

Why Does God Let Bad Things Happen?

Why does God let bad things happen? This is a very common question from Christians and non-Christians alike. It's a very good question. When you look around and see the various diseases affecting people, the disasters and tragedies occurring throughout the world, stories of babies dying, etc. it is common to ask "if there is a God why does he let all these bad things happen?" Many don't know how to even begin to answer this question and can't provide any points that provide clarity on this subject. This leads people to believe that there isn't a God and if there is one he is cold, cruel, and doesn't care about people. In response to that, I say there is a God. A God of love [mature love] who cares deeply for his people as their Father. I ask you to consider the following points to help shed some light on the question "why does God let bad things happen?" I encourage you to search out the Scriptures for further understanding of this topic as well.

We all face various hardships and trials in life. There are four different sources/causes of trials that come upon us:

1. Ourselves
2. Others
3. Satan
4. God

Before diving into each of these four sources, let's get a bit of background information. Starting at the beginning, God created man.

Genesis 1:26-30 [NASB] - "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to everything that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so."

Once God created Adam and Eve, He gave them responsibilities and jobs to do. In particular they were told to “rule” over the fish, birds, and every living thing that moves on the earth (Genesis 1:26). This word “rule” means to have dominion or authority over. God gave man this responsibility which means that we (humans) have responsibilities and choices to make about how we are going to do that. One such example is God had Adam name all of the animals; it was Adam’s decision to think of names and assign them to each animal: “... *brought them to man to see what he would call them...*” (Genesis 2:19). In addition to that God created the trees, plants and other vegetation. In particular He created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and gave man the following command: “... *From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.*” (Genesis 2:16-17).

We can see from the beginning that God created humans with a free will. He gave man commands to follow and opportunities to make decisions along with the ability to make choices for ourselves. God does not control our minds and thoughts, nor does He want robots. We can see this in play each and every day in our lives. We can choose what we want to eat, where we want to live, who/what we want to associate ourselves with, etc. Even in cases where we can’t control the circumstances around us, we can control and make a decision about how we will react to them. The following are a couple of additional verses providing examples of man having free will (there are numerous others throughout the Scriptures!):

*Matthew 16:24 [NIV] - “Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever **wants** [a choice, denoting free will] to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”*

*John 1:12 [NIV] - “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of **human decision or a husband’s will**, but born of God.”*

Angels are free will beings as well, including Satan (Lucifer)! Satan turned away from God and convinced one third of the other angels to do the same.

*Genesis 6:1-2 [NIV] - “When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they **chose**.”*

*Isaiah 14:12-14 [NKJV] - “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. Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.”

2 Peter 2:4 [NIV] - “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment”

From the previously mentioned scriptures, we know that Adam and Eve, as well as Lucifer, all made bad choices by turning away from God. Adam and Eve were deceived by Lucifer and decided to disobey God’s command and ate from the tree of knowledge. At this point, sin entered the world and consequently death (Romans 5:12-14).

From the beginning, Satan set out to deceive man. He is known as the father of lies and there is no truth found within him (John 8:44). Additionally he is known as “the god of this world” and deceitfully influences many people to perform evil acts.

2 Corinthians 4:4 [NLT] - “Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.”

Ephesians 2:2 [NLT] - “You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil--the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.”

Ephesians 6:12 [NIV] - “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

With this background information in mind, let’s look at the various reasons for trials we face throughout life.

1. Ourselves

With us being free will beings, we have the ability to make our own choices. There are many times in life where we make bad ones. Bad decisions get us into bad situations that cause hardship, trials, and sometimes tragedy. There are numerous examples such as car accidents (driving too fast, under the influence, etc.), various health issues (not taking care of yourself whether it’s food intake, exercise, substance abuse, etc.), among many others.

We can see examples of trials brought on by people's own decisions in Scripture as well:

Genesis 3:6 [NIV] - "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."

[Here Adam and Eve disobeyed God and decided to eat from the tree of knowledge which caused much hardship for them.]

Acts 5:1-10 [NIV] - "Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God." When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband."

[Here you can see that Ananias and Sapphira brought their fate on themselves by choosing to lie about the amount they sold their piece of property for.]

These types of trials happen on an individual level but also on a national level as well. We can see this with Israel. Throughout the Scriptures there are instances where they disobeyed the Lord and turned to other gods. This brought on a lot of hardship for the entire nation of Israel. So the people of Israel collectively brought these situations on themselves by the decisions they made.

