

JOB AND HIS PROBLEMS

Study 1

WHY DO THE INNOCENT SUFFER?

Read Job 9: 1-35

The tragedy of human suffering is one of the greatest problems in the world. It has always existed, and always will. Life inevitably leaves many unanswered questions. You will notice that in the book of Job there are many questions asked. It would seem, with some of them, as if they are thrown out into space, out of sheer desperation, without any hope of an answer. Perhaps already in your life some of these questions have arisen. It could be that even now you have feelings of bitterness because of some sorrow that seems senseless and unexplained. Out of the awful turmoil of human pain and misery there seems to ascend to God one, great big, 'WHY?' While the book of Job does not profess to answer all the problems, it does help us, because it brings the difficulties to the surface - out into the open.

Fact of Origin. Sin and pain, evil and suffering, have existed ever since our first parents sinned in the Garden of Eden. This is a simple fact which is taught all through the Bible. In this way, sin, sorrow and death are linked together, for with SIN came the evils of sickness and death. Read **Genesis 3** again and you will find the awful curse that was put upon all creation because of sin. This is very sad, but it is a fact. We cannot help thinking that our world would have been a totally different place had there been no evil. If you read **Revelation 21: 4**, which speaks of the future new heaven and new earth, you will notice that then there will be no more death, or pain or sorrow or crying. Every tear will be dried; there will be no more curse (**Revelation 22: 3**), for SIN WILL BE ABSENT! The whole of Creation longs for that day!

Why? When there is a sudden tragedy in the world, either nationally, or perhaps more specifically in the circumstances of people we know, we often ask 'WHY?' Perhaps we even wonder why God allows it. Does He not know? Does He not care? It could be thousands killed in an earthquake, or some loved one who is suddenly smitten with an incurable disease. We ask 'Why?' or often make it more personal and say, 'Why me?' Humanly speaking, there is no answer. Throughout history, many have suffered, often in a seemingly meaningless way. God is silent - there is no explanation in this life.

No Fatalism. We have already stated that Christians do not escape the sufferings and sadnesses of life. This is true, but to have Christ and His presence in our lives, helps tremendously in times of trouble. Many people in the world adopt a fatalistic attitude to these things. It is frequently said that everything happens according to an inevitable pattern. 'What is to be, will be.' The only way to live is to

be resigned to all that happens. Such reasoning leaves out altogether the fact of a personal God. It makes life a matter of pure chance. Nowhere in the Bible will you find this taught. Whatever questions you may feel the Bible leaves unanswered, there is no doubt about the aspect of life that it teaches. God, life, and every human experience are linked together. He is the Creator and we are responsible to Him.

What is God doing? There is one statement that Job made about God and his own life of suffering, which is very interesting:

"He knows the way that I take: When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold."
Job 23: 10

We are going to look at this in connection with the question we have asked. If you read Job's complaints throughout his speeches, you will sense that at times he felt the unreasonableness of his plight. Look at **Job 9: 20-23** and you will find this, ***"If the scourge slays suddenly, He laughs at the plight of the innocent."*** We can feel the sense of his bewilderment as he seems God-forsaken. Yet through it all he says two vital things which give meaning to suffering:

1. God KNOWS my way.
2. God means GOOD to come out of trials.

1. God knows. Nothing that ever happens escapes the attention of God. Notice Job's many references to **"He"** and **"I"**. The PATHWAY of life which Job was treading was an open book before God. This is a tremendous ray of light among all the dark statements that are made. If God knows anything about us, we can be sure He knows everything. To try to explain sorrow and tragedy leaves us baffled and bruised; maybe even bitter and frustrated. But to commit all to God as the One who knows every detail can give us peace and comfort. **1 Corinthians 10: 13** tells us that He knows just how much we can take, and there is a restraint placed on the extent to which even Satan is allowed to go.

