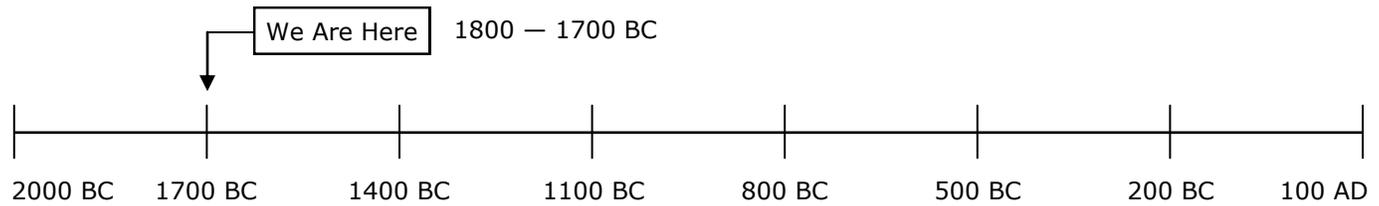


Making Sense of Suffering

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Week 4: January 22-28 — Job 12-34

8% Complete — 337 Days to Go



Helpful Resources

The Existence of Evil (p.141), Overview of Bible History (p.37)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

It is believed that the story of Job occurred during the time of the Patriarchal Period (Hebrew fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob); thus, the *Chronological Bible* places his story between the books of *Genesis* and *Exodus*. It is fitting that it would fall between the sufferings of Joseph and Israel in Egypt. While some believe the book of *Job* to be a fictional story, it is not; it is authoritative, established by the references of the Apostle Paul (*1 Cor. 3:19; Rom. 11:35*). Any time Paul says the words, "As it is written," he is referring to words received from God. In these passages, Paul used *Job 5:13* and *41:11*. However, though the book of *Job* is divinely inspired and the story true, there are precautions one should take when reading it. Not everything written in Job's book is truth. Job had several so-called friends who attempted to enlighten him as to his situation and suffering. However, their explanations are derived from man's logic and are not completely telling of God's view of things. Therefore, one must be discerning when reading their responses to Job. Here are some examples.

Eliphaz (4, 5, 15, 22) argued that Job's suffering was because he had sinned and that God was punishing him severely. His advice was to go to God and present his case before Him.

Bildad (8, 18, 25) said that since Job would not admit that he sinned, that in itself was sin and God was punishing him for it. He asked Job, "How long will you go on like this?"

Zophar (11, 20) told Job that he really deserved more suffering than he had already received. He implored Job to get rid of his wrong-doing before his suffering got any worse.

All three of Job's friends made the mistake of assuming that Job had committed some great sin which had caused his suffering. Suffering can be, but is not always, a penalty of sin. It is human nature to blame someone or something for troubles, but Job's story makes it clear that blame cannot always be attached to those whom trouble strikes. Therefore, Job's friends are errant in their reasoning, and one must be careful not to build his knowledge of the spiritual world from human opinion or perspective. We must trust God and be content, even though we may not know or understand the reason behind our troubles.

Eliphaz (4:7, 8; 5:3, 27) said wisdom is learned by experiencing life (first-hand knowledge).

Bildad (8:8, 9; 18:5-21) said wisdom is inherited from the past (second-hand knowledge).

Zophar (11:6; 20:1-29) said wisdom belongs to the wise; it has no source other than man.

Job correctly said that God is the source of wisdom; the first step is to fear Him (28:20-28).

- Pictures of Christ

Job asked several key questions to which Jesus is the obvious answer:

1. Is there anyone who can help us approach God? (9:32, 33) Yes! See *John 14:6*.
2. Is there life after death? (14:14) Yes! See *John 11:25*.
3. Is there one in heaven working on our behalf? (16:19) Yes! See *Hebrews 9:24*.
4. Is there one who can save us from judgment? (19:25) Yes! See *Hebrews 7:24, 25*.
5. Is there anything that is important in life? (21:7-15) See *Matt. 16:26; John 3:16*.
6. Where do we find God? Or can we even find Him? (23:3-5) Yes! See *John 14:6, 9*.

- Personal Application

1. **The Suffering of Man:** It is clearly evident from the story of Job that those who love God are not exempt from trouble. We too will experience hardship in our lifetime; and, that hardship may be caused by various reasons, such as the fallen world in which we live, consequences of our sinful deeds, testing from God to refine our faith, or, as in Job's case, flagrant attack from our spiritual enemy. Knowing which one of these is the source of our troubles is difficult to know; sometimes, suffering simply does not make sense. Remember, it is not our responsibility to know why suffering occurs; rather our responsibility is to trust God through it, to learn from it, and to glorify Him in it.
2. **The Big Three:** While life can throw us curves at any moment, God's people are not without hope. There are truths that we can rely upon to help us deal with suffering, injustice, pain, etc., in this world.

Everything that happens must pass through God to occur (get His permission). If events happened without God's ordinance, then He would have no control over them and He would not be God. He is sovereign, in complete control, even in suffering.

God is good and all that God does is good; He is incapable of error or wrong-doing.

Therefore, if God can only do good and all things must pass through God to occur, then *all things, including evil, must ultimately have a good purpose*. In the end, God will use all things for His good (*Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20*).

Christ's crucifixion is a prime example of this truth. No one (including Job) was more underserving of his fate than Jesus; He knew no sin. However, God allowed His suffering, the most unjust in history, to occur. An apparent evil? Yes, but allowed and used by God for good, the salvation of mankind. The greatest evil, the greatest good.

The Bottom Line

It is during times of *suffering*, when life doesn't make sense, that we demonstrate *true faith* in God.

Questions to Consider

1. Satan assumed that Job was faithful to God only while things were good. Is that you?
2. What should friends do when someone is suffering? Evaluate how Job's friends did.
3. What good things can come from suffering? Should we avoid or embrace suffering?
4. If so much good comes through trials, then how should that affect our prayers?