The Lord gave us the ability to learn and wants us to do so. One way to do this is to seek the Lord and learn from Him (through Scriptures and Prayer). We can also learn from others, especially our elders, who have gone through various situations and experiences. Doing this will help us make better decisions so we don't put ourselves in situations that cause us unnecessary hardship.

2. Others

Since we are all free will beings, the choices of others can influence and affect us in a way that brings on trials and hardship as well. Using our previous example, we can see this play out in some car accidents where someone was driving irresponsibly and hits someone else on the road. The person that was hit wasn't doing anything wrong but the poor decisions of the other driver caused this bad situation. We can see the same thing with murders, whether it's a terrorist attack, a shooting, or even abortions. It is not God's will for these to occur but He gave man free will and unfortunately it is used in a way to harm others.

We have all come across situations where others caused hardship for us as well as situations where we caused hardship for others based on decisions made. These situations may not have been purposefully caused but it may be a case where there was a lack of understanding or simply was an unintentional accident of some kind.

Here are a couple examples of trials and hardship caused by others in Scripture:

Acts 8:3 [NIV] - "But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison."

[The trials and hardship endured by the men and women of the church were caused by Saul.]

Acts 16:37a [NIV] - "But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison..."

[Paul was beaten and imprisoned by the decisions and actions of others.]

Another example of this, looking back at Genesis 3:6, we can see that the decisions of Adam and Eve caused sin to enter the world and ultimately death. This decision has affected every human since, as we will all die one day (1 Corinthians 15:22).

3. Satan

As described previously, Satan is the "god of this world" and desires to deceive humans. He wants nothing more than to turn people away from God and to himself and will cause chaos, destruction, and anything else he can to try to accomplish his mission. Going back to the beginning in Genesis 3, we can see that Satan deceived Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge.

The following are example Scriptures of Satan's influence which caused hardship:

Luke 22:3-4 [NIV] - "Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus."

[Satan pressured Judas to betray Jesus which ultimately led to His death on the cross.]

Acts 5:3 [NIV] - "Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"

[Here we see that the Ananias allowed Satan to influence him and fill his heart to lie.]

With Satan being the "god of this world", he also has the ability to create natural disasters. As part of his plan, he creates instances of random destruction to try to get people to accuse God and to turn from him. We can see this in Job 1:

Job 1:19,22 [NIV] - "when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you! ... In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."

Throughout the Scriptures and life in general, we see numerous cases where Satan is scheming against humans. To help protect ourselves from these schemes, we are supposed to be alert and wise to stand our ground against these evil schemes (Ephesians 6:10-18).

4. God

There are cases where God creates trials for us to endure. This is done as a testing process and to enable us to learn and grow as we persevere through them. These trials are not done with destruction in mind but with growth (may be considered a pruning process like that of a tree to enable it grow bigger and fuller).

Here are a couple of examples trials initiated by God as a way to test and humble people:

Matthew 4:1 [NIV] - "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

[Here we see where God, via the Holy Spirit, led Jesus into the wilderness as a test. We can also see that Satan attempted to influence Jesus to turn away from

God but Jesus was able to stand his ground through the use of the Scriptures - Matthew 4:1-11].

Deuteronomy 8:2 [NASB] - "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."

[God led Israel through the wilderness (during the Exodus from Egypt) to test them and to humble them. This was a learning experience in which Israel was to pass the lessons learned down to their children.]

With these four sources identified, along with their examples, we should now have a better understanding of why bad things happen. God created both humans and angels with free will, as He does not want robots. Along with that, He wants people with pure hearts who love Him and love others (Matthew 22:37-39). Through Adam we are all born into sin. Thankfully, Jesus was sent as a sacrifice to enable us to enter into salvation by our free will decision to become born again and follow Him. Becoming born again is not the end goal but rather the beginning of life. God wants us to continue to learn and grow. Learning and growing is not an easy process. People are at different levels of maturity and understanding and we have to work through all the various choices and situations that arise. However persevering and enduring trials and hardship are worth it in the end. Jesus himself endured many trial and hardships in which He learned obedience by the things that He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). So as various trials and hardships come your way, seek the Lord and His strength to overcome them and learn from them, knowing that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord (Romans 8:28).