

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

PART 5 – CHAPTERS THIRTY-TWO TO FORTY-TWO

HOW TO MEET SUFFERING CREATIVELY

Trusting God does not mean that we know everything because we are just learners. In fact the longer we go on in our Christian lives, the less we realise we know of all that is waiting to be discovered of Christ. If on the other hand we rely upon ourselves we do not move an inch in our understanding of God and His world.

The contrast between Job and his three friends in this respect is striking. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar speak repeatedly but they have nothing new to add each time apart from being more critical of Job than they were at the start. Bildad, for example, in chapter 25 can only repeat his and the others' statements about the greatness of God and the sinfulness of man. He has nothing new to add and still offers no hope to poor old Job.

Job on the other hand struggles slowly through his despair and hurt to an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He supposes that his complaints to God are bringing no response from the Lord yet little by little he discovers the elements of the Christian message like a man putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Obviously it is the Spirit of God who is revealing this to him.

Here are some of the pieces of the puzzle:

6:24 - Teach me, and I will be silent - Job is willing to listen to God. (Lk.9:35)

7:20,21 - Have I sinned? Why then do You not pardon my transgression?

- Job wants to know if sin can be forgiven.(Rom.3:23,24; I Jn.1:7)

9:33 - There is no umpire between us who may lay his hand upon us both - Job is searching for a mediator between him and God.(I Tim.2:5,6)

14:14 - If a man dies will he live again? - Job wants to know if there is life after death.(Jn.3:16)

16:19 - My witness is in heaven and my advocate is on high. - Job realises someone represents him in heaven.(I Jn.2:1)

17:3 - Lay down a pledge for me with Yourself; who is there that will be my guarantor? - Job seeks someone who will be his pledge of eternal life.(II Cor.1:22; Eph.1:13,14)

19:25 - I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. - Job knows that he has a living Redeemer who will one day return to earth.(Acts 1:11)

21:22 - Can anyone teach God knowledge? - Job realises that God is so much wiser than he is.(I Cor.3:18,19)

24:23 - His eyes are on their ways. - Job understands that God knows everything about us.(Matt.6:8)

28:28 - The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. - Job grasps that God will give us His wisdom when we realise how great He is, and how small we are.(James 1:5)

A fourth friend comes on the scene with a significantly different point of view. This time Job is silent. At last God speaks but His answer to the problem of suffering is totally different to any of the four friends or any of our usual pat answers to someone who is hurting. Job responds, God works and the story has a surprising sequel.

Q.1 Elihu, a young man, who has listened quietly to the conversation between Job and his 3 friends can keep quiet no longer.(Chapters 32-37) With whom is he angry and why? Is there a place for anger in counselling?(Mark 3:5; Eph.4:26) Is his anger sinful?

Q.2 What is his main argument? How is it right, wrong or incomplete? How does his position differ from the other 3 friends? How is it typical of a young man's point of view? Compare Elihu's teaching on how to have the wisdom of God with Prov.3 and I Cor.I.

Q.3 Elihu claims that Job has criticized God. Are these charges true? How can we help a person who is blaming God for his suffering?

Q.4 Neither Job nor his 4 friends make any mention of the Devil or offer even a glimpse of the Christ? How do these 2 omissions affect their understanding of suffering and how to cope with it?

Q.5 Why does Job not answer Elihu? What important lesson has he learned about criticism? Why does God choose this moment at which to answer for the first time? Why do we sometimes feel we have been talking to ourselves in prayer?

Q.6 The Lord's answer is all about creation.(Chapters 38-41) What are the main ideas He is presenting? What does creation have to do with suffering? How in a practical sense could you help someone dying of cancer by talking about creation? Is this section compatible with a belief in evolution?

Q.7 How are Job's answers in 40:3-5 and 42:1-6 so different from his earlier replies? Of what sin is he repenting? How will his changed attitude help him to handle his present suffering and his future blessing?

Q.8 After repenting of his own sin, Job is commanded to pray for his 3 friends. Why was this so important? Compare his action with Lk.23:34 and Acts 7:60. How would this change their future relationship? What is the problem that usually remains after we have come through a crisis in which we have received bad advice?

Q.9 Looking back on the whole book, in what different way would you now answer the questions,
(i) Why does God allow suffering?
(ii) How can I best help a friend who is suffering?