

## WHAT ABOUT SUFFERING?

2Tim.3:12; Heb.11:32-38

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### I. INTRODUCTION

1. One thing is certain, suffering is the common lot of all: Both the saint and the sinner; the righteousness and the unrighteous; the innocent and the guilty.
2. Note some of the things some people say about suffering. Some of the questions people often ask and/or charges they make.
  - a. Why do people suffer?
  - b. Why is there heartache, disease, pain, and death?
  - c. Why does a loving God allow such things?
  - d. Why does God allow even the righteous, including the innocent, sinless little children, to suffer, since he is all-wise and good and all-powerful?
  - e. Why didn't God make man so that he couldn't sin and cause suffering to self and others?
  - f. Why did God do this to me? What have I done that has caused God to bring this terrible pain, disease and suffering upon me?
  - g. Men often make God a cruel monster by charging him with striking people, including innocent little children, with dreaded disease, leaving their bodies helpless or their minds deranged, excruciating in their intensity, or by some form of horrible form of death, taking them from their parents and families who desperately need them; they often do this by saying, "This was God's will!"
  - h. The basic tool of the atheists for claiming proof that there is no omnipotent, omnibenevolent (perfectly good) God is the fact of the existence of human suffering and moral evil in the world.
  - i. It is claimed that the fact of one's suffering some kind of illness or financial setback is proof that he is a sinner and that his personal suffering is punitive.
3. Though we don't have all the answers about suffering, we, in all confidence, deny all these negative thoughts about suffering which people express, as well as brand the charges that all such sufferings and horrible things which happen to even the innocent little children are "the will of God" as false.
4. There is really a very trustworthy source from which to learn the truth on this question, to answer our questions about it, and to correct the common

misconceptions. That source is God's written word, the Bible, a timeless and universal Book, because it deals with all the questions that plague mankind about his present well being and his eternal destiny.

5. Note some of the things we learn from the Bible about suffering from the following four different lessons discussing our question: What About Suffering?

## **II. DISCUSSION**

### **A. THE ORIGIN AND OR CAUSES AND REASONS FOR SUFFERING.**

1. The Bible teaches that ultimately, sin is the source and the cause of suffering, either directly or indirectly, of which the following is proof.
2. Note what the first three chapters of Genesis reveal about it.
  - a. Ch.1, man was created perfect, and placed in a world free from sin, suffering, pain, disease and death, in a literal state of paradise, Gen.1:26-28,31.
  - b. Gen.2, man who was created with a free will, with the ability to choose between good and evil, with the will and ability to choose to obey or to disobey God's revealed will, was told what to do and what not to do, while in the Garden of Eden, in that state of paradise, and warned of the consequences of disobedience, Gen.2:15-17.
  - c. Gen.3, note the dire consequences Adam's and Eve's sin is disobeying God's will in the Garden:
    - (1) Brought upon themselves, Gen.3:7-19,22-24.
      - (a) Guilt, spiritual death or alienation from God.
      - (b) The fear of being found out for their sin.
      - (c) Pains of childbearing for the woman.
      - (d) The sorrow of toiling and laboring among thorns and thistles in the sweat of his brow in order to eat bread.
      - (e) Their return to the ground from whence taken, or the pain of physical death, separation from "the tree of life."
    - (2) Brought upon all mankind: The pain and suffering of physical death, or the physical death penalty upon all men, as a consequence of Adam's sin, Rom.5:12; 1Cor.15:21,22a; Heb.9:27.

- d. Before sin entered there was no guilt, no pain, no fear, no sorrow, no disease, no suffering of any kind, and no death, either spiritual or physical.
- e. Since sin entered, all such things became and continues to be a reality; all men suffer in this life; suffering has become the universal experience of human beings.
- f. Sin and Satan are to blame, not God. See Lk.13:11,16; 2Cor.12:7; Gen.3:4; Jno.8:44.

