

32 Thy kingdom come - The problem of suffering

The big question - Why?

What are the immediate causes of suffering in the world?



Does God know about everything that happens?



How does God feel?



Look at some or all of these passages: Genesis 6:5-6; 1 Chronicles 21:15; Isaiah 63:9-10; Lamentations 3:31-40; Jonah 4:11; Ezekiel 33:11; Luke 19:41-44.

Does God cause suffering?



Now look at 1 Samuel 2:6-7; Amos 3:6; Isaiah 45:5-10 and Luke 13:1-5. What do they tell us about whether God causes the terrible things that happen in the world, and about what we should learn as a result?



Why?

This may sound hard, but remember how God is affected by the suffering in the world. He does not bring suffering and then stand by unfeelingly. It all has a positive purpose. Look at Hebrews 12:5-11 to see a general statement of why God brings suffering, and then at three examples: Hebrews 2:10; Deuteronomy 8:1-3 and 1 Peter 5:6-10.

How would you summarise these passages?

Summary



Read Romans 8:18-25 together, slowly, and talk about each verse as you do so. Then, in your own words, write a short summary below.



Some quotations to think about

Ravensbrück

During World War II there was a women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück in northern Germany. It was mainly for women and children and was opened in May 1939. Between 1939 and 1945, over 130,000 female prisoners passed through the camp. Over 100,000 died from starvation or disease, or were murdered. When the camp was 'liberated' by the Russians a piece of paper was found on which these words were written.



O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted on us; remember the fruits we have borne, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this, and when they come to judgment, let all the fruits which we have borne be their forgiveness

Unknown prisoner in the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück, Germany

The woman who wrote those words must have died a terrible death, but her suffering had not been in vain.

Read about Paul's experiences in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve.
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health, that I might do greater things.
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy.
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men.
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life.
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for but got everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am, among all people, most richly blessed.

If
God IS,
why is there
evil? But if God
is not, why is there
good?

Augustine