2. God plans good in all our trials. Job spoke of the gold that would come out of the fire of affliction. Again notice **"He"** and **"me"**. There was a personal link, in the sorrows of Job, between his life and God. It was not broken by suffering but rather, in the end, it was strengthened. All the dross of misunderstanding and doubt, rebellion and fear, was burnt up. The purpose of Job's trial was revealed in his character. James says something about this in **chapter 1: 12** of his letter. The man who **"endures"** trial is happy indeed. At the end of the road he will receive the crown of life.

In this lesson we have not answered the question we asked at the beginning. In 'time' there is no real answer, but for Christians, eternity will provide many answers to the unsolved problems of life. The faith of Job is seen amid all his sufferings when he said, ***"though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."*** (**Job 13: 15**)

Study 2

A CHINK OF LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Read

Job 19: 1-29

There is a sense of hopelessness in the speeches in Job. The future was dark because life had no meaning or purpose. It was as if the speakers were looking into a dark tunnel and there was no light at the further end. Job and his companions lived a long time before the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world. We wonder what views they took of life in the light of that which was after death. If we look for light, for hope or assurance, we shall find very little. In the Old Testament as a whole, there is very little said in a positive way about that which is beyond the grave. It seems as though the godly people who lived before Christ were waiting for fuller light and understanding. The only thing that we can be sure of is that the Jewish people did believe in a general resurrection of the dead at the end of time. See **Daniel 12: 2-3**.

Death's Dismal Character. The pictures painted of death in Job are interesting, if dismal. Man is viewed as something frail and failing, **"He is of a few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue."** (14: 1-2) If you look carefully through the book you will find much more of a similar nature. Death came to all. In **10: 20-22** we read of Job visualising his end in **"the land of darkness and the shadow of death"**, a place of disorder. You will read much about **"the grave"**, **"Hades"**, or **"Sheol"**. This, to the Jews, was the place of the departed. It was a place of nothingness, of waiting for the expected resurrection. To Job and his friends it was the place of no return. **Chapter 7: 9-10** puts it clearly, **"As the cloud disappears and vanishes away, so he who goes down to the grave does not come up. He shall never return to his house, nor shall his place know him any more."** How hopeless this made life seem, especially in view of the sufferings that were so often experienced. There is a fine passage in **14: 1-10** which describes vividly the hopelessness of human life. A tree has more hope of survival than a man! This aspect of the reasoning of Job is worth careful study. Look at **3: 17-19; 16: 22; 17: 1; 21: 13 & 26; 26: 6; 30: 23**.

Life's Burning Question. In spite of all that is said about the hopelessness of life, it is not all dark. Amidst his depression Job reaches out beyond with a vital question:

**14: 14: "If a man dies, shall he live again?
All the days of my hard service I will wait,
till my change (or release) comes."**

This question asks more than we perhaps realise. These people lived so long before the resurrection of the Lord Jesus became a fact. It could be, that in their hearts there was a deep searching for assurance about life after death. To Job, with all his suffering life was not worth living. Yet unless there was light beyond the grave, the uncertainty of dying was even worse. This makes us realise that unless there is a positive answer to questions relating to death and beyond, life, even at its best, has not very much peace to offer. The closing verses of **chapter 14** indicate that Job was left without a real answer. He felt that God was numbering his steps and watching over his sin, **verse 16**, but there was no relief for his condition.

Certainty of Faith. Yet, in the book of Job there is a remarkable hint of something to lighten the dark scene.

19: 25: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God."

This is a tremendous profession of faith, and although, after he had said it, Job lapsed back into mournfulness, he had offered some gleam of hope for the future. He linked his life with a PERSONAL, living, Redeemer. He spoke of a prospect that would bring his Redeemer to earth. Though corruption destroyed his physical body, yet beyond this he would see his God. Notice how he links his Redeemer with God - they are one and the same. Now it could be that Job saw and said far more than he fully understood. This was often true in Old Testament days of the prophets. But there is no doubt that here he said something which spoke of Christ, the Redeemer, as the only answer to the hopelessness of death. He is the Redeemer that lives as the answer to death.