## **B. NEXT CONSIDER GOD’S INEXORABLE LAW AND SUFFERING.**

1. There is an inexorable, unchangeable, immutable law of God – one that cannot but be – which must be considered in this matter of suffering, as it must be in other things – which is this: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,” Gal.6:7.
2. This is universal as well as individual.
3. Moreover, all of God’s laws are good; they are founded on the very character of God himself, for they emanate from him, who is infinitely holy and righteous, who can’t even be tempted to sin.
4. Conditions that exist in this world, including sufferings which are and that must be endured, death that come to all, **are**, yes **ARE**, the result of man’s being out of order with the Law or Laws of God.
5. Since the Garden of Eden, somewhere, by someone, at sometime, law has been violated, and that sowing demands its own reaping.
6. God does not change the natural order or law because a saint must suffer in consequence of the violation of law, whether his own, or that of others.
  - a. He cannot change it, for it is good; it is best for man as God created him.
  - b. In a moral world, governed by laws of an infinite wisdom, both the law and its consequences are best for man.
7. God’s laws are violated, but not “broken” as we sometimes say. The fact is, man “breaks” himself against the law. The law remains in tact and unchanged, while the man who violates the law is changed!
8. Suffering, per se, therefore, is not sent from God nor is it punishment from God for sins done by the individual. It is the inevitable consequence that comes from violated law.
9. Even if the law be unknown to the violator, even if the violator be in utter ignorance and darkness as to what he or others have done, the consequence is the same.

10. Suffering is the price one must pay for being a moral creature, living in a world governed by law, in which he and his predecessors have had the right of choice.

**C. IN VIEW OF THE UNDENIABLE FACT THAT SIN OR SATAN, EITHER DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY, CAUSES ALL SUFFERING, CONSIDER SOME ADDITIONAL OR DIFFERENT THOUGHTS ABOUT SUFFERING AND SIN.**

1. Suffering as a natural consequence of sin further developed.
  - a. Oftentimes the connection between suffering and sin is clear to one and all. Examples:
    - (1) The homosexual who contracts AIDS.
    - (2) The promiscuous heterosexual who contracts a venereal disease.
    - (3) The drug addict who destroys both body and mind.
    - (4) The thief, the drunk, the liar, the murderer, who suffer in various ways as a direct consequence of their sin.
  - b. The book of Proverbs focuses on this moral order of God's creation, and is, therefore, filled with warnings about the natural, inevitable consequences of sin.
    - (1) Prov.2:10-19; 7:21-27.
    - (2) Prov.11:6,19.
    - (3) Prov.12:13.
    - (4) Prov.13:20,21,23.
    - (5) Prov.21:6,7,25,26a,27,29a.
    - (6) Prov.22:8,14.
    - (7) Prov.23:29-33.
    - (8) Prov.28:9,10a,17-25a.
    - (9) Num.32:23: "Be sure your sin will find you out." See Psa.140:11; Prov.13:21; Isa.3:11; 59:12; Rom.2:9.
  - c. Though the connection between suffering and sin is not always clear; there is, nevertheless, a connection, either because of our own sin or that of others.
2. Suffering as a punishment for sin. Yes, there is such a thing under certain circumstances.
  - a. Sometimes God sends direct punishment upon the sinner above and beyond the natural consequences of sin. Examples:
    - (1) The case of Nadab and Abihu, Lev.10:1,2.

- (2) The case of Uzzah who sinned in touching the Ark of the Covenant, 2Sam.6:6,7.
  - (3) The case of Ananias and Sapphira, Ac.5:1-11.
  - (4) The case of Herod, Ac.12:20-23.
  - (5) Even men of God such as Moses and David suffered severe punishment from God because of their own sins.
3. Suffering in the world can be traced directly to the evil choices men make, 1Cor.6:9,10; Gal.5:19-21; Eph.5:3-6; Col.3:5-7; 2Th.2:10-12; 2Pet.2:1-9.
  4. Suffering as the result of the harsh conditions of nature.
    - a. Much of man's suffering is the result of the harsh conditions of nature, but even that can be traced to the curse of sin, because the natural world itself has fallen into disorder because of the curse of sin.
    - b. Originally the natural world was "very good" (Gen.1:31).
    - c. Some change in the natural world because of sin is indicated in Gen.3:17-19a.
    - d. Eventually the wickedness of man was so great in the earth that God sent the flood of Noah's day and "the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished," Gen.6:5-13; 7:11; 2Pet.3:6.
    - e. Think of the tremendous changes implied in these verses.
      - (1) Before the flood, the earth was apparently watered by a mist, Gen.2:6.
      - (2) Creation scientists argue that a "vapor canopy" existed prior to the flood which produced a greenhouse effect, so that the entire world had a mild climate.
      - (3) That temperature extremes, and the violent weather that accompanies such, would not have existed.
      - (4) That the flood brought a catastrophic destruction of the original world; "the fountains of the great deep were broken up" (Gen.7:11); that this would have had a tremendous destabilizing effect on the crust of the earth.
      - (5) That earthquakes, which result from the movements of an unstable earth crust, would certainly have increased.
      - (6) That today the natural environment is much more harsh and weather conditions are apparently much more severe as a result.
      - (7) That there was a balance which originally existed in nature that has been lost.
    - f. Therefore, when we see suffering caused by nature, should we blame the Creator?

