Adam. His sin brought an *intruder* into the world—death. God had to judge sin with death, as He warned Adam that He would (Genesis 2:17; cf. 3:19).

Indeed, God apparently caused the first death in the world: an animal was slain to make clothing for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). As a result of God's judgment on the world, God has given us a taste of life without Him—a world that is running down; a world full of death and suffering. As Romans 8:22 says, “the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs”—because God Himself subjected the creation to processes of decay (verse 20).

Implications about suffering, if you accept this view of history

How can we find a God of love amid the groan-

ing of this world? By understanding the Genesis account of the Fall, we know that we are looking at a fallen, cursed world.

From the Bible's perspective of history, death is really an enemy, not an ally. In 1 Corinthians 15:26, the Apostle Paul describes death as the "last enemy." Death was *not* a part of God's original creation, which truly was "very good." Based on a straightforward reading of Genesis, history can be represented by the following illustration:



Death and suffering is the penalty for sin. When Adam rebelled against God, in effect he was saying that he wanted life without God. He wanted to decide truth for himself, independently of God.

Now the Bible tells us that Adam was the head of the human race, representing each one of us who are his descendants. Paul says in Romans 5:12–19 that we sin "in Adam," after the likeness of Adam. In other words, we have the same problem Adam

had. When Adam rebelled against God, all human beings, represented by Adam, effectively said that they wanted life without God.

God had to judge Adam's sin with death. He had already warned Adam that if he sinned, he would "surely die." After Adam's Fall, he and all his descendants actually forfeited the right to live. After all, God is the author of life. Death is the natural penalty of choosing life without God, the giver of life. Also, because the Lord is holy and just, there had to be a penalty for rebellion.

The Bible makes it clear that death is the penalty for *our* sin, not just the sin of Adam. If you accept the Bible's account of history, then our



The right view!

sins—not just the sins of “the other guy”—are responsible for all the death and suffering in the world! In other words, it is really *our* fault that the world is the way it is. No one is really “innocent.”

God has removed His sustaining power—temporarily

At the same time that God judged sin with death, He withdrew some of His sustaining power.

Romans 8:22 tells us that the whole of creation is groaning and travailing in pain. Everything is running down because of sin. God has given us a taste of life without Him—a world full of violence, death, suffering and disease. If God withdrew *all* of His sustaining power, then the creation would cease to exist.

Colossians 1:16–17 tells us that all things are held together, right now, by the power of the Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ. However, in one sense He is not holding it together perfectly, as He is deliberately letting things fall apart to give us a taste of what life is like without God. In other words, God gives us precisely what we asked for—life without Him (see Romans 1:18–32).

In the Old Testament, we get a glimpse of what the world is like when God upholds things 100%.

In Deuteronomy 29:5 and also Nehemiah 9:21, we're told that the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years, and yet their clothes and shoes didn't wear out. Also, their feet didn't swell.

Obviously, God miraculously upheld their clothing and shoes so that they would not fall apart, as the rest of the creation is doing. And He preserved the health of their feet. One can only imagine what the world would be like if God upheld every detail of it like this.

The book of Daniel, in chapter 3, gives us another glimpse, when we read about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walking into a blazing furnace, yet coming out without even the smell of smoke on their clothes. When the Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of the universe, preserved their bodies and clothing in the midst of fire (verse 25), nothing could be hurt or destroyed.

These examples help us understand a little of what it would be like if God upheld every aspect of the creation—nothing would fall apart.

At present, we're living in a universe where things are decaying. Around us we see death, suffering, and disease—all as a result of God's judgment against sin and His withdrawal of some of His

sustaining power to give us what we asked for—a taste of life without God. Thus, looking through “biblical lenses,” we see our sin in Adam as the big-picture perspective on tragic events, such as the actions of terrorists. Of course, such specific evil acts were also a result of the individual sin of the terrorists. The suffering caused by a tsunami or earthquake, by contrast, can’t be blamed on any individual’s sin today, but is still the consequence of sin in general (more on this later).



