

# Why Do People Say That God Is Cruel?

DO YOU find the question on the cover of this magazine shocking? Some do, but a lot of people today wonder whether God is cruel—or they assume that he is. Why?

Some who survive natural disasters ask: “Why does God allow these things to happen? Is he indifferent? Or is he cruel?”

Others are similarly troubled when reading the Bible. They come upon such accounts as the one about Noah and the Flood, and they wonder, ‘Why would a loving God put all those people to death? Is he cruel?’

Do such questions occur to you at times? Or do you find yourself unable to give an answer to those who wonder if God is cruel? In either case, consider a different question that may help.

## WHY DO WE HATE CRUELTY?

Simply put, we hate cruelty because we have a sense of right and wrong. We differ greatly from animals in that respect. Our Creator made us “in his image.” (Genesis 1:27) What does that mean? He gave us the capacity to reflect his qualities and moral standards, his sense of right and wrong. Consider this: If we received our sense of right and wrong from God and we tend to hate cruelty, does that not suggest that God hates it too?

The Bible confirms such logic, for in the Bible, God assures us: “My ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:9) If we were to judge God to be cruel,



We are naturally inclined to show compassion and to hate cruelty

would we not be stating the opposite—in effect saying that our ways are higher than his? It would surely be wise to gather more facts before taking such a stand. Perhaps we should ask, not whether God is cruel, but why some of his actions may *appear* to be cruel. To help us, let us consider what “cruel” really means.

When we call someone cruel, we judge his motives. A cruel person is one who *enjoys* seeing others suffer or who is indifferent to their distress. Thus, a father who disciplines his son because he enjoys hurting his son’s feelings is cruel. But a father who disciplines his son to instruct or protect him is good. Motives are easily misunderstood, as you well know if anyone has ever misjudged you.

Let us consider two of the reasons why some think of God as cruel—the natural disasters we see today and the divine judgments we read about in the Bible. Do the facts really show that God is cruel?

# Natural Disasters

## EVIDENCE THAT GOD IS CRUEL?

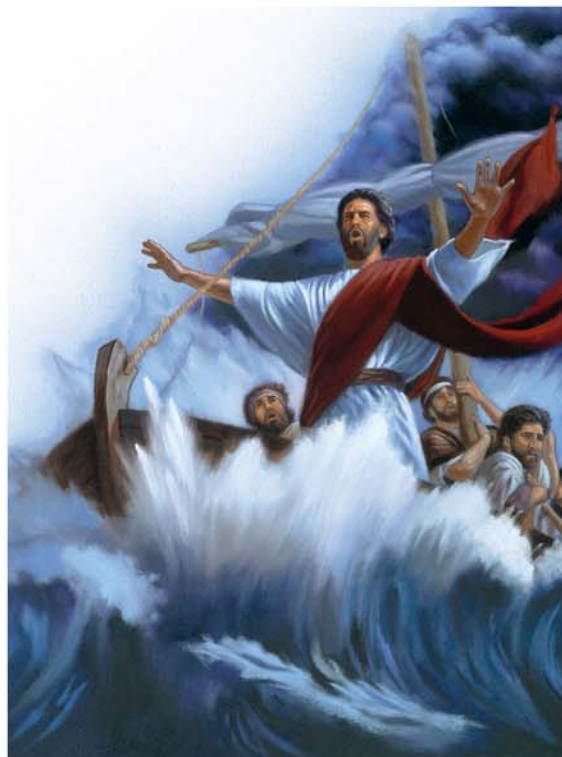
**WHAT YOU MAY HEAR:** “God rules the world, so he causes natural disasters; therefore, he must be cruel.”

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:** “The whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one.” (1 John 5:19) Who is “the wicked one”? The Bible identifies him as Satan. (Matthew 13:19; Mark 4:15) Is that far-fetched? Think of this: If Satan has power over the world, then he influences humans to be as selfish, greedy, and shortsighted as he is. Would that not help to explain why man so badly mismanages his own environment on the earth? Many experts warn that mismanagement of the environment may play a role in natural disasters, whether by causing them, worsening them, or making human society more vulnerable to them.

