

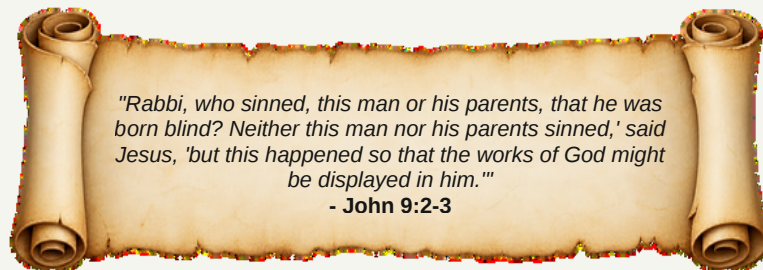
Q:

Does God punish us for our sins in this life?

My knee-jerk answer would be, Yes, definitely. Mostly because I want it to be true. I would prefer to know my suffering is not a lifelong condition but something that might be alleviated through my own action.

I'd like to think God is punishing me (fairly or not) rather than forcing me to accept that suffering in all its severity is simply the natural state of our fallen world. An earthly condition that will persist until the end.

Sadly, the answer is, we don't know for certain.



Secretly I would prefer that the system operate like karma: Do horrible things, win horrible prizes. And the more instant the better.

Perhaps we misunderstand God's intentions. What feels like punishment may instead be correction, a process intended to form us rather than hurt us.

And so, we ask...

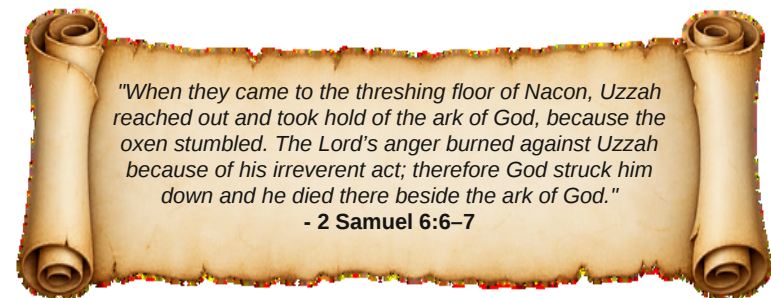
Can we know which sin amongst many we are being punished for?

Does punishment in this life mean we are forgiven, at least for that sin?

Do we pray that God won't punish us, or that He will?

The Old Testament operated under the "retribution principle", a paradigm where the righteous are rewarded and the wicked suffer. Most often, the punishment was inflicted upon a group or an entire nation. But in some cases, punishment was addressed at an individual. And it was swift and severe.

Consider Lot's wife instantly turned into a pillar of salt. Or poor Uzzah, who was simply extending a hand to help.



In the New Testament, however, there is no verse spoken by God, Jesus, prophet, or apostle that specifically states earthly punishment tied to a specific sin is an operational fact. And in turn, none that denies punishment as a productive possibility on our road to salvation.

A WORD ON THE WORD

The Greek word *Paideia* refers broadly to education, upbringing, training, formation, instruction, correction, or discipline. It derives from *paideuō*, "to train/educate" and *pais*, "child." While it can include severe or even painful correction, it is not strictly meant as punishment following wrongdoing. The concept is more closely aligned with formative child-training operating within the father-child wisdom tradition. The full process - forming a child into a mature person - requires not merely penalizing misconduct but often strong and unyielding discipline.

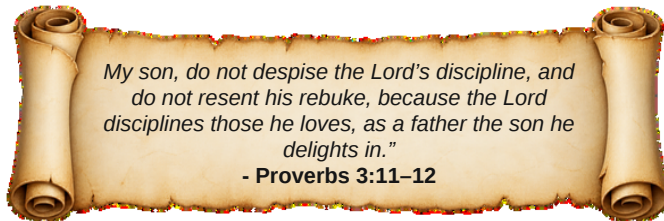
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Human suffering is universal. No one alive or dead has ever managed to escape it. While human sin can lead to human consequences – infidelity to divorce, recklessness to injury, cruelty to retaliation - suffering does not show any detectable pattern or traceable cause-effect connected to a specific act, or more broadly, poor moral decision-making.

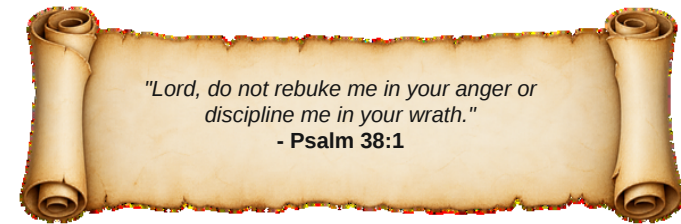
Attempting to reverse engineer an episode of suffering from a specific human action is dangerous guesswork at best.

Only God is the reader of hearts.



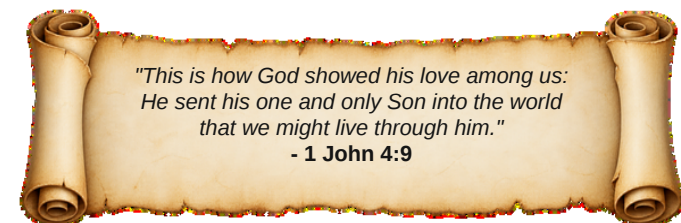
Questions remain.

- As the reader of hearts, does God apply personal punishment for individual sins or more as a general humbling of humanity?
- Although we may not know the exact sin, does knowing we are being punished drive us toward better behavior in the future?
- If we had a choice, would we accept a little real-world correction now for a clean slate at the time of final judgment?



To us, punishment may not appear the most effective means to form the tender heart Jesus tells us to possess. But on the other hand, without the possibility of God-directed discipline we might go the way of the undisciplined, like a child pushing the boundaries of bad behavior, until it is too late.

God knows our rebellious, self-satisfying nature. He knitted free will into each of us in the womb. And He wishes nothing more than to show us how to reduce, or even eliminate, our tendency toward self-destruction.

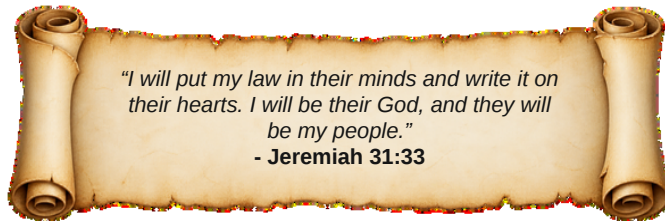


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We have proven unsuccessful at living righteously by God's law or the rigorous observation of our internal moral code. We are a stubborn lot, difficult to persuade and even harder to convince despite all the lessons.

And so, He chose to send His own Son who willingly endured the most extreme punishment as the ultimate sacrifice for our incurable addiction to sin.



Without the rebuke, correction, and the occasional punishment of the Father, could we ever truly develop a resilient and mature faith, a true formation of who He intended us to become?

I pray the answer is, no.