In contrast to the view that death and suffering have continued for millions of years, this biblical view of history has a wonderful implication for the future. The world will one day be *restored* (Acts 3:21) to a state in which, once again, there will be no violence and death. According to Isaiah 11:6–9, wolves and lambs, leopards and goats,

lions and calves, and snakes and children, will dwell together peacefully. Clearly, this future state reflects the paradise that was once lost, not some imaginary land that never existed.

So if Adam's Fall explains sorrow in general, what about specific cases of "senseless suffering"? The Bible teaches that suffering is part of the big picture involving sin, but *individual* cases of suffering are *not* always correlated with *particular* sins of individuals.

God allowed the suffering of a righteous person. A man named Job, who was the most righteous man on earth at his time, suffered intensely—losing all his children, servants, and possessions in a single day; then he was struck by a painful illness. God allows every reader of the book of Job to witness some extraordinary “behind-the-scenes” events in heaven, which Job never saw. The Lord had reasons for allowing Job's suffering, but He never told Job these specific reasons, and He demanded that Job not question the decisions of his Maker.

Jesus was asked why a man was born blind. As they passed him, Jesus's disciples asked Him whether the man's blindness from birth was due to his own sin or the sin of his parents. Jesus

explained that neither was the case. The man was born blind so that God could demonstrate His power (when Jesus healed him, John 9:1–7).

In addition, Jesus discussed why eighteen Jews died tragically when the tower of Siloam collapsed. Christ said something that is directly applicable to modern tragedies, such as the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the US on 9/11.

Luke 13:4 records His words: “Those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were sinners above all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no!” Suffering in our lives is *not* always related to our personal sin.

Note, however, that Jesus went on to say that “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Though this may have been referring to perishing physically in the coming downfall of Jerusalem (AD 70), the bottom line is that no one is innocent. All of us are sinners and therefore condemned to die. Thousands of people died in the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, but the hundreds of millions of people who saw and heard about these terrorist attacks will also die one day—in fact, thousands of them are dying every

day—because all humans have been given the death penalty because of sin.

The account of the rich man and Lazarus is another key to understanding suffering.

In one of Christ's most memorable teachings (Luke 16:19–31), the Son of God gives the key to understanding the apparent injustices of this world.

A wicked rich man lived in splendor, while a faithful beggar named Lazarus sat at the rich man's gate, covered with sores and eating table scraps. But the story does not end there. At death, Lazarus went to a place of blessing, while the rich man went to a place of torment. There is an eternal world to come, where God will make all things right. The hope of a resurrection is the key to understanding our suffering.¹³

Once, the 20th-century atheistic philosopher Bertrand Russell claimed that no one could sit by the bedside of a child with a terminal disease and believe in a loving God. A minister who actually had experience with dying children (unlike Russell, who never got his own hands dirty with such things) challenged Russell to explain what he himself could offer such a child. An atheist could only say, "Sorry, that's how it goes. That's the end

of everything for you.” But the Christian has hope that this life is *not* the end.

The Apostle Paul found reasons to “glory in my infirmities.” His “résumé of suffering” included torture, beatings, imprisonment, stoning, shipwreck, robbery, infirmities, exhaustion, hunger, and thirst and cold. His letters show that Christ’s Resurrection was the key to his making sense of his suffering. Without the Resurrection, “then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain, ... [and] we are of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 19).

Though sometimes we will never see the reasons for certain suffering in this life, Paul’s letters contain practical reasons for the suffering of God’s children, even when they have done nothing wrong. For instance:

1. Suffering can “perfect” us, or make us mature in the image of Christ (Job 23:10; Hebrews 5:8–9).
2. Suffering can help some to come to know Christ.
3. Suffering can make us more able to comfort others who suffer.

Is God doing anything about death and suffering?

People who accuse God of sitting back and doing nothing are missing a vital truth. In reality, God has already done everything you would want a loving God to do—and infinitely more!