Resurrection Triumph. We can hold onto this statement and, as we end our lesson, leave behind the hopelessness that surrounds it. In **John 11** we find the Lord Jesus amidst the darkness of death. There is sorrow and hopelessness around Him, but He speaks words which are a direct answer to the question of Job. **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he dies, he shall live."** (verse 25). Only in a living Saviour can an answer to the awful darkness and disaster of death be found. Every Christian can truly say, **"I know that my Redeemer lives."** There is no doubt that every tentative groping after light in the Old Testament, looked forward to the full assurance of life that was brought to us when the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. It is true that the day will come when He will return to earth and stand there for all to see. But, better still, every believer will one day see the Lord Jesus face to face. (**1 John 3: 1-3**) Whatever sorrow and separation death may bring, this will be turned to joy and gladness when the Lord Jesus comes again. Remember He is a living Redeemer and Saviour.

Study 3

THE PRICE OF WISDOM

Read

Job 28: 1 - 18

This chapter as a whole gives a welcome break from the gloom of the discussions between Job and his friends. Looking at the previous chapter, there seems to be very little connection between it and this chapter on wisdom. Then when we come to **chapter 29** it seems as if Job takes up the strain of his problems leaving **chapter 28** as a detached poem on wisdom. You will notice that in this chapter, Job forgets himself and his sufferings altogether. He seems lost in meditation as he questions the origin and place of wisdom. It is a meditation of searching. It also ponders on the value of true wisdom and its worth in terms of life. Undoubtedly, it forms a lovely addition to Bible literature. But, of course, it does more than that.

Failure of Worldly Wisdom. Wisdom can perhaps mean different things to different people. To possess a great deal of knowledge does not always mean that someone is wise or possesses wisdom. This is especially true with regard to Biblical standards. The Greeks had a style of wisdom which the writers of the Scriptures almost scorned. If you

read **1 Corinthians 1: 21**, you will read what Paul has to say about worldly wisdom, **“the world through wisdom did not know God.”** This is a very revealing statement, for it makes the aim of true wisdom to be the knowledge of God. Keep this in mind then as we study the chapter. The Greeks in Paul’s time were renowned for this ability to debate and discuss the philosophies of life. They probed into the deep issues and problems of the day. Their ideas were clever and sophisticated. But Paul says that this was not true wisdom. In fact, in God’s sight, the wisdom of the world was foolishness.

Treasures of the Earth. The central theme of the chapter we are studying is summed up in the question which is twice asked, **“where can wisdom be found?” verses 12 & 20.** Notice the poetic way in which Job approaches the question. **Verses 1-11** give us a picture of man in his search for the treasures of the earth. Silver, gold, iron, the valuable minerals of the earth; men make sure they know where they are to be found. This is an Old Testament picture of mining. Through the industry of man, all that the earth has of value to yield, he seeks by his skill to find and to obtain. Hidden things are brought to light and precious treasure is thus obtained.

“Where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?” (verse 12)

Verses 12-19 compare the value of wisdom with the treasures of the earth. Man knows the value of gold and silver and precious stones, but he does not know the value of wisdom. **(verse 13)** Notice Job’s opinion of all that man counts as precious and worth possessing. This certainly is a fine passage and it makes us realise how highly the Hebrews valued wisdom. The verdict of Job is that wisdom is priceless.

God is the Answer. He repeats the question:

“From where then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding?” (verse 20)

It is hid from the eyes of all living; fowls of the air are excluded from the knowledge, but destruction and death have heard a rumour! **Verses 23-27** lead us to the answer. God understands the way of it and He knows the place where it is found. This statement teaches us why the wisdom of the Hebrews, who were God’s chosen people, was so much higher than pagan wisdom. The idea that is put forward in these verses is that God’s wisdom is as old as His creation. In fact, in **Proverbs 3: 19** we are told that it was through the wisdom of God that the worlds were made.