- (1) Think back to the way it was originally, and remember that in God's original scheme of things, the creation, including, the universe, was "very good" (Gen.1:31).
  - (2) Let's realize the consequences of sin affected even the natural realm!
5. Suffering as a member of a sinful group.
  - a. According to Josh 7, when Achan sinned, the whole nation of God's people Israel suffered defeat and humiliation in battle at the hands of the idolatrous people of Ai, and thirty six Israelites were killed; they suffered the physical consequences of his sin.
  - b. when he was publicly exposed for his sin, his whole family was executed with him; they suffered the physical consequences of his sin.
  - c. Even godly men such as Daniel, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel suffered greatly along with the rest of the nation of Israel during the Babylonian Captivity, brought upon one and all because of the sins of the people who refused to repent and turn back to God in spite of repeated warnings and pleas.
  - d. Even today we sometimes suffer because we are associated with other people who are sinners.
  - e. Indeed, some suffering comes to all men simply because they are part of the sinful group known as the human race, who as a whole are sinners.
  - f. But the more sinful the portion of the human race with which we choose to associate, the more intense our suffering may be.
  - g. As an example, think about the suffering "just Lot" brought upon himself and his family when he "pitched his tent toward" sinful Sodom, 2Pet.2:6-8.
6. Suffering to bring repentance from sin.
  - a. This was often the case with Israel of old, as God had warned them through Jeremiah, so it happened unto them in the Babylonian Captivity in order to bring them to repentance.
    - (1) Warned, Lev.26:14-33; Jeremiah.
    - (2) Applied or fulfilled, 2Chr.36:14-21.
    - (3) Cf. Dan.9; Ezra; Neh; the record of their repentance and restoration to their land.
  - b. Same with us today.
    - (1) We are warned, 1Cor.10; Heb.3.
    - (2) We are chastised, Heb.12.
7. Suffering to keep us from sin.

- a. God may also allow us to suffer just to enable us to resist temptations we will face in the future, or maybe even to keep us from being confronted by temptations greater than we can bear.
  - b. God, through Moses, clearly told the Israelites that was why he let them suffer hardship in the wilderness, Deut.8:1,2,16,17.
  - c. Paul said that was why the Lord did not remove his thorn in the flesh, 2Cor.12:7-10.
  - d. Jesus Christ himself learned obedience by the things he suffered, Heb.5:8. Vine, II, 324: “Learned – to learn by use and practice,” Phil.4:11; 1Tim.5:4,13; Tit.3:14; Heb.5:8.
  - e. Jas.1:2-4; Rom.5:3-5; 8:24,25, speak of a perfecting of our faith and patience through the suffering of temptations and tribulations
  - f. Surely the perfection we attain through suffering includes the strength and self-discipline to resist future temptations. Cf. Jas.1:12; 1Cor.10:13.
8. Suffering because of someone else’s sin.
- a. Thus far, for the most part, we have considered suffering that is in some way connected to our own sin.
  - b. But we know that sometimes the truly innocent suffer through no fault of their own.
  - c. Perhaps you can think of one or more times in your own life when you have caused an innocent person to suffer because of your sins.
  - d. This was true in the case of Naboth who suffered because of the sin of Ahab and Jezebel, 1Kgs.21:1-14.
  - e. Indeed, the more righteous we are the more we may expect to suffer through the sinfulness of others or even the opposition of Satan himself.
  - f. The truly righteous man is an irritant to the ungodly world around him, and that world fights back, in various ways, trying either to conform him or to destroy him.
    - (1) See Mt.5:10-12; 2Tim.3:12; Jno.15:18,19; 1Jno.3:13.
    - (2) 1Pet.2:19,20; 4:12-19; 5:8,9.
    - (3) Eph.6:10-18; Rom.12:1,2.
  - g. Remember this: Job suffered from the hand of Satan precisely because he was righteous, Job 1,2.
9. Suffering for the good of others.
- a. Sometimes the righteous man willingly suffers on behalf of others, and for their good, even when he knows they are sinners, though such suffering is exceedingly rare, Rom.5:6-8.Cf. 1Pet.3:18.

