

The Interrogation of Job

By Elder David Pyles

The book of Job is likely the oldest book in the Bible and is also one of the oldest books in the world. The story is familiar to people all over the world, even to those who are neither Christians nor Jews. Most people take an interest in it because they all endure trouble, and trouble is commonly perceived as coming in waves. Job was a man who got them in a tsunami. The book of Job is primarily a debate between Job and his friends (i.e. the “miserable comforters”) about the subject of troubles and why God causes or allows men to have them. Job took one position while his friends took another, and this led to intense debate. Both sides erred in the dispute, but the comforters were in much greater error than Job.

The doctrine of the comforters was simple: They essentially claimed that things always balance in this life, so that for every good thing that happens to a man, there will be something good he has done, and for every bad thing that happens to a man, there will be something bad he has done. They therefore insisted that the trouble experienced by Job was owing to some bad thing he had committed, and while having no egregious charge against him, they thought surely that he had a “skeleton in his closet.”

Job replied to all this by saying that the miserable comforters were naïve and in denial of the plain facts of reality. He claimed that anyone should see that in this world the worst of things can happen to the best of people, and the best of things can happen to the worst of people. The reader will also know that the comforters were wrong because the book had already made us privy to the real reasons for Job’s sufferings. They were not because he was a bad man, but actually because he was a good man. Indeed, God contended there was none like him in all the earth (1:8). Job was under Satanic attack on this account, evidently because Satan was hell-bent on proving to God that men are unworthy of His love, which Satan thought would be sufficiently proven by demonstrating that even the best of men are nothing but self-serving animals who honor God only when they stand to gain from it. In this sense, Job served as a representative for us all.

While Job maintained faithfulness and integrity throughout his trial, the sheer weight of his sufferings and the provocations of the

comforters did at times move him to argue for too much. Job came dangerously close to saying that God's action or inaction can sometimes be arbitrary or without reason. This is of course a tendency of all men in times of trial. Failing to see any good purpose in their trouble, they commonly but foolishly entertain the idea that there is no God, or that if He exists, He has no concern for our affairs and has left us to the vagaries of chance. However, the fact there is trouble in our lives does nothing to disprove the existence of God. It only proves that He is not doing things the way we want them done. This should be expected since He has warned us, saying, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord,*" (Isa 55:8).

The debate was settled by God Himself. He began by rebuking Job for his error by pummeling him with questions about the world and Universe that Job was incapable of answering. All readers will readily acknowledge the point here being made, but many have wondered how it was pertinent to the issue at hand. What bearing did these questions have on the sufferings of Job? There are in fact at least three relevant points made by these questions:

1) God is sovereign. He blesses men because He is a giving God, not because He is in any way indebted to them. Men oftentimes forget this, even to the point of denying God rights that they reserve to themselves. All men claim the right to give to some while not giving to others. Men reserve the right to forgive one offender while holding another to account. Men also build things and then destroy the things they build. God has all the same rights, so we must understand that His goodness derives from sovereign choice, not from any obligation He has to us.

2) The Universe is filled with questions that men cannot answer. This ordinarily moves men to higher faith. When they see the design and complexity in all about them, they are compelled to believe there must be a God and that He must be incomprehensibly great. However, they tend to draw very different conclusions when the complexity pertains to their personal lives. When confused about this, they are moved to doubt and fear. This is inconsistent. Also, because God is sovereign, He is under no obligation to explain to us how He intends to use our lives, or make His plan simple enough for us to comprehend it, and He surely is not obligated to secure our approval for it.

3) Though there are many questions around us that we cannot answer, we always assume there are in fact answers to these questions. This is the assumption of all science. The same is true of our personal lives. So when we allow trouble to move us to the idea that God has no purpose or plan for us, we are approaching conclusions that we would never draw about anything else. On all else, we always assume there is a reason for it. Whatever has come to pass was either caused by God or permitted by God. If He caused it, He had reasons for causing it, and if He permitted it, He had reasons for permitting it.

In further proof of this last point, consider that you have never heard anyone tell of a past trial, saying that, as of the time of the trial, they thought God had a purpose in it, but now, being older and wiser, they see there was no purpose in it at all, and that it was merely a chance event. Men always tell the opposite, or that while in the midst of the trial, they saw no purpose in it, but now, being older and wiser, they see a valuable reason for what they endured.

Notwithstanding the rebuke of Job, God exonerated him in the end and condemned the miserable comforters. The comforters' idea that all things balance would be true in a broad context, but it is not true that every good or bad thing that happens to a man in this life is owing to good or bad things he has done. For example, we receive the good of being saved to heaven, but the Bible denies this is on account of any good we have done. On the opposite side, Job's extreme sufferings were not on account of any evil he had done. The balance that the comforters asserted can only be true when Jesus Christ and the life hereafter are also weighed.

This is in fact formidable evidence favoring the claims of Christianity. Our Creator designed us to expect balance and justice, so that it is our nature to be very unsettled when we see imbalance, unfairness and injustice. Yet such things are everywhere in the world around us. When we see that sense can be made of all this only by considering Jesus Christ, substitutionary atonement, heaven, hell, etc, then this is testimony from the conscience that all of these things must be true.

Job was exonerated notwithstanding his errors because of His faith in the Redeemer (14:13-15, 19:23-27). Such will be the case with all who believe in Jesus Christ, acknowledging that good things to

come are not owing to good things we have done, but to the good things done by Him and given to us by His sovereign grace.