

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF JOB

PART 2 – CHAPTERS THREE TO FIVE

SUFFERING AND GRIEF

In part I of this study, in Job chapters 1 and 2, we saw a man suffer about as much as a man can suffer and survive. These two chapters are of enormous importance in the Bible because they spell out for us very plainly why suffering occurs. It is all ultimately the work of Satan. It is not the work of God. It follows from this that we should neither praise nor blame God for what He did not do.

The Christian faith is unique among the world's religions in this respect. In every other religion, their god or gods cause suffering as a whim or in response to our bad behaviour. Then if appropriately bribed or persuaded they may fix suffering. Such a position is never taught in the Bible and yet all too often Christians have fallen into the heathen mistake of teaching that God does bad things to bad people or that He removes problems from good people if they have enough faith.

Satan can attack us directly but most often, as in the story of Job, his attacks come through other people,(1;15,17) through the natural world by disasters such as lightning strikes or hurricanes, (1:16,19) or through sickness in our own bodies.(2:7) All three are possible because of the effect of man's rebellion against God on the created world.(Genesis 3:16-19) Man said to God 'I don't need you in my world', so God withdrew from controlling a world that did not want Him. Satan moved in as 'the ruler of this world'.(John 12:31). God still sustains the universe.(Colossians 1:17). He knows all that goes on,(Psalm 139:1-6) and cares deeply,(John 3:16) The world bears the unmistakable stamp of God's creative work.(Rom.1:20) One day God will again take control when Christ returns but until then His involvement is by His Spirit convicting all men,(John 16;8) and indwelling and working through all Christians.(John 14:17-26)

It is interesting that having firmly established in Job 1 and 2 that Satan causes our suffering, there is no further mention of Satan throughout the book, even when God answers Job in the closing chapters. We are to accept that Satan causes suffering but not to dwell upon or to be pre-occupied with his role.

From the cause of suffering, the book moves us on to the effects of suffering, in the experience of grief.

Satan had been permitted by God to try Job's faith by taking away his family, his possessions and his health. First Job's wife and then Job himself suffered the typical symptoms of grief which all of us, however spiritual, experience to some extent in the face of any major loss in life. Eliphaz, his friend, tried to help but only made things worse. We often do the same. Where do we go wrong and how can we do better?

Q.1 In the third chapter Job's pain explodes in anger. Towards what 3 things is he angry? What are his reasons? How do people express the same 3 kinds of anger today?

Q.2 It is usually assumed that people attempt suicide because they are depressed or have lost touch with reality and do not know what they are doing. What other reasons for attempting suicide does chapter 3 reveal? How might such a reason operate? How does this chapter suggest we may be able to help someone who has survived a suicide attempt or who is thinking of suicide?

Q.3 Job seems to pass through 5 emotional stages from 2:11 onwards. What are they? How have you passed through similar emotions after some major loss in your life? In each stage there is an appropriate way to help. What is it?

Q.4 How does Eliphaz react towards Job as a person in chapter 4 and 5? How has his attitude changed by his second speech in chapter 15? Why has he changed? How and why do our attitudes towards friends in trouble change? What effect does this have upon the sufferer? What was Jesus' attitude towards those who suffered? And what was His attitude towards His own suffering?

Q.5 What is the reason for Eliphaz speaking at all? How does Eccles.3:7 apply to such situations? Why do we find it so difficult to remain silent when asked a question, presented with a problem or criticised?

Q.6 What is Eliphaz' explanation for Job's suffering? Set out his argument step by step. Do you agree with him? If not, why not? Compare Eliphaz' teaching with Romans 3.

Q.7 What action does he want Job to take? What does he anticipate will be the result of his advice being followed? What are the dangers of such advice in counselling? Give examples from your own experience.