

## **Facing Trials and Tribulations, Insights from the Book of Job**

### **I. Trials and Tribulations Will Come**

**Job 1:13-19, I Corinthians 4:11-14, Philippians 1:29, James 1:2, I Peter 1:3-6**

There's nothing more inevitable in life than trial and tribulation. All these trials and tribulations are battlegrounds of spiritual warfare so the biblical specifics applicable to such confrontations must be known. The book of Job faces this issue in a way no other part of the Bible does. Job, a devout believer, a pillar of his community, a very good father, a good man, suddenly, inexplicably, has taken away from him health, wealth, and family ... everything. He's plunged into agony, and for chapter after chapter Job is confused and angry, crying out to God in prayer, and arguing with his friends.

Grievous trials and overwhelming tribulations are disabling, and take us to our extremities. Can we get through them, how can we get through them, prosper in spite of them, or even grow because of them? It is an understatement to say Job faced an upheaval of life's difficulties, yet he came through and grew in the process.

What we must learn in life is that God's love for us is bigger and broader than sentimentality and sympathy and his will for our lives is vaster and grander than our personal happiness or success. We are to love God and to cherish him, whether he gives or takes away. We need to know that in some deep way it is necessary for the whole universe to publicly observe that God is worthy of our love, and that this love is in no way dependent on God's gifts to us.

If we live long enough it is certain that as Job we will go through rough times. They may come as disease, or disaster, or discouragement, or depression, or disappointment, or difficulty, or disdain of self, or death of a loved one, any of the debilitating d's. How do we face such trials and temptations? Why are there so many struggles in our lives? We usually think if we just knew the why we would be ok so we ask why this, why me, why now, why so severe, why God, WHY? The theological insight in Job addresses this subject in depth, and wisdom.

### **II. Trials and Tribulations Answers Are Not Simple**

Learn to avoid simple answers to the question of why you suffer trials and tribulations. Job is described as blameless, upright, one that fears God, and shuns evil. We're told this three times: 1:1 by the author, twice by God, 1:8 and 2:2. Something in us screams that Job's suffering is wrong because he is 'good'. For the same reason we ask why in our own case. I know we have less trouble with the 'ungodly' suffering, in fact, some of us think they should suffer a lot more, but Job is the godliest person on the face of the globe and the tribulations he faced were severe. This presents a problem of immense proportions. The answer is not simple; there is no 'fix all' to trials and tribulations.

#### **A. Usual (Simple) Responses Are Lies, 1:9-11**

##### **1. The So Called Christian Way**

We want simple answers; in fact we nearly always respond to suffering either in the so called Christian way, or the worldly wise secular way. The common Christian way is not actually Christ's way, but our perception of the Christian way. The so called Christian way is to ask "Why is God punishing me?" "What am I doing wrong" Brothers and Sisters are even glad to help us heap guilt on ourselves (John 9:1-2). I'm afraid there are a lot of folks, not just in Christianity generally, but even in the church itself, who think, "Well, if you're sick, you need to eat better. If you're having financial problems, you need to work harder. You need to be more dedicated." This is NOT Christianity, it is more karma than anything else. It says the forces generated by a person's actions perpetrate all consequences and determine singularly the person's life existence of blessing or curse. This belief that all tribulation has a direct correlation to obedience puts a burden upon God's people that essentially has all answers to life's difficulty's summarized in "pray more, read more, witness more, and sacrifice more, and Hocus-

## Facing Trials and Tribulations, Insights from the Book of Job 1:1-22

### 2. The Secular Way

Whereas religious people tend to see suffering as a punishment, secular people tend to see suffering as a random thing. Life is a roll of the dice; there is not a powerful God in charge of everything. The worldly see suffering as a fate we must accept. These people look at the randomness of suffering as proof that there is no God, or as proof that if there is a God he is unloving and impotent. It's very typical to look at evil and suffering and to say, "If there were an all-powerful and all-good God, he would never have let this happen. The Bible says God is all-powerful and all-good, but the God of the Bible obviously doesn't exist." Both the false christian way and the worldly secular way are dead ends.

Truth is Job fears God and shuns evil, but even so Satan challenges God to touch him and God says, ok, you may touch him. This just looks wrong doesn't it? If you are in the middle of a trial right now and burdened down . . . don't make matters worse by trying to pin God down on the why of it all so 'you' can quickly make it all better. It just isn't as simple as all of that.