- b. In the case of Joseph, whom his brothers had sold into slavery, he said that the things he had suffered had been for their good, Gen.45:5-7.
  - c. It was so in the case of Paul, wherein he rejoiced that his bonds had resulted in the furtherance of the gospel in that it had led brethren in the Lord to great confidence and a bold and more fervent proclamation of the gospel, Phi.1:12.
  - d. We should be reticent to characterize our own suffering in this way. But, if and when we do suffer for others, we then become truth Christ-like, Col.1:24.
10. Suffering to glorify God.\
- a. Whatever the cause of our suffering, we can transform it to a higher purpose if we patiently endure.
  - b. We can show that the power of God in us, through the influence of his word, is greater than the power of Satan and his ministers.
  - c. Indeed, we can use the suffering that comes from sin, from every source, as an occasion to **triumph over sin and Satan**, and thereby **glorify** God, 1Pet.4:13-16.

(This part of our study on suffering and sin is taken from an article, "Suffering And Sin," by Pail Roberts, in Guardian of Truth, Vol. XXXII, No.17, Sept, 1, 1988, pp. 3,4,38)

**D. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LESSONS WE CAN LEARN THROUGH SUFFERING WHICH ARE TO OUR SPIRITUAL ADVANTAGE OR PROFIT?**

- 1. We learn patience and steadfastness and spiritual strength in service, Jas.1:2-4; Rom.5:1-5a; 8:17,18,24,25; 1Cor.15:58.

- a. The word “patience” means “steadfastness, constancy, endurance ... the characteristic of a man who is un-swered from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.” Thayer.
- b. Patience is not a fatalistic submission to “come what may”; but it is a steadfast enduring, waiting, letting the Lord work out the end.
- c. See exo.14:13,14; 2Chr.20:17.

2. We learn obedience to the Father’s will.

- a. Even Jesus Christ so “learned” obedience, Heb.5:7-9. See Vine, II, 324, “learned”; Vine, III, 124, “obedience”.
- b. Paul also learned to submit to God’s will from the things he suffered.
  - (1) 2Cor.12:7 reveals that he was given a “thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan,” to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure.
  - (2) 2Cor.12:8 tells us he asked the Lord three different times to remove that thorn in the flesh.
  - (3) 2Cor.12:9a declares that God denied his request with an explanation for his denial.
  - (4) 2Cor.12:9b,10 record Paul’s humble obedience, his attitude toward his continued suffering his thorn in the flesh, and what he learned about himself as to his spiritual strength under suffering.
- c. As already cited, we re called upon the learn and to do the same.

3. We learn dependence upon God.

- a. The Psalmist wrote:
  - (1) Psa.119:67.
  - (2) Psa.10:14b, i.e., the “poor” (the oppressed) turn to the Lord for the deliverance which no man can or will give.
- b. Since our own trials of affliction and sufferings, both of a physical and a spiritual nature, sometimes drive us to greater dependence upon god, we can be thankful that they come to us with this effect.

4. We learn to turn to God in more fervent prayer.

- a. Again the Psalmist wrote:

- (1) Psa.18:1-6.
    - (2) Ps.86:1-7.
  - b. Through suffering we often see the need for and the benefits of the prayer of faith; and experiencing the vicissitudes of life which involve suffering, helps teach us to pray more fervently, which in turn causes us to draw nigh unto God and to resist the devil. See Jas.4:6-10; 1Pet.5:6-8.
5. Suffering serves to remind us of our human frailty and our need for God. Thus it humbles us.
- a. Again the Psalmist wrote:
    - (1) Psa.39:4.
    - (2) Psa.102:1-5.
  - b. The illnesses or diseases of the body remind us that one day we too shall die, that this earth is not to be our permanent home.
  - c. They serve as reminders to us that we must be making preparation for eternity in that home of the soul; thus they serve a worthy purpose.
  - d. Consider again Paul and his thorn in the flesh, 2Cor.12:7-10, esp. V.7.
6. Suffering tries and tests our faith in God to our advantage.
- a. The devil charged that man, in fact, all men, only serve God because of what he gets from God, or “piety for profit,” not because of true convictions, or a love for God, truth and righteousness, Job 1:8-12; 2:3-6.
    - (1) More on Job later in our study, but we know about Job’s faith being tested by severe and pro-longed suffering and how he proved Satan wrong, 1:22; 42:12.
    - (2) The psalmist stated that “the word of the Lord tried” Joseph during the time he was an Egyptian slave and prisoner, Psa.105:16-19.
    - (3) See Psa.66:10-12. Those who have maintained their faith through suffering are like gold or silver refined by fire.
  - b. See Jas.1:2-4,12; Rom.5:3-5; 8:24,25.
7. Suffering and times of trouble doesn’t mean that God has forsaken us.
- a. The psalmist wrote:

- (1) Psa.91:14-16.
- (2) 34:15-19.
- (3) Psa.1; Psa.23.
- b. Heb.13:5,6.
- c. Indeed, God will be with the righteous through the storms of life.
- d. One poet expressed it like this:

“When you walk through a storm,  
Hold your head up high.  
And don’t be afraid of the dawn.  
Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart  
For you never walk alone.”

