

# OpenTheo

## Why Would God Create Animals and Allow Them to Suffer?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about why God would create animals and allow them to experience so much suffering and whether Christians should be content and accept their circumstances without fighting back no matter what.

\* Why would God create animals and allow them to experience so much suffering and gruesome deaths?

\* Should Christians be content and accept their circumstances no matter what, or are there times when they ought to fight back?

### Transcript

Welcome to Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast with Amy Hall and Greg Koukl. Alright Greg ready to get into this? Sure am. Okay, let's start with the question from Joel.

I have the problem of evil sorted in my mind but what about animal suffering? Why would God create animals and allow so much suffering and gruesome deaths? Well, yeah this is an issue that was brought up to me by a young earther who made the claim that there's animal suffering and how could God possibly countenance such a thing as entailed by an old earth perspective and I get my response there there I can't promise that I'm going to give an answer that's going to be fully adequate for everyone but oftentimes we we don't see the big picture on these things and in everything there is a trade-off. Okay, so some people here's a parallel an analogy that I want to use to get into making this point some people have complained that you know the if God really designed things he could have done a better job at designing them okay because look this thing doesn't work very well to accomplish this purpose they have in mind but when you design something for a purpose it does not serve other purposes well okay so an automobile is highly designed but you're not going to be able to drive it across the river because it's not a boat a boat is designed wonderfully but you're not going to be able to drive it down the freeway because that's not what it's made for the point I'm making is there are always certain trade-offs we have to think what the purposes were now when I

was pressed on this issue by this man I asked him if he thought that God designed creatures to feel pain and he had to think about it for a second but then he said or or I think he said yes or maybe I asked the question from a different perspective and I said do you think that pain has a useful function in an organism's life okay so both of those going together and the point is pain is actually serves a good function physical pain a good function and the good function is to warn us of danger so we put our hand on something hot we feel pain we pull it back so we don't get injured by the heat and there's a bunch of examples like that but I think that's adequate to make the point now of course if a creature cannot escape the heat like in a forest fire or something like that then that creature is going to die a painful death and there's no way to avoid that because the thing that is made for a good purpose also it serves a good purpose but at the same time it is inadequate in other ways I don't know how else to put it okay and it's going to be the case for virtually everything you could imagine that has a design function that there's going to be a downside to that in some way so I guess what I want to say is in God's wisdom he made a world that worked well even though this means there was going to be the possibility of excess in some areas not just the possibility the eventuality of it and I guess the what we end up doing I think is somewhat anthropomorphizing some of these things well I would want to feel the pain that that animal is feeling and that's terrible and therefore it would be wrong if I felt it and it would be wrong for the animal to feel it and I guess I'm not sympathetic to that way of thinking I think it's an emotional reaction all right God designed the world in a particular way and just because it has some liabilities doesn't mean the design wasn't good because I don't consider pain to be bad in general I will say this though and this is something a lot of people who have not spent time in the wild or with creatures may not have noticed but a lot of animals go torpid when they start feeling a lot of pain in other words they just kind of go inert and it appears when they're in a difficult circumstance and I've been in circumstances to see this not only on film but also I mean watching something like you know in the wild and African stuff but also it was my own experience that when an animal is injured or is approaching death they seem to settle down and relax into it almost as if the pain ceases to be a factor no I'm not in their head so I don't know what they're actually feeling but after the fight or flight thing is resolved in a circumstance where they're not going to get away they just seem to collapse now there may be something that's going on there in their central nervous system that God has also designed that makes it easier for them less painful to succumb to the attack and I mean let's face it hardly anything dies a natural death it seems to me you know you get carnivores around you know I don't I mean it's just it's just the way God made the world I it is obvious to me that that death entails design features in the animal kingdom in fact I was on the road jogging once in the Colorado Springs I was at summit had some time off I was jogging down a trail and then I saw a carcass of a rabbit and it looked totally dead and half gone but it was moving I couldn't figure out why I was moving I caught my attention so I look closely in the the illusion of motion was all the variety of different critters that were feasting on this carcass as God's disposal system I guarantee in the

