**Job I: Is God Good?**

**Theodicy and the Problem of Suffering**

Job tackles the question of the goodness of God. Theodicy. Is God good?

Theme of Job:

Hanging on to everything (God) through anything.

Q: If God is so loving and so powerful, why is there suffering and why is there evil in the world?

Job answers questions about theodicy. Given what we know about the world—all the evil and suffering in the world—is God good?

Questions we all have:

Why is there evil in the world?

Why is there so much suffering in the world?

Why do we, as Christians, suffer?

What should we do when we suffer and when others suffer?

Why am I suffering right now?

What should I do with my suffering?

First, let’s get a way into the text of Job for context.

Job 1:1-5

Note: Uz means East, so Job is a worshipper of God who lives to the East of the Promised Land. He was not Jewish!

Job was “blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

Wow! We should be so good!

God is really going to bless Job with good things, right?

v. 3 He was the “greatest man among all the people of the East.”

Muhammad Ali had nothing on Job!

Job 1:4-5 Job was a good, loving father. He prayed for his children and even made sacrifices in case they sinned.

Q: How would you rate Job as a good person on a scale of 1 – 10?

Surely he is blessed by God and he will continue to be blessed by God because he is faithful in everything.

God is going to “put a fence” around Job, right?

Job 1:6-12 A remarkable passage. v. 6 Satan is a “fallen angel”? Like human beings, Satan has free will.

God: What have you been up to?

Satan: Oh, nothing really. Just hanging out, having a few talks with people. No big deal.

Just trying to destroy a few lives, to create confusion, deceive some, accuse others, trying to undermine faith in you. Nothing in particular…

Satan is patrolling his territory. He is very confident that the earth is his. Heaven is God’s but the earth is his. “I own this place.”

John 12:31 The ruler/prince of this world.

Q: Can you relate? Does it sometimes seem like Satan is pretty much in control in the world? Who in the OT (his name starts with an E) felt the same way? Eliljah I am the only one left…

Job 1:8 God to Satan: It may look that way, but it is not true. I still have a few who are faithful to me.

Have you considered Job? Have you considered \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Job 1:9-11 Satan: Job does not really love you. Satan is a total cynic. Job is paid off. Job is spoiled. Take away his blessings and we will see that he is really just selfish and in it for himself. Job is into God for what he gets from God.

A question for you, would you be faithful to God even if he had not given you the blessings you have? Are you like the way Satan claims Job is? If God brought some real suffering into your life, might you become disillusioned and leave God?

Job 1:12 God say, in essence, go for it! A hard question: Why did God allow Satan to do this to Job?

Why does God allow suffering in our lives in general?

Job raises more questions than it answers.

More specifically, why did God “sic” Satan on Job?

- To show Satan? To disprove Satan’s cynicism?

- Because God gives free will to Satan, and lets him do what he desires?

- As a test—so that Job can prove to God and to Satan that he is indeed faithful to God

 - So Job can prove to himself how faithful he is?

- For our sake?

Let’s back up here: Why do we, as Christians, suffer?

Surely you have wondered about this!

In fact, this is one argument of atheists against the existence of God.

Agnostic says: The Christian God is supposed to be completely good and all-powerful. You cannot have it both ways. Which is it?

Is it a lack of power to prevent suffering, or is it a lack of concern?

The atheist: The Christian God is not real.

Given the pain and suffering in the world, this cannot be true. He could be either:

A. All-powerful, but certainly not completely good. Or

B. Completely good, but certainly not all-powerful.

This is a serious question. Possibly, this may be the single most common/significant apologetic question. It is a legitimate question.

We will see, God does not ignore this question. Not at all!!!

Kinds of suffering:

1. Acute pain, broken bones, chronic pain (cancer, etc.), burns, etc.

2. Disease, both acute and chronic. Cancer, lupus, leprosy, heart disease, malaria,

3. Broken relationships Emotional devastation.

4. Poverty, hunger, etc.

5. Violence, terrorism, genocide, violent crime, political crimes.

6. Chronic fear as a result of 5 Deuteronomy 28:65-67.

7. Disappointment, feelings of failure, loss of hope, loss of job.

8. Death of a loved one, bereavement, mourning.

There is a lot of suffering in the world!!

Q: How can a good God allow these things?

Is it a lack of power on God’s part?

Is it because God is not loving and good?

A strong caution here: There is no simple answer.

**CAUSES OF SUFFERING:**

**1. Free will and resultant rebellion, evil and sin**. Note: the phrase “free will” is not in the Bible.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (exp 19-20) Now choose life.

Joshua 24:15 Choose today…

John 7:17 If anyone chooses to do God’s will…

A loving God gave us a choice.

We were made in God’s image in this sense: free will.

So, Why is there evil in the world?

Because God loves us. Love gives a choice. God gives choice.

That is why God put that pesky tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden. God had to give us a choice—a real choice. Not between $1000 and a punch in the nose.