- e. Even to those in the time of the writing of the Book of Revelation who faced death for the uncompromising profession and practice of their faith, the Lord through John wrote:
    - (1) To the church at Ephesus, Rev.2:7.
    - (2) To the church at Smyrna, Rev.2:10,11.
    - (3) To the church at Pergamos, Rev.2:17.
    - (4) To the church at Thyatira, Rev.2:25,26.
    - (5) To the church at Sardus, Rev.3:5.
    - (6) To the church at Philadelphia, Rev.3:10-12.
    - (7) Even to the church at Laodicea, Rev.3:15-21.
8. Suffering helps teach us to show mercy for, to have a deeper sympathy and compassion for others, which is what God expects of all Christians.
- a. See Mt.5:7; Jas.2:13; Mt.23:23; Jas.3:14-17.
  - b. Most everyone agrees that the ability to show mercy, be sympathetic, or to have compassion for others is a virtue; yet it is a virtue learned and honed to perfection in the school of suffering
  - c. The suffering saint learns to communicate compassion to and to give comfort to others which the one who has not suffered cannot give. Cf. 2Cor.1:3-6.
  - d. It teaches us to feel and to be able to share the experiences of another, to encourage and inspire them, in ways we could not have done before our own experience. Cf. My own experience with the loss of my parents; my experience with cancer!
  - e. Who can better minister to a wife at the death of her husband, than a widow who has experienced the same suffering?

- f. Or one soldier who is an amputee and who has learned to overcome and cope well, to another soldier who is a recent amputee?
9. Learn that in reality suffering normally lasts but a short period of time.
- a. Yes, we know, in the hour of grief and suffering, the days seem long and drawn out; days may seem like weeks; weeks may seem like months; months may seem like years; years may seem like ages.
  - b. We have a tendency to think our suffering will last forever. However, most suffering, either physical or spiritual, is short-lived.
  - c. The psalmist wrote: Psa.30:1-11; Note esp. Vv.5,11.
  - d. William and Gloria Gaither expressed the thought of Psa.30:5 in the poem:

### **Joy Comes In The Morning**

If you've knelt beside the rubble of an aching, broken heart,  
When the things you gave your life to fell apart;  
You're not the first to be acquainted with sorrow, grief or pain,  
But the Master promised sunshine after rain.

To invest your seed of trust in God in mountains you can't move,  
You risk your life on things you cannot prove,  
But to give the things you cannot prove for what you cannot lose  
Is the way to find the joy God has for you.

Hold on my child, Joy comes in the morning,  
Weeping only lasts for the night;  
Hold on my child, Joy come in the morning,  
The darkest hour means dawn is just in sight.

Conclusion to this part of our study: Remember that: God's purposes are accomplished through suffering as well as through prosperity. Cf. Eccl.7:14. Let us learn from our sufferings!

### **“Friendly Obstacles” (author unknown)**

For every hill I've had to climb,  
For every stone that bruised my feet,

For all the blood and sweat and grime,  
For blinding storm and burning heat,  
My heart sings but a grateful son --  
These were the things that made me strong.

For all the heartaches and the tears,  
For all the anguish and the pain,  
For gloomy days and fruitless years,  
And for the hopes that lives in vain,  
I do give thanks; for now I know  
These were the things that made me grow.

'Tis not the softer things of life,  
Which stimulates man's will to strive,  
But bleak adversity and strife  
Do most to keep man's will alive.  
O'er rose-strewn paths the weaklings creep,  
But brave hearts dare to climb the steep.

(Notes for this part of our study taken from Guardian of  
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## **E. NOW TO THE MATTER OF LEARNING ABOUT SUFFERING IN THE LIFE OF JOB.**

1. Job was an outstanding righteous man, one who even had God's own testimony to the fact that he was, Job 1:8; 2:3.
2. In spite of being such an outstanding righteous servant of God, notice the intense sufferings he had to endure as a test of his faith to prove a point to Satan.
  - a. He lost all his considerable material possessions, 1:13-17.
  - b. He lost his sons and daughters, 1:18-19.
  - c. His body was afflicted with boils from head to foot, 2:7.

