

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

PART 3 – CHAPTERS SIX TO FOURTEEN

ADVICE – GOOD, BAD AND INCOMPLETE,

Having introduced the central figure in the story, Job himself, a man who would suffer greatly, the book then stated plainly the real cause of all suffering, the Devil. One of the Devil's most successful lies is that it is God, not him, who causes us to suffer as some form of discipline or judgement. Most of the world's religions teach this and many Christians believe it. We will find that this is the view of Job's three friends. Much of the book is given to the arguments they developed from this wrong basis and Job's struggles to answer them.

Before exploring these fundamental and damaging errors, we are given insight into a process common to all human experience and only in recent years recognised by psychologists and counsellors. The grief process is powerfully demonstrated in the book of Job. Grief is the universal experience of all who suffer a significant loss whether it be through death, illness, separation from a loved one or any other cause.

The first step in grief is denial in which the shock of the loss so overwhelms us we cannot take it in. Job's friends in 2:11-13 were lost for words when they saw just how bad Job's situation was. This stage for them lasted a week.

The next stage is anger when we look for someone to blame for the loss. Job's wife showed anger against God in 2:9. Job rebuked his wife for her outburst but he himself became angry in chapter 3, first at his birth,(3:2-10) then at his mother(3:11-19) and finally at God.(3:20-26) In the stage of anger there is a real risk of suicide. It is important to stay close to the person in grief at this time. Often at this stage there is bargaining going on with God, ourselves or others in which we make promises on condition God or someone else performs as we expect by fixing the problem. Job went through a stage of bargaining with God in argument. Bargaining takes place when we have not appreciated the grace of God who gives unconditionally because He loves us.

The third stage is guilt in which we blame ourselves. Job began by protesting his innocence but as the book goes on he started wondering, at least to God, if it really was his fault. We need the assurance of the Cross at this time.

The fourth step is anxiety and depression in which we begin to look ahead at an empty future and wonder how we will cope. As the book continued Job sank in to depression to the point where he no longer spoke to God. Quietly in his heart however God was still speaking to him. Somehow we need to be a reminder to the one who is grieving of a loving, present God by attitude and sometimes words.

The final stage is acceptance when we realise life will go on. In the last chapter Job reached the point where he again had a purpose to live.

Let us now explore the opening arguments of the mistaken counsellors and Job's efforts to answer them.

Q.1 Consider Eliphaz' first speech again? How is he right? How is he wrong? What important ideas has he left out?(chapters 4 and 5)

Q.2 What is Bildad's main point? How is it different from Eliphaz' approach? Again where is it right, wrong and deficient? In what common ways is the same view expressed today? What effect does it have on those who are suffering?(chapter 8)

Q.3 Zophar suggests that just because a person thinks he is innocent does not mean he is. What arguments does he use to support this idea? Do you agree with his arguments and his conclusion? In what different ways does the New Testament deal with this problem of us fooling ourselves into overlooking our sin?(chapter 11)

Q.4 Having listened to all 3 friends in 'round one', sum up their combined view of the Christian message in relation to (i) sin, (ii) judgement, (iii) salvation, (iv) repentance. Are they false teachers in the sense of II Pet. 2:1; Jude 4; Matt.7:15; II Cor.11:12-15 and I Jn.4:1-3? Why is the New Testament so tough on false teachers?

Q.5 Job's first reply is addressed partly to Eliphaz and partly to God. Where does he change from one to the other? What effect has Eliphaz had on Job's suffering and his faith? How does he try to answer Eliphaz? Is his request in 6:24 a wise one?(chapters 6 & 7)

Q.6 From Job's answer to God in chapter 7 what is his view of God's character and plan for man? David in Psalm 8 and later the writer of Hebrews in Heb.2 take up Job's question in 7:17. How do these two writers answer Job? How might they have helped him in his suffering had they written before his time?

Q.7 When people ask the kind of question Job is asking in his second reply, we have a marvellous opportunity to help. What are his questions and how would you answer them?(chapters 9 and 10)

Q.8 Where does Job's reply to God in this speech begin? How is his answer to God different from his answer to Bildad? What clues does this give as to why God does not answer him yet and why our attempts to answer questions of someone who seems to be searching for God often seem fruitless?

Q.9 In his third reply Job describes God's justice in this present life as a joke. Life seems unfair. Are we to expect justice now? If not why bother to seek God's help when people or circumstances are against us? In what situations do people today ask the same questions? How can we help them?(chapters 12 and 13)

Q.10 From 13:20 Job speaks to God. What are his 2 requests? How do they represent real progress from his attitude in chapters 7 and 10? But why does God still not answer?