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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Answering Atheists: Making Sense of Evil and Suffering

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching addresses evil and suffering as both a philosophical question and a deeply personal experience. It considers whether suffering disproves God's existence, why people suffer, what solutions God provides, and how believers should respond. It acknowledges the pain of bereavement, illness, and injustice rather than treating the subject as an abstract debate alone.

The first argument connects moral judgments with God's existence. The teaching reasons that calling something objectively evil presupposes an objective standard of good and evil. It then argues that this transcendent moral law requires a personal moral lawgiver. On that basis, it maintains that the reality of evil does not disprove God and that biblical faith provides a framework for understanding it.

The teaching next discusses human choice and limited human knowledge. Much suffering results from people choosing evil, and Romans connects sin and death with Adam while also affirming that all have sinned. For suffering not directly explained by an individual choice, the teaching contrasts God's complete knowledge with human limitations. Joseph's hardships and eventual role in preserving lives illustrate a good purpose that was not apparent while he suffered.

One answer to suffering is the promised future end of death, mourning, and pain in Revelation 21. Another is redemption and sanctification: God can use trials to develop obedience, wisdom, and steadfastness. The teaching rejects the idea that God's purpose is simply to guarantee health, wealth, and comfort. It instead identifies fearing God and keeping his commandments as the purpose of life.

God's presence and compassion form another answer. The teaching points to God responding to Job and to Yeshua weeping with those grieving Lazarus, even though he knew Lazarus would rise. These examples support its assurance that God understands sorrow and draws near to the brokenhearted. Future hope does not erase present grief or make compassionate presence unnecessary.

The final answer involves God working through his people. The teaching calls believers to stop contributing to suffering, resist injustice, and give practical help to those in need. It also calls for prayer for physical, emotional, and spiritual healing, with faith in God's power. Waiting for the kingdom's fullness is therefore joined with present action, compassion, and obedience.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The problem of suffering involves personal grief as well as intellectual questions.
- The teaching argues that objective evil presupposes a transcendent moral standard and lawgiver.
- Human choices to do evil account for much suffering.
- Limited human knowledge does not establish that God has no good reason to permit suffering.
- Joseph's story illustrates a purpose that became clearer after painful events.
- Revelation 21 promises a future without death, mourning, or pain.
- Trials can produce steadfastness, obedience, and spiritual maturity.
- The teaching rejects a guarantee of health, wealth, and comfort as the purpose of life.
- Yeshua's tears over Lazarus show compassion for people in grief.
- Believers are called to stop causing harm, help the afflicted, resist injustice, and pray for healing.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. In Deuteronomy 30:19, Moses urges the people to choose _____.
2. Romans 5:12 connects sin entering the world with the man _____.
3. The son of Jacob whose hardships led to a role in saving people from famine was _____.
4. Yeshua wept with those grieving the death of his friend _____.
5. According to James, trials produce _____.
6. Romans 12:15 calls believers to weep with those who _____.

Challenging

1. God's complete knowledge is described in the teaching as his _____.

2. The teaching argues that a transcendent moral law requires a moral _____.
3. The future promise that death and pain will end is quoted from Revelation _____.
4. The teaching pairs redemption with _____ when discussing spiritual growth through suffering.
5. Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 is used to identify life's purpose as fearing God and keeping his _____.
6. The chapter cited for sharing food, sheltering the homeless, and helping the oppressed is Isaiah _____.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the teaching connect the claim that evil is objectively real with its argument for God's existence?
2. What distinction does the teaching make between suffering caused by human choices and suffering whose purpose we cannot see?
3. How does Joseph's experience illustrate the difference between immediate circumstances and a later understanding of events?
4. How does the teaching distinguish spiritual maturity through suffering from the promises of prosperity preaching?
5. Why are Yeshua's tears meaningful in the teaching even though he knew Lazarus would be raised?
6. What practical responses does the teaching call for while believers await the final end of suffering?

ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. life
2. Adam
3. Joseph
4. Lazarus
5. steadfastness
6. weep

Challenging

1. omniscience
2. lawgiver
3. 21:2–4
4. sanctification
5. commandments
6. 58