Then why does God allow Satan to have so much influence? The answer goes back to the dawn of human history, when our first parents rebelled against God as Ruler. Most of mankind has followed the same course ever since. That choice—the rejection of the rule of God—has placed the world of mankind in the hands of God’s enemy, Satan. Jesus thus called Satan “the ruler of the world.” (John 14:30) Will Satan rule forever? No!

Jehovah\* is not callously indifferent to the suffering that Satan causes. In fact, God is deeply moved by human suffering. For example, concerning the hard times that befell the nation of Israel, the Bible says of God: “During all their distress it was distressing to him.” (Isaiah 63:9) Mercifully, God has arranged to bring the cruel rule of Satan to an end—soon! He has appointed his Son, Jesus Christ, to be a just and righteous King forever.

**HOW YOU ARE INVOLVED:** Although Satan’s rule has failed to protect people from natural disasters,



God gave his Son the power to end natural disasters

ters, Jesus’ rule will do so. Jesus once acted to protect his disciples during a violent storm. The Bible account says: “He . . . rebuked the wind and said to the sea: ‘Hush! Be quiet!’ And the wind abated, and a great calm set in.” The disciples said: “Who really is this, because even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:37-41) That incident gives us confidence that Jesus will protect all obedient mankind during his rule as King.—Daniel 7: 13, 14.

\* Jehovah is the name of God as revealed in the Bible.

# Divine Judgments

## WERE THEY CRUEL?

TO ADDRESS this question, let us briefly focus on two examples of divine judgment in the Bible—the Flood of Noah’s day and the extermination of the Canaanites.

### THE FLOOD OF NOAH’S DAY

**WHAT YOU MAY HEAR:** “God was cruel when he unleashed a flood that destroyed all mankind except for Noah and his family.”

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:** God said: “I take delight, not in the death of the wicked one, but in that someone wicked turns back from his way and actually keeps living.” (Ezekiel 33:11) So the destruction of the wicked in Noah’s day brought God no pleasure at all. Then why did he do it?

The Bible answers that when God brought such judgments against ungodly people in times past, he was “setting a pattern for ungodly persons of things to come.” (2 Peter 2:5, 6) What pattern did God set?

First, God established that even though it pains him to destroy people, he does take note of cruel people who cause suffering and holds them accountable for their actions. In time, he will end all injustice and suffering.

Second, the pattern of God’s past actions establishes that God lovingly warns people before executing judgment. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, but most people ignored him. The Bible says: “They took no note until the flood came and swept them all away.”—Matthew 24:39.

Has God held to that pattern? Yes. For example, he warned his people Israel that if they turned to wickedness as the nations around them had, he would allow enemies to invade their land; destroy their capital, Jerusalem; and carry them off into exile. Israel did turn to wickedness—even



Before God executed wicked people in the Deluge, he had Noah deliver a warning message

carrying out child sacrifice. Did Jehovah act? Yes, but only after sending prophets to warn his people, again and again, to change their ways before it was too late. He even said: “The Sovereign Lord Jehovah will not do a thing unless he has revealed his confidential matter to his servants the prophets.”—Amos 3:7.

**HOW YOU ARE INVOLVED:** The pattern we see in Jehovah’s past judgments gives us hope. We can confidently look forward to God’s judgment

of those who cruelly cause suffering. The Bible says: “Evildoers themselves will be cut off . . . But the meek ones themselves will possess the earth, and they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace.” (Psalm 37:9-11) What do you think about a judgment that relieves mankind of suffering? Is it cruel, or is it merciful?

## THE EXTERMINATION OF THE CANAANITES

**WHAT YOU MAY HEAR:** “The destruction of the Canaanites was a cruel war crime comparable to modern-day genocides.”

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:** “All [God’s] ways are justice. [He is] a God of faithfulness, with whom there is no injustice.” (Deuteronomy 32:4) An act of divine justice is not comparable to a human war. Why? Because unlike humans, God is able to read hearts—that is, what humans are on the inside.