The Son of God became a man and endured both suffering and a horrible death on man's behalf. You see, Adam's sin left mankind in a terrible predicament. Even though our bodies die, we are made in the image of God, and thus we have souls that are immortal. Our conscious being is going to live forever. Unless God intervened, Adam's sin meant that we would spend an eternity of suffering and separation from Him.

The only way for us to restore our life with God is if we are able to come to Him with the penalty paid for our sin. Leviticus 17:11 helps us to understand how this can be done. It says, "The life of the flesh is in the blood." Blood represents life. The New Testament explains that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness [of sins]" (Hebrews 9:22).

God makes it clear that, because we are creatures of flesh and blood, the only way to pay the penalty for

our sin is if blood is shed to take away our sin.

In the Garden of Eden, God killed an animal and clothed Adam and Eve as a picture of a *covering* for our sin. A blood sacrifice was needed because of our sin. The Israelites sacrificed animals over and over again. However, because Adam's blood does not flow in animals, animal blood (though it could temporarily cover our sin) could never take it away. (The Hebrew word translated "atone-ment" is *kaphar*, which means "cover.")

The solution was God's plan to send His Son, the Second Person of the triune Godhead, the Lord Jesus Christ, to become a man—a perfect Man—to be a sacrifice for sin. In the person of Jesus Christ, our Creator God stepped into history (John 1:1–14) to become a physical descendant of Adam, called "the last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45), born of a virgin. Because the Holy Spirit overshadowed His mother (Luke 1:35), He was a perfect Man, one without sin—despite



having been tempted in every way that we are (Hebrews 4:15)—who thus could shed His blood on a cross for our sin.

Because mankind's first representative head—Adam—was responsible for bringing sin and death into the world, the human race can now have a new representative—the “last Adam”—who paid the penalty for sin. No sinner could pay for the sins of others, but this last Adam—Jesus Christ—was a perfect Man. God in human flesh was able to bear the sins and sorrows of the world.

The Son of God rose from the grave so that He could provide eternal life for all who believe (John 3:16). After Christ's suffering and death, He rose from the dead, showing He had ultimate power—power over death. He can now give eternal life to anyone who receives it by faith (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8–9). The Bible teaches us that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and



believe that God has raised Him from the dead, and receive Him as Lord and Savior, will spend eternity with God (1 Corinthians 15:1–4).

The Son of God sympathizes with our sorrows.

Christ's suffering and death mean that God Himself can personally empathize with our suffering, because He has experienced it. His followers have a High Priest—Jesus—who can be “touched with the feeling of our infirmities. . . . Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15–16).

How long will this suffering and death go on?

People who complain about the suffering on this earth need to understand God's perspective of time. God dwells in eternity, and He is lovingly preparing His people to spend an eternity with Him. As the Apostle Paul said, “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). The book of Hebrews says that Jesus Himself, “for the glory that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

The present suffering—intense as it can be at times—is so insignificant, in view of eternity, that it can't even be compared to the glory to come.

God has prepared an eternal home where there will be no more death or suffering. Those who

put their trust in Christ as Savior have a wonderful hope—they can spend eternity with the Lord in a place where there will be no more death.

“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” (Revelation 21:4).

Indeed, death is really the path that opens the way to this wonderful place, called heaven. If we lived forever, we would never have an opportunity to shed this sinful state. But God wants us to have a new glorified body (1 Corinthians 15:35ff.), and He wants us to dwell with Him forever. In fact, the Bible states that “precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15). Death is “precious” because sinners who have trusted Christ will enter into the presence of their Creator, in a place where righteousness dwells.

There is also a place of eternal separation from God. The Bible warns that those who reject Christ

will taste a “second death”—eternal separation from God (Revelation 21:8).

Most of us have heard about hell, a place of fire and torment. None other than Jesus Christ warned of this place more than He spoke of heaven. He also made it clear that the torment of the wicked was as eternal (Greek *aiōnios*) as the life of the blessed (Matthew 25:46). God does not delight in the death of the wicked. “Say unto them, As I live, said the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11).



