

THE BIBLE, GOD AND SUFFERING

A BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

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In the Bible – most clearly associated with the **Book of Job**

- Job and his family affected by a natural disaster – life ruined, even though he was righteous.
- Job functions as a debate with Deuteronomy, which links good with obedience and suffering with disobedience. See Deut. 28:1-6 with 28:15-19. . . Job indicates that the link is not always clear.

SO – in the Old Testament

1. Trust anyway
 - Habakkuk 3:17-18; Psalms – see Ps.23 -- & Ps.22:1-2, 22:22,29-31
2. Know that God uses even evil for his purposes
 - Isaiah 10:5-6; but 10:12; Habakkuk 1:5-6

& in the New Testament

3. **Jesus** connects disobedience with suffering,
BUT does not connect all suffering with disobedience!!
 - Luke 13:1-5 Suffering and Repentance
 - Luke 9:23, 14:27 – Calls his followers to suffer (carry the cross)
4. Jesus HIMSELF suffers
5. **The NT Letters** see suffering in the light of Jesus
all Christians will face suffering because they are followers of Jesus
 - Hebrews 12:1-13 . Romans 5:45. Jesus is our example for facing suffering without despair; God uses suffering for our sanctification
 - Romans 8:28 Suffering cannot thwart God's purposes for us
 - Romans 8:18-21; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Suffering will be put into perspective in God's future
 - Romans 8:31-35 Suffering cannot separate us from God's love

BUT WHY? WHY MAKE THE WORLD THIS WAY?

1. **Creation – without animate life** . . what's the problem with earthquakes and meteors? Creation, death and re-creation are ongoing and neither good nor bad

2. **Creation with life:** awareness, meaning, pain, choice, death become problems!

3. **God's Decision to create or not to create** . . did God know that suffering was inevitable? . . . yes . . .

4. **So WHY continue?** Driven by overflowing love (like a parent) & the willingness to suffer.

SO John 1:1 . . .“In the beginning was the Word” means not just that Jesus was God eternally, but that God's decision to suffer in Jesus was eternal . .

SO . . when suffering hits us . . what do we do?

1. Remember God's Word (as above)

- That God is still a God of love and power
- That what is mysterious will become clear one day

2. Stay Close to Others:

- Step in to help others
- Seek help from others

3. Stay Close to God in Prayer

- Cry out to God in prayer with your deepest feelings and pain.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 15-19

28If you will only obey the Lord your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth; 2all these **blessings** shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the Lord your God:

3**Blessed** shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.

4**Blessed** shall be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your livestock, both the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock. 5**Blessed** shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. 6**Blessed** shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

15But if you will not obey the Lord your God by diligently observing all his commandments and decrees, which I am commanding you today, then all these **curses** shall come upon you and overtake you: 16**Cursed** shall you be in the city, . . .

TRUST ANYWAY

Habakkuk 3:17-18

17 *Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, **18** yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.*

Psalms 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

4 *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.*

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Psalms 22

1 *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?*

2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

BUT

22 *I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:*

29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

30 Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,

31 and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

GOD USES EVIL FOR GOD'S PURPOSES

Isaiah 10:5-6, 12

5 Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger— the club in their hands is my fury!

6 Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. . . . **12** *When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride.*

Habakkuk 1:5-6

5 Look at the nations, and see! Be astonished! Be astounded! **For a work is being done in your days that you would not believe if you were told.** **6** *For I am rousing the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous nation, who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own.*

JESUS ON SUFFERING

Luke 13:1-5

13 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 He asked them, **“Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3** *No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.* 4 Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 *No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”*

JESUS' CALL TO SUFFER

Luke 9:23, 14:27

9.23 Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and **take up their cross daily and FOLLOW ME.**

14.27 Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

JESUS AS OUR EXAMPLE – GOD USING SUFFERING

Hebrews 5:8

8 Although he was a Son, **he learned obedience through what he suffered;**

Hebrews 12:1-13

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and **let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2** *looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.* 3 Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children— **“My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; 6** *for the Lord*

disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.” 11Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. 12Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees

Romans 5:4-5

4. we also boast in our sufferings, *knowing that suffering produces endurance*, 4and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Romans 8:28

28We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

SUFFERING AND GOD’S FUTURE

Romans 8:18-21

18I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 21 . . the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

16So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. *17For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure*, 18because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

SUFFERING CANNOT SEPARATE US FROM GOD

Romans 8:35, 37

35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

GOD’S ETERNAL PURPOSES

1 Corinthians 2:7-8

7But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

John 1:1-5, 3:16

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

3.16 “For **God so loved** the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

SO, WHEN IN SUFFERING, WHAT DO WE DO?

1. Remember God’s Word (as above)

- That God is still a God of love and power
- That what is mysterious will become clear one day

2. Stay Close to Others:

- Step in to help others
- Seek help from others

Galatians 6:2

Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

John 15:12

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Philippians 2:4

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Matthew 25:38-39

38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40And the king (Jesus) will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

James 2:15-17

15If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

3. Stay Close to God in Prayer

- Cry out to God in prayer with your deepest feelings and pain.
- Remember the Psalms of “Lament”

Psalm 69 (selected)

1 Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.
2 I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.
3 I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with
waiting for my God.

Psalm 22 (selected)

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from
helping me, from the words of my groaning?
19 But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!
29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall
bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

Psalm 102 (selected)

Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you.
2 Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me;
answer me speedily in the day when I call.
17 He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer.

Psalm 142 (selected)

1 With my voice I cry to the Lord;
2 I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him.
7 Bring me out of prison, so that I may give thanks to your name. The righteous
will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.

Psalm 40:1-5

1 I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.
2 He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon
a rock, making my steps secure.
3 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and
fear, and put their trust in the Lord.
4 Happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to
those who go astray after false gods.
5 You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts
toward us; none can