

# The Puzzles of Job

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## Chapter One

### WHY DO CHRISTIANS SUFFER?

Though written nearly 3500 years ago, the Book of Job is as up-to-date as if it had been written in our day. It is very possible that more persons know of Job than they do of almost any other individual of ancient times. The Book of Job is one we may not understand completely, but much of it comes right home to us because Job deals with the very things that we must live with, think about and find an answer to. These are things from which none of us are exempt, such as sorrow, pain, suffering, change, fear, hope, death and eternity.

Some persons look on this book as being one of pure philosophy because it deals with principles and life experiences to be found in every age. It is much more than that, however, for it is a story of a man who really lived, a man as human as any of us. He was a man who came to grips with things that even today strain the faith of men to the breaking point.

This book is a record of a man who laid bare his soul before GOD and poured out his complaints in words we would all like to call our own at times. Job said, "**Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul**" (Job 7:11).

This is one of the poetic books of the Bible. Its poetic form, however, does not detract for a moment from its inspiration. What better form could one use for expressing the deep things of the inner life? Poetry can often phrase the cries of the soul that prose would never dare to attempt. Just as expressions of love seem fitting and even move us deeply when expressed through poetry, the same thoughts put in the form of prose might leave us unmoved or even provoke us to laughter.

The words of Job were not hasty words. He sat in silence for seven days before taking up the series of conversations with his friends that occupy the bulk of the book. Undoubtedly these debates, for such they were, took a number of days to complete. The ancient sufferer may not have thought through all of his statements completely, but he did think about them.

He was no stoic, suffering in silence. He was a man of deep feeling. We can almost picture him

as he sat upon a heap of ashes groaning because of bodily affliction and moaning out his unfathomable grief at the loss of his family and possessions. He made known his desires to GOD even though he may have questioned whether or not GOD would hear or that GOD would care. Is this not the way we sometimes respond to the hard places of life?

This is a supremely human and personal book. Job did not look for answers to settle problems between nations not for remedies for the world's ills. He was searching for answers to the problems that are common to all of us.

He looked for a bridge over the deep chasm that separated him from GOD. In so doing he became a man who can be identified with every age. We still speak of severe sufferings as "suffering like Job," or patience under trial as "the patience of Job."

Little is known of Job outside the book that bears his name except for two other passages in Scripture. In Ezekiel 14:14, the LORD speaks of the righteousness of Job and compares it with that of Noah and Daniel. In the New Testament James says, "**Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy**" (James 5:11).

When first introduced to us, Job is seen as a very prosperous man yet one who was careful to see that his prosperity did not hinder his service for GOD. The LORD Himself testified of this, saying there was no man like Job in all the earth, a perfect and upright man, one who feared GOD and shunned evil. Yet calamity befell him. His oxen, asses and camels were stolen, his sheep and servants killed by fire; and all his children died when a violent wind destroyed the house in which they were eating. It was from this background of loss and tragedy that Job faced some of the greatest puzzles of life. And the things that puzzled Job are the very things that puzzles us.

There were at least seven major puzzles for which Job sought a solution, the first one having to do with pain and suffering.

It is a subject as old as the human race. Two passages tell us of Job's feeling about this: "**Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave? Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in? For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters**" (Job 3:20-24).

Then in chapter 7 Job said, "**So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome**" (Job 7:3-5).

Job wondered why he was kept alive. He wanted to know the purpose of the pain and suffering he was enduring.

Job found himself

- Weary of hoping hopes that seemed vain,
- Weary of struggles - never ending,
- Weary of thinking when nothing seems plain,
- Weary of life - meaningless.

Never once in all of this did Job speak of suicide. He could desire that the LORD would see fit to end his suffering, but he would not end it himself. Suicide is not the solution for life's problems. Despair is a miserable place for anyone to seek refuge, for there is no refuge in it. It is far better to be a living dog in the will of GOD than to be a dead lion out of it.

There is more than one kind of pain and suffering.

Physical suffering is often hard to endure. No one knows how severe this road is except one who has been over it or is in the midst of it. Those of us who have had little physical suffering must sympathize in silence. Only those who know what pain is can share in its agony. Job knew when it was and he knew that it was not something foreign to humanity, for he said, "**his flesh upon him shall have pain**" (Job 14:22).

There is another kind of suffering Job knew. He not only said, "**His flesh upon him shall have pain,**" but he added, "**and his soul within him shall mourn**" (14:22).

In Job's case and in many others this is the type of pain and suffering that is most dreaded.

