

Reasons for Trials, Suffering, and Persecution

Roadmap

Waiting on the Lord In a Pagan World

A Pagan World: Pagan Worldview

Myth

Philosophy

Law

Deeds

Waiting on the Lord:

History

Prophecy

Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs

Teaching / Doctrine

Types: of Waiting, Suffering, Trials, Persecution, Testing, Judgment...

Reasons for the above

God's sovereignty and His plan shown forth

Why Examine Suffering through the Lens of History?

Scripture does not only present abstract methods for dealing with suffering

The bulk of Biblical material on suffering is not systematic theology, doctrinal, or wisdom principles, although that is there and forms a foundation

The bulk of Scripture on suffering is historical = personal and immediate

History is someone else's REALITY

Even when we see it only darkly

The bulk of Scripture dealing with trials, suffering, and persecution is personal, direct, immediate, and therefore historical in nature

Not just names and dates type of history

Rather, deep spiritual stories of people and their trials

Types of Suffering

Define these practically:

Suffering

Trials

Persecution

Testing

Discipline

Judgment

Why Trials?

There are different reasons why God allows suffering

Fiery trials for believing in Christ (I Peter 4; John 15)

Testing (Deut. 8)

Discipline (Hebrews 12)

Judgment on the house of God (Ezekiel, Jeremiah, all of the OT Prophets)

Judgment on the unbeliever (I Peter 4)

Natural consequences of our sin

In our suffering: opportunities to show our faith in Christ to others

In others' suffering: opportunities to show the love of Christ to them

In our suffering: to help us empathize with others, witness to them, and minister to them in their future suffering

This list is not comprehensive

Reasons are not singular, multiple reasons can apply

Often we don't know why at the time but discover later

Sometimes we never know why in this lifetime (e.g. Job)

For Following Christ

John 15:18-20

18 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

I Peter 4:12-17

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Discipline

Hebrews 12:3-11

3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Testing and Discipline

Deuteronomy 8

8 “The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. 2 And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, **testing you to know what was in your heart**, whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 **And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna**, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, **that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.** 4 Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. 5 **Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you.** 6 So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him.

Testing and Discipline

Deuteronomy 8...

7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, 9 a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. 10 And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. 11 “Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, 12 lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, 13 and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, 14 **then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God**, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, 15 who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, **that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end.**

Judgment on the Covenant

Deuteronomy 8...

17 **Beware lest you say in your heart,** 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' 18 You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, **I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. 20 Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God.**

Judgment on the Covenant

I Peter 4:12-17

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. **17 For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us,** what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Judgment on the Unbeliever

I Peter 4:12-17

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, **what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"** 19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Natural Consequences of Sin

I Peter 4:12-17

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Sinful Responses

Some people pursue persecution out of self-righteous folly

Others are ashamed of suffering for Christ

Others suffer for Christ but are ashamed of the suffering

I don't deserve this, I deserve better

Self-punishment / works of penance

e.g. responses during the Black Death

Application

Sometimes we don't know why we are suffering, e.g. Job

Some people jump to incorrect conclusions about the reason for their trials

Sometimes we need helping understanding the reason for our trials

Christ suffered, and He was sinless, so we are called to endure suffering that is totally unrelated to our sin.

Trust ourselves to the character of God: I Peter 4:19: So then, those who suffer according to God's will should **commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.**

Matthew 5:11-12: 11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.