day or so that carcass would be gone and there were probably six or seven different types of insects or whatever that were involved in the process all of them designed to eat carry in and to remove and kind of recycle the carcass of this dead animal now that is unmistakably a design feature all right and if it's a design feature God designed it I think I wrote a piece a long time ago or I did a commentary on when I was in KBRT back in the early days when I was doing regular radio I called design for death and I was just making the case that God is involved in designing everything in a very particular way with animal death at least in mind and in view and had built this great system into the ecosystem in a very balanced and intentional fashion okay so I'm actually going beyond the original question but I think these are all tied together okay do animals get terrified when they face the possibility of being eaten by a predator of course they do because the terrified feeling creates in them an impulse to flee okay and that's just the way that works we feel the same thing get terrified emotionally because of danger and then we want to protect ourselves from the danger it's the way that God has designed us to protect ourselves so it's like it is a design feature that has a good purpose in God's economy but also has I don't know if I want to call a side effect or what but it has this other side to it and I don't think that other side in this particular case is a result of the fall I have no reason to believe that so Greg just even if even if you're wrong about that even if the death is a result of the fall I think there's still our reasons for it I mean first of all if if you have figured out as Joel says if you figured out how to deal with human evil and suffering I'm not sure why this would be any different because he says he's he's already dealt with that so what but why would he do this to animals but the answer is the same reason why we're fallen in Adam right it the whole world is fallen because of Adam and so because of that the animals suffer for that we suffer for that everything in this universe suffers for that that can suffer and there's decay and there's all these other things so the idea that maybe they're innocent so why did God do this but the truth is because Adam was the head of the world and he had was head over the animals they also fell and that's the way that God has done this so why did God create animals I think there's a lot of purposes for animals you know beyond even just their help for us they're they're creative and they're beautiful and they're interesting and they taste good they eat them but they're in a fallen world I think even the suffering of animals has a purpose in terms a theological purpose when we see this death and suffering and of course God knew there would be a fall even so even if you think yes that all the animals were created to have this cycle of they're eating each other whatever it is when we see that destruction we are also reminded of sin it's a picture of sin every time we see suffering every time we see evil it's a picture of the ugliness of our own sin it's a result of our sin and it's an image of our sin and when we I think of one time I don't know if I've mentioned this on the show before but I feel like maybe I did recently but I saw this video of a sacrifice in Israel that someone had done of a lamb and it was very difficult to watch because all you can think is here is this poor innocent lamb who's dying because of someone else and of course that's the point right that is exactly what it's there for so that we can recognize what it means for our sin to kill someone who is innocent it's all a

picture helping us to see who Jesus is and what he's done so I think all of these things play into this and the same questions we have about suffering for human beings is the same question we have to answer for suffering for animals and I'd also like to point out that I think there's a difference between pain and suffering where human beings suffer in a way that animals can't the animals can feel pain but the animals can't perceive evil there's no evil being done when an animal eats another animal it's not like a serial killer who torches a human being and you have the human being has understanding of what's happening and understanding of the evil and they can perceive that there's a level of suffering that human beings endure that animals don't endure so be careful not to put those ideas onto the animals and what they're experiencing and that has to do with at least arguably cognitive ability now that you mentioned this I remember either JP Morlin or Bill Craig talking about this once I think it was JP and he was saying animals here's what the way he put it now people can accept that are rejected and he could probably defend it better than than I can I can't even defend it I'll tell you what he said he says animals feel pain but they don't know that the pain is theirs they are not self reflective on the pain all right and so that represents a cognitive difference between animal pain and human suffering that that may be akin to the what you're talking about right now yeah there's a whole extra level that human beings have to endure with those sorts of things let's go on to a question from matchless M recently I heard reports of Christian teenage girls being kidnapped by Islamic terrorists some might argue that we should be content no matter what should these girls and other Christians fight back or accept their circumstances well I mean if I see no theological reason why people should not fight back and seek their freedom under these circumstances or any circumstance where freedom is being impinged on it less extreme forms than what you just described it there are a number of places in scripture I'm thinking in the New Testament in the gospels and also in the book of Acts where persecution reared its head and people fled okay I mean the earliest cases Jesus right after he was born and there was Herod ready to kill the newborns in a Bethlehem and Joseph fled with his family to Egypt on the urging of an angel in a vision or dream so there was persecution flee okay it wasn't like well this is fate just take it I think the idea and then you also have Paul being persecuted early on in the book of Acts and he's in Damascus and they let him over the wall at a basket so he can get out of there and there's a number of other cases in Asia minor etc when when a riot happens and they flee and they flee to the neck in fact Jesus Jesus says that I think in Matthew 10 if they persecute you in one city flee to the next something to that effect now this to me is an example of of harm that is on the horizon for a person and this one in these cases due to spiritual things but nevertheless harm that they are encouraged to flee so there is seems to me there's there's no theological reason of any kind to simply surrender to whatever happens to you we are to take responsible action with regards to our families etc etc and and try to oppose the evil of losing our liberties and other evils that follow from having lost the liberty like sexual predation in this case now if it turns out that there is nothing we can do on our own to change the circumstances then in the midst of terrible circumstances we trust God if Corey 10 boom could have escaped from