- d. His wife rebelled against God, as well as urged Job to curse God and die, 2:9.
  - e. His suffering was so great that he wished he had never been born, 3:11.
  - f. To this point, on two separate occasions the book said that Job sinned not with his mouth.
    - (1) 1:22: “In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly (or, “attributed folly to God”, marg.).
    - (2) 2:10: “IN all this did not Job sin with his lips.”
  - g. eventually, his honor is turned into contempt by those younger than he, 30:1.
3. At this point in Job’s life his three friends enter:
- a. “For they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with and to comfort him,” 3:11.
  - b. When they came, they failed to even recognize him because he was so disfigured by his affliction; they lifted up their voice as one, and wept, 2:12.
  - c. For seven days they sat with him upon the ground, and spake not one word to him; for they saw that his grief was very great,” 2:13
  - d. Beginning from Ch.4 and on through Ch.36, when they did speak they offered not comfort but repeated accusations against him, charging, but false so, that his personal suffering and his financial losses were proof that he himself was suffering because of his own sins.
    - (1) They made this charge in spite of:
      - (a) Job’s repeated denials and calls for evidence in proof of their charge.
      - (b) God’s commendation of him as a righteous person.
    - (2) Examples: 22:5-10.
  - e. One of Job’s arguments refuting their charge was that all sinners do not suffer as a direct cause of their own personal sin, because of the fact that the wicked prosper financially and enjoy good health, 12:6; 21:7-16.
    - (1) Job did not know why he was suffering.
    - (2) He never learned why he had suffered so severely.
    - (3) God never told him why he allowed it, nor who was responsible for it.
    - (4) But he learned it was not because of his own personal sin.
    - (5) And he learned that he should never question the superior wisdom of God no matter what the circumstances.

4. At this point in our study we examine the philosophy of Job's friends because it represents not only the common error of that day, but also the twisted thinking of some even in our day.
  - a. Eliphaz, the first to speak, and in his first speech (Chs.4,5) presented his philosophy of suffering, which was the wisdom of the ancients, which is: It is the wicked who suffer; they suffer because of their sin. Suffering is punitive. If men will return to God, and do that which is right, their prosperity will return unto them.
    - (1) In a syllogistic form his position would be:  
 M.P.: Personal suffering is the result of that person's sin.  
 m.p.: Although apparently Job, you have been a good man yet you are a suffering person.  
 Conclusion: Therefore, since you suffer, you have sinned.
    - (2) The inescapable consequence of Eliphaz's doctrine is that God controls the world by the principle of good for good, and bad for bad. Job is receiving the bad; therefore, he has been bad.
    - (3) Eliphaz, in his second speech (Ch.15) became more intense in his accusation against Job, and he can't be wrong because it's the wisdom of the fathers! In this 2<sup>nd</sup> speech his accusation is more direct; he has nothing to say about Job ever having been a good man.
      - (a) The principle of his 2<sup>nd</sup> speech is the same as the 1<sup>st</sup>, only more intense.  
 M.P.: Only the wicked are cut off speedily.  
 m.p.: You, Job, have been cut off speedily.  
 Concl: Therefore, you are a wicked man.
    - (4) In Eliphaz's 3<sup>rd</sup> speech (Ch.22) there is no change in his position. There is only a stronger accusation against Job, charging him with great wickedness, and urging him to confess his sin and return to God.
      - (a) There is much truth in what Eliphaz says in his speeches, but his premise and application are wrong.
      - (b) His premise is that all personal suffering is punitive, the result of the individual's own personal sin.
      - (c) His application is that Job suffers because of sin; therefore Job is a sinner.
  - b. Bildad, the 2<sup>nd</sup> friend, and 2<sup>nd</sup> speaker, assumes the same position as that of Eliphaz.

- (1) In his 1<sup>st</sup> speech (Ch.8) he accuses Job's children of sinning, while he simply iterates and reiterates the charges of Eliphaz; he incriminates and re-incriminates Job as a sinner.
- (2) In his 2<sup>nd</sup> speech (Ch.18) he does no more than depict the awful lot of sinners.
- (3) His premise and conclusion are the same as that of Eliphaz  
M.P.: The lot of sinners is always terrible because of their of their own sin.  
m.p.: Your lot, Job, is terrible.  
Concl.: Therefore, you must be a terrible sinner.

c. Zophar, the 3<sup>rd</sup> friend, and 3<sup>rd</sup> speaker (Ch.11), is the most direct, harsh and blunt of all the friends.