God takes no pleasure in the afflictions and calamities of people. He is a loving, merciful God—it is *our* fault that man is in the current state of suffering and death.

As we face horrible suffering, such as the tragedies on 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the Asian tsunami, let it remind us that the ultimate cause of such calamity is *our* sin—our rebellion against God. Our loving God, despite our sinfulness, wants us to spend eternity with Him.

Christians need to stretch forth a loving, comforting arm to those who are in need of comfort and strength during times of suffering. They can find strength in the arms of a loving Creator who hates death—the enemy that will one day be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14).

There is no conflict between the statements “God is all-powerful and loving” and “the world is full of suffering and evil.” For God to rid the world of evil would require ridding the world of us! Instead, God wants us to be saved from His wrath to come. One day, God will indeed rid the world of evil.

We have two options: separate from our sins by trusting in Christ, and thus dwell with God forever; or cling to our sins, in which case, God will

grant our wish and separate us from Himself for eternity. This is why Jesus, on the Day of Judgment, says to evildoers, “Depart from me ...” (Matthew 7:23; Luke 13:27).

When we understand both the origin of death and the gospel of Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Bible, then we can understand why this world is the way it is and how there can be a loving God in the midst of tragedy, violence, suffering, and death.

Death and suffering in modern times

AiG illustrator Dan Lietha is renowned for coming up with serious strips that can depict complex issues at a glance. Dan’s illustration below was drawn just after the 2004 Asian



tsunami. He has entitled it “**Tsinami**” (in a play on words, it reminds people in a serious way of the ultimate cause of the tsunami).

In this case, truly a picture is worth a thousand words. This illustration tells people the truth from Genesis concerning the origin of sin and the consequence of death.

Also, as we anticipate more “right-to-life, right-to-die” controversies in the wake of the famous Terri Schiavo case and her eventual death in 2005, the question of death and suffering will not go away.

In the Schiavo case, a court had ordered the removal of a feeding tube from Schiavo who suffered severe brain damage in 1990 after her heart stopped; doctors appointed by the courts determined that she had been in a persistent “vegetative” state with no chance of recovery. President George W. Bush declared that: “In cases where there are serious doubts and questions, the presumption should be in favor of life.”¹⁴

The Bible gives us the only infallible guidelines for making difficult choices, including about pain and suffering. For example, from the Bible’s very beginning, we see that humans were created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), and that God

strongly opposes the wanton taking of life.

The suffering-and-death topic of euthanasia will become an even hotter one in America during these “culture wars.” Believers need to be equipped with answers from the Bible on the relevant social issues of the day, such as this growing controversy.

Final thoughts

Which view of death do you accept? Is it one that makes God an ogre, responsible for millions of years of death, disease, and suffering? Or is it one that places the blame on our sin, and pictures our Creator God as a loving, merciful Savior who wept over the city of Jerusalem, who wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus, and who weeps for all of us?

Tragedies like the tsunami, school violence, terrorist attacks, etc., should remind everyone that ultimately *we* are the cause of such tragedies ... because we're sinners. At the same time, we should be reminded that God is a loving God in that He has provided a gift of salvation because “it is not His will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Because there is a loving God to whom we're

accountable, we need to be obedient to His Word. And His Word clearly instructs us to have compassion on people and to help in any way we are able, sharing their burden (Psalm 72:13, Proverbs 14:21 and 28:27, etc.). After all, humans (collectively, through our sin in Adam) are responsible ultimately for the tragedy, and thus we need to be involved in dealing with the consequences.

The more difficult aspect to understand, however, concerns the death of seemingly “innocent” children and also the terrible grief suffered by a person who has lost a child (or a spouse, other family member or close friend). But here are some observations that shed light on this.