### **B. God's Involvement Must Be Clarified, 1:12-13**

God's relationship to trials and tribulations appears to us to be to direct, yet also disproportionate. When we first look at Job's tribulation, we are horrified. What in the world? Are God and Satan playing games with this poor man? That totally misses the keen insight of this book dramatically pointing out that there is a relationship of God to suffering that we don't fully understand. Notice, it is Satan's idea that all of these bad things should happen to Job. God doesn't come up with the idea, Satan does. Satan is the one who goes and does it. God does not actively or directly generate the suffering.

This is revealing. When God made the world, he didn't make disease in it or a world in which windstorms destroyed houses and children. It wasn't a place of disaster and death. These forces of darkness were unleashed when we turned from God. When we rebelled this world went bad. God is not actively desiring or creating the suffering that goes on in Job's life (or ours). Satan is doing it.

Give me your attention though, this is very important, God **IS** in absolute control. We don't have Satan and God as two equal opposite forces fighting against each other. NO! What we have here is God in total charge, and he's overruling the evil. Do you understand this? He permits it, but then he limits it. Please notice, he says, "Behold, all that he hath *is* in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand." He says, "You can do this, but you can't do that." God is totally in charge.

God only gave Satan enough rope to hang himself. Satan is bringing evil and suffering into Job's life, but the result is the opposite of what he's trying to get. Satan wanted Job discredited. Instead Job is one of the most noted figures in the history of the human race to give courage in the midst of trial and tribulation. God allowed Satan to defeat himself and God achieve the very opposite of what Satan wanted in the life of Job. Satan's involvement in Job's profound tribulation shows us the mistake of charging God with direct relationship to our difficulty.

What this is telling us, and this is SO important, God hates suffering, but, on the other hand, he's in control. Hard to understand? Yes! Important? Yes! You can't say God can't help it, He is permitting it, and he is in charge. Neither can you say God loves to see his people suffer. He doesn't.

## **III. In Trials and Tribulations Embrace the Lord**

### **A. Love For God Must Be Singular, 1:8, 21a—1:21b**

Trials and tribulations will come. The why of trial and tribulation is not simple. If we realize though that the Lord is wise and in control, we will not be in desperation about our trials and temptations, we can in fact face and embrace them. Look at verse 8, "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is* none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one

## Facing Trials and Tribulations, Insights from the Book of Job 1:1-22

God says, "Job is my servant, he fears me." The word 'fear' biblically has a much more positive sense in our relationship to God than what we give it today. The word means inward awe and worship. God is saying, "Job serves me, but he serves me out of love." Satan says, "No he doesn't, he just loves the things you are giving to him (family, money, health, status). Take these things go away and he will turn against you."

There is an element of truth in what Satan is saying. We often do serve the Lord for what we think we will get. We have all been networked, exploited, and used but we must not think we can exploit and use God for our purposes. What we tend not to notice or realize is that exploiters and manipulators become hard and cynical, they become like Satan. If we attempt to exploit and use God, it won't affect him, but little by little, incident by incident we will become more and more like the Devil.

When I have reduced God to be my little god to do for me what I want, to give me what I want when I want it, to give me explicit answers . . . I am trying to be a god bigger than God, and I have become like Satan. If we are to be God's servant, we must love God for who he is alone. After Job lost his money and family he still said God alone was enough. Sure, later when he lost his health we see a lot of self-centeredness in Job. The way God made Job into a man of greatness, though, was to allow Job to face the loss of everything and not to know why. To demand why, is to demand to be God.

Don't you see, Satan doesn't believe anybody would serve **God** for naught. God says "Job loves me," and over at the side you can hear Satan saying, "He doesn't either, Not really." At the challenge God proves he can create true deep genuine love in an individual without that person expecting anything in return. There can't even be an answer to the *why* of life, because that in itself would be a reason to serve God. We are called to be in a loving fellowship with a God who is in control (even of our trials and tribulations), and to embrace and accept the mystery of not knowing why we face trials and temptations. God himself alone must be enough for us to serve him.

### **B. Love For God Must Be Worshipful, 1:20, 21c, 40:3-5**

At first Job worshipped the Lord even in great suffering (1:20). Then when the suffering got worse Job demanded God to show up so he could get answers. Job defended himself, despised his circumstances, and descended into despair. What did God do? The same thing he will do in our case if we take Job's path in suffering. When God showed up he didn't even mention Job's trials but instead deepened Job's knowledge of his God. "Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, "Who *is* this that darkeneth counsel By words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; For I will demand of thee, and answer thou me" (Job 38:1-2).

