

“What Does the Book of Job Teach Us About Suffering?”

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The book of Job found in the Bible is one that is often misinterpreted and misunderstood. It is common for people to make the claim that if you want to learn about why people suffer or why evil exists, then read the book of Job. Even though there is much suffering found in the life of Job, it is important to state right up front that this book never answers these questions. If it doesn't specifically answer these major life questions, then what does it teach us?

In the first two chapters we are introduced to a meeting that happened between God and Satan where the Devil in his usual occupation was attacking the faith of Job. God was defending the faith and integrity of Job and ended up giving permission to Satan to test Job's faith. The tragedy of the story as found in chapters 1-2 is a swift account of how Job lost all of his possessions, his children, and finally his health. Yet through all this Job did not lose his faith, curse God, or say anything negative about God (Job 2:10). The story continues with Job's three friends coming to comfort him in his misery. Yet these three friends did everything but comfort poor Job. In fact, the next 30 chapters contain dialogue where these three friends accuse Job of lying and needing to confess his sin. In their understanding, the reason this happened to Job was because of some hidden sin in his life that he needed to confess and repent of. Job spent many chapters defending his own integrity and even though he began well, he ended up becoming righteous in his own eyes (Job 32:1) and declares himself as being judged by God without a cause (9:17; 10:7; 33:8-12). Additionally, he ends up demanding an audience from God where he seeks to ask God to provide a reason for his dreadful predicament in losing everything.

Have you ever been in this situation? I think we all have in one way or another felt wronged by God for a particular trial or tribulation in our life. We stand back and want God to give us answer for our difficulty and when the answer doesn't come in the way we want it, we might begin to doubt God's love for us or even walk away from Him in anger. Fortunately for Job and us who read the book, God did show up and talked with Job concerning his situation (Job 38-42). However, the answer that God gave Job is surprising and also was very humbling for Job. Let's remember that Job began to question God's love, concern, and wisdom for allowing this trial in his life. Now we might imagine that God showed up and apologized for allowing Job to go through this tremendous trial of faith, but He does the exact opposite. Notice God's first words to Job, *“Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them”* (Job 38:2-3). God goes on to ask Job dozens of questions that make Job realize that he is not very wise and shouldn't dare question how God runs His universe. God is in charge, not Job, and Job should have trusted the Lord more instead of speaking ignorantly while making accusations against the God of the universe.

So what does the book of Job teach us? It doesn't ever provide the specific answer for evil, but we see that Job repents and acknowledges that he should have never spoke ignorantly and demanded an answer from God (42:6). It's not that God never answers us either, we are told in James 1:5-8 to pray for wisdom, but we should seek it humbly and trust in the Lord with much patience. *“For examples of patience in suffering...look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy”* (James 5:10-11). Be encouraged! If you are a believer in Jesus, God will always work out your trial for the good (Romans 8:28). Have a blessed week!

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