The Fear of the Lord. We have now arrived at the end of our search. God is the answer; in Him is the secret of wisdom. More than that, He wants men and women to share in it.

**“And to man He said,
Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
And to depart from evil is understanding.” (verse 28)**

We can bring our study to a close by considering what this means. We notice that wisdom begins with a right approach to the Lord. This is what ‘fearing the Lord’ means. Not ‘to be afraid’, but to respect and love Him. It means that in a practical way we shall obey His Word. In **Deuteronomy 4: 6** we read that Moses told the people that keeping God’s commands would be their wisdom and understanding in the sight of all peoples. Similarly, God’s commands and instructions will make us, in our day, wise Christians as we obey them.

Asking God for Wisdom. Notice there is the other side to the matter. To turn away from evil is a proof that we

understand and are wise. It reminds us very much of the wise and foolish builders in **Matthew 7: 24-27**. The wise man was he, who heard the word of Jesus and did it. He laid a firm foundation for his life. The foolish man ignored the words, and reaped the harvest of destruction. This is something that, as Christians, we need to carefully consider. James says in his letter **1: 5**, that **“if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God”**, and he will find God is only too ready to supply it.

There are many stumbling blocks and problems which we meet in our Christian pathway, which demand a higher wisdom than our own. This chapter in Job gives us a picture of the quest of man for wisdom. It also shows us that true wisdom can only be found in the fear of the Lord.

Study 4

BETTER AT THE END

Read Job 42: 1-17

The story of Job has a bright and cheerful ending. It ends in true Hebrew style with all the ideas of blessing being in earthly terms. We feel as if we are suddenly transported out of the black storm clouds into the brilliance of sunshine. We have not really looked at the closing chapters of the book. They are quite heavy to read, but they represent some wonderful ideas. **Chapters 32 - 37** give us a long discourse from Elihu, son of Barachel, the Buzite. He is younger than Job and his three friends and therefore waits before he speaks. He is angry with Job because he feels that Job has clung to his own righteousness and failed to vindicate God. He is angry with the three friends because they have given Job neither comfort nor answer. Yet, strangely enough, with all he has said he still fails to find the true answer to Job’s plight. **(37: 23)** Thus the long discourse ends.

Voice out of the Whirlwind. The build-up to **chapter 42** comes through **chapters 38 - 41** when the Lord speaks to Job out of the whirlwind. The whole style of the Lord’s answer is set in question form. As the mighty Creator and Controller of the Universe, He poses problems connected with creation. The impression I always get after reading through these great statements of the Lord, is that Job and all his sufferings are a minute part of the total works of the Lord. It is obvious that, after listening to what the Lord has to say, Job is smitten with a sense of his own insignificance, **(40: 3-5)** and eventually of his own guilt. **(42: 1-6)** The Lord was going to bless him richly; but before that there must be repentance and an acknowledgment of the majesty and superiority of the Lord.

Repentance and Restoration. This teaches us quite an important lesson. In every experience of life, especially in times of trouble, it is easy to get away from God. Whatever Job’s failure was, there is no doubt that his suffering separated him from God and he needed to be restored. It was because of this that the Lord waited until this point before He spoke. **James 5: 11** records the patience or perseverance of Job, but he also remembers that the Lord is full of pity and merciful. God understood, as He always does, the weakness in Job and the severity of his trials. Whatever there was of failure and sin, the Lord wanted to lead Job into righteousness and then bless him very much. So through repentance we find blessing and restoration. Always remember that through all life’s trials, God wants eventually to draw us nearer to Himself.

Questions

Study 1

WHY DO THE INNOCENT SUFFER?