1. As we have already stated, no one is truly “innocent”—“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) and thus all are condemned to death, from the point of conception.
2. Even though the loss of any person is, of course, very sad, and we grieve, our anger nonetheless should be directed at sin, not at the Creator God who created a perfect world without death at the beginning. (He created everything “very good”—Genesis 1:31.)

3. Although some say it's not "right" or it's "unfair" that young children should die in such a tragedy, only the Christian who believes in an infinite God (and thus accepts that God is the absolute authority) can even define such terms as "right" and "wrong" ... or "good" and "bad" ... or what's "fair" and "unfair." Those who do not accept this absolute authority have no basis to make moral judgments concerning fair, right/wrong or good/bad. Jesus answered an inquirer, "Why are you asking me about what is good? There is only One who is good" [namely, God] (Matthew 19:17).
4. Some say that if God is all-powerful, He should have stopped a calamity like a tsunami. Even though God could have (and no doubt has done so at times probably without us even realizing His protection for us), we have to remember that we no longer live in a perfect world. Until the future final Consummation, people will continue to die. Calamitous events will still occur. And as things continue to run down in this world, perhaps there will be even more catastrophes in the future.

As an infinitely powerful Creator, God must have morally good reasons for allowing things to

continue at the present time. We can't always see those reasons. As He says, "My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

For those who aren't Christians, why should death be such an issue anyway? From an atheistic perspective, when a person dies, that's the end of that person's existence. They won't even know they existed—they won't know anything of life and the pleasures or sufferings of this world. Not only this, but if the universe eventually runs down, and all life ceases (as many evolutionists propose), no one will know that anyone existed—no matter what famous contribution they made to humanity. And such people usually support or condone the abortion death of about 3,500 human beings every day in the U.S. alone. Why does this human death have no meaning to them and yet they might complain about human death from a tsunami? It's an inconsistent position and hopeless situation.

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, is crucial to begin to deal with death and suffering, because the origin of death itself is outlined in the first chapters of this book. One is certainly "lost without Genesis" to explain it.

Only Christianity provides a sure hope of eternal life with our Creator. The Bible is the ONLY true history book that gives us the true meaning of all aspects of reality. Only the Bible gives us the “big picture” of history that enables us to understand this seemingly contradictory world of life and death, and to trust our loving God amidst the suffering and anguish of the present existence.

Yes, recent tragedies have been terrible. But the worst day in the universe occurred over 6,000 years ago in the Garden of Eden, and it has been wreaking havoc across the earth ever since. Praise God He will one day end the “death wave” when death itself will be cast into the lake of fire.

HERE'S THE GOOD NEWS

Answers in Genesis seeks to give glory and honor to God as Creator, and to affirm the truth of the biblical record of the real origin and history of the world and mankind.

Part of this real history is the bad news that the rebellion of the first man, Adam, against God's command, brought death, suffering, and separation from God into this world. We see the results all around us. All of Adam's descendants are sinful from conception (Psalm 51:5) and have

themselves entered into this rebellion (sin). They therefore cannot live with a holy God, but are condemned to separation from God. The Bible says that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) and that all are therefore subject to “ever-lasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

But the good news is that God has done something about it. “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Jesus Christ the Creator, though totally sinless, suffered, on behalf of mankind, the penalty of mankind’s sin, which is death and separation from God. He did this to satisfy the righteous demands of the holiness and justice of God, His Father. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice; He died on a cross, but on the third day, He rose again, conquering death, so that all who truly believe in Him, repent of their sin, and trust in Him (rather than their own merit) are able to come back to God and live for eternity with their Creator.

Therefore: “He who believes on Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is con-

demned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

What a wonderful Savior—and what a wonderful salvation in Christ our Creator!

(If you want to know more of what the Bible says about how you can receive eternal life, please write or call the Answers in Genesis office nearest you—see inside front cover.)



AiG's Creation Museum near the Cincinnati Airport has special exhibits that tackle this question as to why God allows disease, suffering, and death. For information on this national center which presents a walk through the history of the Bible, go to www.CreationMuseum.org

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