the concentration camp mott house and whoever she was at then she should have done that and in fact before that she did all kinds of thing to avoid detection breaking all kinds of laws not just hiding Jews there are all kinds of laws she broke falsifying documentation and stuff like that food food coupons etc and so she worked hard to avoid that when she was stuck there and she couldn't avoid it any longer that was the opportunity to trust that God would work in a difficult circumstance and I think that's the equation there we do what we can and when we can't do any more that's appropriate in the circumstance then we have to simply trust God for the outcome let me make a different kind of application of the some people are in relationships committed relationships that are really bad for whatever reason they're painful they're difficult and and they have done everything they can to improve on the circumstances and have not been able to do it some parents have children that are rebellious and just won't won't respond to their direction what do you do you you can do what you can do and that's all you can sometimes you you run the limit and when you run the limit this is where you have to trust God to do what you accomplish what you are not able to accomplish and by the way it doesn't mean he's going to do that but the but it means that it's now within his province we do what we can do here Romans what 12 13 14 somewhere in there if possible as far as it's within your power be at peace with all men okay so that means it's not always going to be possible and it's not always going to be within your power and so if you are not at peace in a relational circumstance whatever that looks like then this is where and you can't do anything about it then this is where you're going to have to trust God and this is where prayer comes in powerfully that's God's side of the equation you know and this is where we appeal to him aggressively to act I think of Roman Romans I think of Philippians I'm always thinking of Romans but I think I think of Philippians 4 where we see that the the contentment comes from you know when when Paul says I've learned to be content in every situation whether prosperity or need or whatever it is and he says he says I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me that is the secret that he gives for his contentment in other words what the contentment means is that you can rest knowing that God will give you what you need to endure this situation for whoever long you're in it you do it through his power you're not you're not despairing you're not giving up but you are saying I know I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me I can go through anything he's not going to leave me that is the source of the contentment and Greg the distinction you make between working to change things which is clearly advocated and being content in every situation I think both those things work together because the way you become content is by knowing that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me and the verse that came to mind for me was in 1 Corinthians 7 21 where it says were you called while a slave do not worry about it in other words being a slave has no bearing on your inheritance with Christ your whether you're a slave or a free man or whatever it is when you're in Christ you are a full member of the family you are not at a lower status in God's eyes at all but then he says there's that so there's the contentment right then he says but if you were able if you were able also to become free rather do that so there we see both of those sides right it

is better to be free it is better to do that if you can but at the same time you know that you are in Christ and that's not your your status as a slave will will not affect that at all you're not a lower status in God's eyes so I think that's a good example of how those two things fit together all right that's it Greg we're out of time oh my goodness thank you Joel and matchless and we really appreciate hearing from you if you have a question sit it to us on Twitter with the hashtag #strask we look forward to hearing from you this is Amy Hall and Greg Cockel for a stand to reason

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