1. In what way does the book of Job help us in dealing with the problem of suffering?
2. How long has pain and evil existed in our world and where did it begin?
3. What does fatalism ('what is to be will be') make of life and what does it leave out in its reckoning?
4. What two great things does Job say which help to give meaning to suffering?
5. Give four things which will "be no more" in the new heaven and new earth.

Study 2

A CHINK OF LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

1. What does it seem that godly people were waiting for when we read in the Old Testament of life beyond the grave?
2. Give two things that Job says about death and the grave.
3. Why is it essential that we have certainty about life beyond the grave?
4. What wonderful thing did Job say about his Redeemer?
5. Quote the words of the Lord Jesus which are an answer to Job's question in **chapter 14: 14**.

Study 3

THE PRICE OF WISDOM

1. What does God say about the wisdom of this world?
2. What is the central theme of this chapter?
3. (a) What is Job's verdict of wisdom?
(b) Why was the wisdom of the Hebrews higher than that of the pagans?
4. What does it mean to "**fear the Lord**"? (**28: 28**)
5. How can we obtain wisdom for our Christian lives today?

Study 4

BETTER AT THE END

1. For what reason was Elihu angry with Job and his friends?
2. What two effects did the words of the Lord have upon Job as he listened to them?
3. Why is this chapter so important?
4. What was necessary in Job's life before he could effectively pray for his friends?
5. What does God intend that trials and sufferings should produce in our Christian experience?

Approved by the Lord. We can now study **42: 7-17**. The Lord makes very clear to them and to us how He assessed the outcome of things. Against the three friends His anger is kindled, "**You have not spoken of Me what is right,**" God says. But notice that He adds in **verse 7, "as My servant Job has."** This may strike you as amazing, but it shows the grace and kindness of God. While Job felt so wretched, and was often groping in the dark, the Lord was taking account of his words. This reminds us that in our lives the Lord is quietly watching over us and He always commends that which is worthwhile. He never makes a mistake in His dealings with us.

Accepted by the Lord. Notice **verse 8** - it is very important. Here we find the principle of sacrifice. If Job is perhaps the earliest book in the Bible, it does show that from the very beginning sin and sacrifice were linked together. The only answer to the sin of his friends was the burnt offering and the prayers of Job. I think that a blessing even greater than the material prosperity that became his, was the fact that God said concerning Job, "**I will accept him,**" **verse 8**. This was what Job had been longing for all the way through his dark hours of suffering. It seems now that the whole sky had cleared. God and Job were at peace, there was no longer any barrier between them. Such is our experience. All Old Testament sacrifices pointed forward to the sacrifice of Calvary. We have acceptance before God because of the fact that the Lord Jesus died for our sins. We often make the mistake that Job did and cling to the idea of our own righteousness, saying that we are right before God. We have to remember that we have nothing to plead before God. As believers we are only "**accepted in the Beloved**" (**Ephesians 1: 6**) - in Christ. This is a wonderful position to be in, and one that should cause our hearts to overflow in worship and praise to God.

Praying for his Friends. Job prayed for his friends. (**verse 10**) This marked the end of his trials and the beginning of his triumphs. With his goods and friends and eventually a new family, this man who had suffered so much began a new and better life. It is all summed up in **verse 12, "Now the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning."** Only a man who had been accepted by the Lord could really pray for his friends. This is true for all who want to help others with their prayers. It was only through the pathway of suffering that Job really realised how wonderful God was. We could say that Job was twice the man in character after his trials than he was before.

Conclusion

We end our studies on the life of Job with a look at **Hebrews 12: 5-13**. Read this passage carefully. It gives us a very important comment on the reasonings for suffering and their outcome. What should be the outcome of those trials which God allows? "**That we may be partakers of His holiness.**" (**verse 10**) That thy may yield "**the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it**" (**verse 11**) Thus God intends to produce character through our sufferings. Finally, **Romans 8: 28** is an illuminating verse, and the object of the "**all things**" is that we may be "**conformed to the image of His Son**". (**verse 29**)