- (1) He charges that Job's suffering is not even as great as it should be: "Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth," 11:6a.
- (2) He charges that not only has Job committed the former sin which brought the calamity upon him, but he has added to it by denying that he had sinned, 11:1-4.
- (3) Therefore, according to Zophar, Job has charged God with sinning by letting him suffer when he has not sinned.
- (4) In his 2<sup>nd</sup> and final speech (Ch.20), he makes a slight concession.
  - (a) He modifies his position to allow that if the wicked should prosper, it would be for a short time only.
  - (b) Vv.4,5: "Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment."

5. Of course, Job answered each friend in turn denying their charges, and silencing them.

- a. But the record finally says of the three as to why they ceased to discuss with Job: "So these three men ceased to answer (ceased from answering, marg.) Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes," 32:1.
- b. The position to which they tenaciously cling from beginning to end is still: "Piety pays, perversity punishes," even though they cannot meet Job's challenge of their arguments, nor shake him with respect to his own integrity

**F. OUR STUDY OF THE STORY OF JOB WOULD NOT BE COMPLETE WITHOUT CONSIDERING THE CONTENTIONS AND PERPLEXITY OF JOB DURING HIS SUFFERING.**

1. From the beginning to the end of the story three points stand out most prominently with reference to Job.
  - a. Job consistently affirms his integrity: "I am innocent."
  - b. He is undergoing terrible, intense suffering; suffering beyond all description.
  - c. He continues to go back to God as the cause, and for the answer to his suffering, and not always wise in the way he does it.
2. Toward his suffering, as to the cause of it, Job is highly perplexed; he is confused beyond measure.
  - a. He knows he has been a good man, a righteous man; no man can justly accuse him of wrong-doing, so why should his suffering be so intense?
  - b. In Ch.5:4, he blames God with being unmerciful to him, of being unduly and unjustly hard on him.
  - c. In 6:24, he pleads with God: "Teach me, and I will hold my tongue: and cause me to understand wherein I have erred."
  - d. In 9:22-24, he charges that God makes no distinction between right and wrong.
  - e. In Ch.12, he acknowledges God's omnipotence, but in his frustration and perplexity it seems to him that God unjustly uses it to further the cause of the bad as well as the good.
    - (1) This he does without knowing some of the things he later came to realize he did not know, and for which he repents, saying: "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes," 42:6. See Vv.1-3.
3. But a change in Job's attitude toward God is seen as the discussion progresses, beginning in Ch.13.
  - a. He then charges the friends with seeking to shield God with falsehood(13:1-7), while Job, himself, affirms "that a godless man (a hypocrite) shall not come before him" (13:16).
  - b. However, this changed attitude toward God on Job's part raises more questions in his frustrated, confused mind:
    - (1) "How many (what) are mine iniquities and sins?" 13:23.
    - (2) "Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?" 13:24.

- (3) “Wilt thou harass a driven leaf? And wilt thou pursue the dry stubble?” 13:25
  - c. This attitude of friendliness toward God continues to develop.
    - (1) He appeals to God to witness for him while continuing to lament his miserable condition, 16:11-17:3.
    - (2) This friendliness reaches its highest degree of development when Job turns to him, confident that God will vindicate him, 19:21-29.
    - (3) The contention of Job here adds a fourth phase:
      - (a) Job is innocent.
      - (b) Job is suffering.
      - (c) God is somehow, someway, back of the suffering.
      - (d) But God will vindicate him in his suffering.
4. Throughout the discussion or the debate with his so-called friends Job’s attitude toward them is one of disgust, disdain, and distrust.
  - a. He charges them with lying, and their theology and position on suffering as rubbish.
  - b. They are not friends! With friends like that, one certainly doesn’t need any enemies!
5. The contention of Job may now be stated as follows:
  - a. I am righteous.
  - b. God is all-might, powerful, wise.
  - c. Therefore, there must be some other solution to my problem than that of the friends’ position; they are unquestionably wrong. Suffering is not punitive.
6. As the debate between Job and his friends draws to a close:
  - a. Job has silenced them, though he has not changed their minds about him or that personal suffering means that one is a sinner.
  - b. Two questions growing out of Satan’s query to God in Ch.1 and Ch.2 have been answered, which are:
    - (1) Man does and will serve God for the pure joy of that service, for righteousness; therefore God can trust man to do so. Job’s steadfast holding on to God has proved this point.
    - (2) Man can trust God, for God does not afflict simply to hurt man.
      - (a) This question, however, is not so clearly and completely answered at the end of the cycle of speeches as one would like, due to some things Job has said about God in his frustration, confusion and ignorance.

- (b) Much more must be said following their debate, for Job has affirmed some hard things about God which need to be corrected.
- (c) This distorted view of God must be changed, for the conception of God thus viewed is too low; it is wrong; and Job's confused mind must be cleared.