Isaiah spoke of having pain from just seeing and hearing: "**Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth: I was bowed down at the hearing of it; I was dismayed at the seeing of it**" (Isaiah 21:3). Such suffering can be terribly real. It makes one toss and turn in the night. Bad news about our children can do this to us. Seeing those we love do things that lead to tragedy will also do this to us, especially if we cannot say a word to them about it.

Jeremiah knew what it was to have heart pain: "**And it shall come to pass at that day, saith the LORD, that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder**" (Jeremiah 4:9). It came to him because he heard the sound of the trumpets and the alarm of war. This is the kind of suffering that many have known through the years and generations. David spoke of his heart being sore pained within him: "**My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me**" (Psalm 55:4).

Why should there be such suffering and pain?

Why the agony of heart? Why the groaning of the soul? Why the recurring aches and pains of life which grind away at our bodies and spirits?

I often do not know the answer when people ask me these questions. I have seen much suffering for which I knew no answer whatsoever. I have had to face persons with broken hearts and say, "I do not know why this thing happened."

It is not only difficult but sometimes utterly impossible for us to read the meaning of our tears.

One thing that ought to be settled here is that pain and suffering are not necessarily the result of some personal sin on the part of the sufferer. There is a general line of teaching abroad that suffering is invariably connected with some sin or wrong doing on the part of the sufferer. No wonder that when such afflicted persons honestly search in their lives for a reason for their condition and can find none they are frustrated. Moreover we must remember that those of us who have trusted in CHRIST have been forgiven all our sins. GOD does not reach into the past in an arbitrary manner to punish us for sins that are under the blood of CHRIST.

When we think suffering is the result of some specific sin, and we find no sin on which we can place our finger, there follows a feeling that GOD has turned against us and does not hear our pleas.

We get the feeling that we are forsaken and alone in our trouble. There is more to it than this, however. Suffering is never in proportion to sin. Even the best of men know pain and grief. The LORD JESUS set this matter straight for us when the disciples asked Him concerning a blind man: "**Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind**" (John 9:2). It must have been a very surprised group who heard JESUS say, "**Neither.**" Then He proceeded to explain the reason the man was born blind was that "**the works of God should be made manifest in him**" (John 9:3).

It is well to remember that pain does not always lead men to righteousness.

We have all know persons who, the more they suffered, the more wicked they seemed to become. A classic example of this is found in Revelation 16:10, "**And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain.**"

Sometimes our pain and suffering is a result of our own neglect and ignorance and not direct punishment for some sin at all.

It we overeat, or do not eat enough, we are bound to suffer. In some respects pain is a relative matter. Tests by medical men show that we all suffer about the same, only some people react differently. A fighter in the ring will take quite a beating and come out smiling; but if his wife should accidentally bump him he may carry on as though he had been badly hurt.

The conclusion of the matter is, that if pain and suffering are present with us from no cause of our own, and there is no cure from man or GOD for it, then we must lift our eyes above the hills in absolute confidence and trust in GOD.

When the enemy comes in like a flood, then it is that the LORD will lift up a standard against him. It is in the darkness that we may reach out our hand to GOD and know that He is by our side.

The assurance that He holds us in His hand is better than a light shed on our pathway. We are

safer in that case than if we walked on a well-worn path. It is then that we can say with confidence: "Be still; He who holds the worlds is holding thee!"

We may not know that GOD intends, but we know that He knows that His way is best for us!

In order to get a proper perspective on pain and suffering, we must take a look not only at what is past but on into eternity:

"Life is real, life is earnest,  
And the grave is not the goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
Was not spoken of the soul."

While it is not easy for anyone who is passing through suffering to see this truth, we must remember that our future does not depend upon what we see or what we feel, but upon what GOD says. The Captain of our Salvation, the LORD JESUS CHRIST, suffered, and He sympathizes keenly with us in our suffering.

CHRIST suffered in order that repentance and remissions of sins should be preached in His name among all nations.

He suffered also in order that He might know our suffering and be a faithful High Priest in representing us before the FATHER (Hebrews 2:10-18).

The future is as bright as the promises of GOD!

And one of these promises is, **"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us"** (II Timothy 2:12).

And **"if children (of GOD) then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"** (Romans 8:17-18).

Let us also remember that the day is coming when pain will be no more: **"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away"** (Rev. 21:4).

"Light after darkness, gain after loss,  
Strength after weakness, crown after cross;  
Sweet after bitter, hope after fears,  
Home after wandering, praise after tears.

Sheaves after sowing, sun after rain,

Sight after mystery, peace after pain;  
Joy after sorrow, calm after blast,  
Rest after weariness, sweet rest at last.

Near after distant, gleam after gloom,  
Love after loneliness, life after tomb;  
After long agony, rapture of bliss -  
Right was the pathway leading to this."

- *Frances Havergal*

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