Job had been saying, "Your counsel, your plan, your letting these things happen is so dark, it doesn't make sense." God said, "You're darkening my counsel with your words because you don't really know as much as you think you do." God said, "Why don't we take a look at your knowledge for just a minute. How much wisdom and knowledge do you have compared to my wisdom and knowledge?"

Both of our air conditioners, the one upstairs, and the one downstairs, went on the blink day before yesterday, the day I was to come to Tyler. What do you think the repairman would have said to me if I said, "I just don't believe that unit needs a new fan motor, look, it is still running. I just don't believe this other unit that is dumping water into our bedroom needs new piping, it is obvious it just needs a new drip pan." Do you think he would have entered into a long dialogue with me and taken me through a thorough HVAC course? No, he would have said, "Who *is* this that darkeneth counsel By words without knowledge?" If God is powerful enough for you to expect him to change the events of your life, you can be sure he at the same moment is wise enough to have reasons for why he allows certain events in life. Get it? God is saying, "You can't question my counsel unless you can match my

## Facing Trials and Tribulations, Insights from the Book of Job

So, really now, because you say “I can’t see any reason why God would let thus and so happen,” does that mean there can’t be a good reason for thus and so happening just because you can’t think of a good reason for thus and so to have happened? That’s ludicrous. Yet we do it. Do you know why when suffering comes and disappointment we immediately fall apart and think the worst about our lives, do you know why? Our main problem is that we don’t really deep down really awe God, worship God.

### IV. We Face Trials by Quietly and Humbly Thanking God for our Redeemer and Heaven

#### A. We Have heaven, 14:13-15

We all desire a perfect world and struggle with the fact that the house we live in is filled with trials and tribulations. The desire for a life without trouble is wired inside of us (Romans 8:23). So, even if we know there will be trials and tribulations and don’t demand simple answers, and even if we are resting in the Lord who is wise and in control and we therefore are not in desperation about our trials, and even if we are loving the Lord singularly and worshipfully, even so, we hope much, and long much for a world where we are not plagued by the difficulties of life. Trials and tribulations make us desire heaven (II Corinthians 5:1-2).

#### B. Our Redeemer is the Ultimate Answer, 19:10:27

Job suffered, we suffer, and we can never say we deserve not to suffer, that is an answer. Job’s view of a distant perfect day and one who would redeem him to that perfect day was the ultimate answer to his suffering in the darkest hours of his life. Satan though assaulted a sufferer in the darkest hour of his life, and a man who in himself deserved not to suffer any whatsoever. This sufferer died on a cross and cried out “My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me”, and he got no answer. Christ when suffering was the ultimate Job. We are not. Got it?

#### C. Let Us Be Quiet in Trials and Temptations, 40:3-5

When God appears (chapter 38) in the great storm and whirlwind he gives no word of comfort to Job. Instead God displays his grandeur and majesty in his ways and works. God basically keeps asking Job “Who are you, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth, when I set the stars in their place, when I set the bounds of the vast oceans.” Job covers his mouth and has nothing to say.

Do you see? In chapter 40 Job says, “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: Yea, twice; but I will proceed no further” (40:4-5). God keeps speaking, he in essence says, “You say I don’t know how to judge? Will you condemn me so you’ll look good? Let’s see you judge, Job. Look at everyone that is proud, bring them low. Trample the wicked in the dust, then I will admit your right hand can save you,” (40:8-14).”

No explanation, no comfort, and the most surprising thing, this is what Job needed. “Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every *thing*, And *that* no thought can be withholden from thee. Who *is* he that hideth counsel Without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; Things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: But now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor *myself*, and repent In dust and ashes,” (42:1-6).

The disquietness and rebellion inside Job is put to rest. His pride is humbled. He is utterly changed, he is satisfied. Job thought he was forsaken, he wasn’t actually. When Christ suffered he was actually forsaken of God. Jesus is the only person in history to whom God said, if you obey me fully I will abandon you fully. We have no room to complain. Let us as Job learn not to reply against God (Romans 9:20). Let us as Christ love God for whom he is in himself. Christ did not die so that we would not ever suffer, but so that when we suffer we could become like him. One day we will see him and be like him (I John 3:2-3). Let us face our trials and tribulations like Job the Greater.