For example, when God judged the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and determined to bring them to ruin, the faithful man Abraham was concerned about the justice of the matter. He could not imagine that his just God would “sweep away the righteous with the wicked.” Patiently, God reassured him that if there were even ten righteous people in Sodom, He would spare the city on their account. (Genesis 18:20-33) Clearly, God searched through the hearts of those people and saw the depth of their wickedness.—1 Chronicles 28:9.

Similarly, God judged the Canaanites and rightly ordered their destruction. The Canaanites were notorious for their cruelty, which included burning children alive in sacrificial fires.\* (2 Kings 16:3) The Canaanites knew that Jehovah

had commanded Israel to take possession of all the land. Those who chose to remain and wage war were taking a deliberate stand against not only the Israelites but also Jehovah, who had given powerful evidence that he was with his people.

Moreover, God extended mercy to Canaanites who abandoned their wickedness and accepted Jehovah’s high moral standards. For example, the Canaanite prostitute Rahab was saved, along with her family. Also, when the inhabitants of the Canaanite city of Gibeon sought mercy, they and all their children were preserved alive.—Joshua 6:25; 9:3, 24-26.

**HOW YOU ARE INVOLVED:** We can learn a vital lesson from the judgment of the Canaanites. We are rapidly approaching the foretold “day of judgment and of destruction of the ungodly men.” (2 Peter 3:7) If we love Jehovah, we will benefit when he eliminates human suffering by ridding the earth of those who reject his just rule.

**The Canaanites were notoriously cruel, and they deliberately opposed God and his people**

Jehovah lovingly reminds us that the choices parents make affect their children. God’s Word says: “You must choose life in order that you may keep alive, you *and your offspring*, by loving Jehovah your God, by listening to his voice and by sticking to him.” (Deuteronomy 30:19, 20) Are those the words of a cruel God or the words of a God who loves people and wants them to make the right choice?

\* Archaeologists have unearthed evidence that Canaanite worship included the sacrifice of babies.



# Will You Trust God?

IMAGINE that you have a friend whom you admire greatly, but he does something that you cannot understand. Others criticize his action and judge his motives, saying that your friend is cruel. Would you be quick to agree with them, or would you wait to hear your friend's side of the story? If he was not there to explain himself, would you be patient, giving him the benefit of the doubt?

Before answering, you might want to know more. You might ask, 'How well do I really know this friend, and what basis do I have for admiring him?' Fair enough. But consider: Can we not apply the same principles to this question of whether God is cruel?

You may find it hard to understand some of what God has done, or you might be puzzled by what he has allowed to happen. There are plenty of people who will tell you that God is cruel and who will urge you to judge his motives as they have. Will you extend him the benefit of the doubt until you know more? The answer may depend on how well you know God. Ask yourself, 'What kind of a friend has God been to me?'

If your life has been difficult, you might be tempted to say that God has not been a friend at all. But think for a moment. Has God been responsible for the hardships in your life—or for the blessings? As we have seen, Satan is "the ruler of this world," not Jehovah. (John 12:31) It is thus Satan who is behind much of the misery and injustice of this world. And would you not agree that our own imperfections and unpredictable circumstances cause many of our problems?

On the other hand, what has God been responsible for? Consider what the Bible says: that God is "the Maker of heaven and earth"; that



Has God been responsible for the hardships in your life—or for the blessings?

his works include our physical bodies, which are "wonderfully made"; and that Jehovah is "the God in whose hand your breath is." (Psalm 124:8; 139:14; Daniel 5:23) What does all of that mean?

It means that we owe our every breath, our very existence, to our Creator. (Acts 17:28) It means that the gift of life, the beauty of the world around us, the pleasures of love and friendship, the joys of taste, touch, sound, and smell—all of these are gifts from God. (James 1:17) Would you not agree that those blessings make him a Friend who is worthy of our esteem and trust?

Granted, you may find it hard to trust God. Perhaps you feel that you do not yet know him well enough to trust him. And that is understandable. In these brief articles, we cannot address all the reasons why some judge God as cruel. But would it not be worth the effort to get to know God better? We are confident that as you do, you will come to know the truth about God. Is he cruel? Quite the opposite: "God is love."—1 John 4:8. ■

\* For example, find more information on why God allows wickedness in chapter 11 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.