**G. AT THIS POINT IN THE DEBATE ELIHU ENTERS THE PICTURE AND SPEAKS TO VINDICATE GOD, REBUKE THE THREE FRIENDS, AND UPBRAID JOB FOR HIS IGNORANT IDEAS OF GOD, CH.32-37.**

1. Job's last speech had silenced his three friends, who obviously felt he would never change his conviction of being innocent, "So these three men ceased to answer (or from answering, marg.) Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes," 32:1; i.e., they could not convince him he was the great sinner they made him out to be.
2. Elihu enters the debate as a young man inflamed with anger, 32:2,3,5.
  - a. He is angry at Job because Job "justified himself rather than God," 32:2.
    - (1) That is, that Job was so anxious to exonerate himself from being viewed as a wicked man that he went so far as to accuse God of injustice.
  - b. He was angry with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar "because they had found no answer (no way to refute Job), and yet had condemned him," 32:3,5.
3. Roy Zuch (Job, Chicago: Moody Press, 1978, p.141) summarizes the contrast between Elihu's faulting of Job and that of the other three:
 

"Whereas Elihu's elders had recommended that Job repent of willful sin committed prior to his calamities, Elihu recommended (1) that Job repent of pride that developed because of his suffering...The three counselors had claimed that Job was suffering because he was sinning, but Elihu explained that he was sinning because he was suffering! His suffering led to an attitude of pride before God and a questioning of God's ways. The triad diagnosis pertained to sinful actions in Job's past experience, whereas Elihu's diagnosis dealt with sinful attitudes in Job's present life."
4. The position of Elihu is clearly closer to the truth than that of the three, for when Jehovah later rebuked them, there was no rebuff of Elihu. Cf. 42:7-9.

5. The speeches of Elihu pave the way for Jehovah to speak and bring the debate to an end and Job to repentance, thus we come to:

## **H. THE FINAL WORD IN THE STORY OF JOB AND HIS SUFFERING.**

1. In Chs.38-42 Jehovah speaks. His speeches become an important examination of Job, testing the wisdom and knowledge of the suffering patriarch against that of All-Mighty God.
2. It is revealed that at times Job, in his frustration and confusion as to why he was suffering, had spoken as if he knew all behind the government of the universe, yet admittedly ignorant as evidence by his continual searching for the answer.
3. He now confesses his ignorance in the presence of the Majestic wisdom of Almighty God.
4. God's speeches remind Job that in all of his works there are manifestations of wisdom and purpose.
5. On the other hand, Job sees that at times he had been somewhat boastful in his suffering; he had been ignorant of things he thought he understood; he had lacked humility; and at times a proper sense of dependence on God.

## **III. CONCLUSION**

1. Though Job never learned why God had allowed him to suffer so intensely, nor who was behind it, for God never revealed it to him; he did learn some vital things about himself and about God.
2. Furthermore, in the Book the following five problems seem to be solved.
  - a. The traditional position (the position of the ancients) is refuted: All suffering is not punitive; it cannot always be traced to and charged to sin on the part of the individual sufferer.
  - b. God can trust man to serve him for righteousness' sake, and not simply for the pay, profit, or reward that might be involved; his service is not simply "piety for profit" as Satan had charged. Job is proof of this!
  - c. Man can trust God when he cannot see; for he has evidence to support his faith in God. For though he may not know why he suffers, he may know that God cares, and the rules the universe, and that in all his ways there is purpose. God does not arbitrarily inflict suffering, nor is God disinterested in the suffering of the righteous. The story of Job proves this.
  - d. No matter how often we may be told a thing, some things will be learned by us only in the school of affliction.

(1) Only after his experience in the crucible of suffering, and after God had challenged him, Job could say, "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," 42:5,6.

e. That God rules the universe, not Satan. For he limits Satan's power and influence.

(In our study of the suffering of Job our notes were taken from the article "The Problem of Suffering", by Homer Hailey, in Guardian of Truth, May 21, 1987)

3. As a brief review, in addition to the matter of learning about suffering in the story of Job, we have considered the following:

a. The origin and or causes and reasons for suffering.

b. God's inexorable law and suffering.

c. In view of the undeniable fact that sin, either directly or indirectly, causes suffering in general, we considered some ten different thoughts about suffering and sin.

d. Some of the lessons we can learn through suffering which are to our spiritual advantage or profit.

4. Hopefully, all of this will help us to understand and to place suffering in its proper place, without being unduly discouraged by it, or without charging God foolishly, or attributing folly to God, because of our ignorance of its source and reason and lessons to be learned from it.