Genesis 3:1-7 The fruit of the knowledge of good and evil was “desirable.” Sin is “desirable.”

And thus evil and sin and suffering came into the world.

Would you prefer the alternative? (not living at all, or being a “robot”?)

Is it better if we did not have freedom to choose good or evil?

Response to the atheist critic:

God is SOOO powerful and SOOOO loving that he created us in his image and he gave us the ability to choose to obey or to rebel against him.

Illustration: parents who totally control their kids

God wants us to choose to love him. Is that evil? You decide.

God is loving enough and powerful enough to give us a choice to love or hate, to do good or to do evil.

God took a huge risk. Why? Because he loves us. Parents take the same risk. Our kids may become career criminals and may totally reject our love. It is definitely still worth it.

Illustration: The Prodigal Son.

Free Will and rebellion led to evil and sin in the world.

Q: Is this God’s fault?

The vast majority of all suffering can be attributed to human choice to sin.

**·** addiction, lack of self-control

**·** sexual perversion and abuse

**·** anger, violence

**·** greed

**·** pride, arrogance, jealousy, desire for control, power

**·** selfishness (but not all… AIDS, Tsunami, etc.)

Exodus 20:4-5 “… punishing the children for the father’s sin to the third and fourth generation.” A biblical principle. Generational sin.

God’s inviolable moral law, says sin cause suffering, both to the perpetrator and to the victim of such sin. This is a law; as inviolable as the law of gravity.

Vs.

Ezekiel 18:19-20 The one who sins is the one who will die. The son does not share the guilt of the father, nor vice verse.

This is God’s justice.

Exodus 20:4-5 and Ezekiel 18:19-20 Both are true…

Exodus 20:4-5 the effect of sin in this life.

Ezekiel 18:19-20 the effect of sin in eternity.

Here is the real question: does the existence of these things prove that God is evil or powerless?

A very important note:

Be extremely careful to use the sin card. As a general rule, do not tell a suffering person that it is because of their sin, or even the sin of a loved one.

**B. NATURAL CAUSES OF SUFFERING.**

There are natural physical laws, just as there are natural moral laws.

Example: What about earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis?

Which sin caused the Sumatran earthquake and tsunami that wiped out 250,000 lives in 2004?

Explanation: Plate tectonics.

1. Without plate tectonics, the surface would be sterile and not support advanced life, and without plate tectonics, the earth would have no atmosphere. Definitely no advanced life on the earth. Look at mars.

Example: What about hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and other weather-caused natural disasters.

2. Weather distributes energy almost evenly across the earth, waters the land, etc. No weather, no storms, no hurricanes. Are floods and storms evil?

3. Even diseases. God made bacteria, fungi, etc. with amazing abilities to recycle all kinds of nutrients. Without bacteria, we would be dead. Even genetic mutation is part of God’s plan to cause adaptation and evolution. Is disease evil?

4. Much suffering due to “natural causes” is really the result of either human unwisdom (putting it nicely) or greed. Ex: Living in a flood plain, destroying the environment, etc.

For God, the real problem is not suffering. The problem is sin and the resultant separation from God.

Job does not address how God has solved this problem.

Summary:

Book of Job answers questions about theodicy: In view of the pain, the suffering and the evil in the world: Is God good?

We saw that God gave free will to Satan to “go after” Job.

Why is there evil in a world with an all-powerful and all-loving God?

Because love gives a choice. God wants us to choose to love him.

Sin came into the world, and therefore evil and suffering.

But not all suffering. Suffering has “natural causes.”

Suffering and even death are not the problem. The problem is sin and separation from God.

We saw last week from Exodus 34:6-7 that sin has consequences and sin brings suffering into the world. Generational sins affect us. We need to take stock of that, take it to God and begin the difficult work of moving forward.

But, why do we suffer?

Why am I suffering now?

What should I do with my suffering?

Job 1:13-19 How does Satan tempt Job? Why did he choose these things?

-Maybe they were Job’s weak point. Satan thought so.

-Satan was overconfident. He underestimated Job.

Is he underestimating you?

Q: If Satan was given freedom to tempt you what would he tempt you with?

Disaster!!!!

Job 1:20-22 Q: How would you describe Job’s response?

v. 20 (and I have missed this in the past). Job was really torn up.

Job went into mourning.

We Americans, especially we white European Americans do not know how to grieve.

Now we find out why Job worshipped God, and Satan was wrong in his assessment. What about you?

In all this, Job did not sin. Amen, Job!!! (Job is not yet at the wall from EHS)

Job 2:1-8 skin for skin is a saying for the Jews. It meant something like this: A man would exchange anything to save his “skin” (ie. his life) skin for skin means property for person.

A Turkish proverb: We would give our beard to save our head.

Satan thinks Job’s religion is about himself, not about God.

Q: Why is Satan so confident? (he cannot imagine a person with selfless motives)

The world will be like this. They will assume that you are a fake.

Q: Will Job disown God in order to save his skin?

Would you forsake God to save your skin?

V 7-8 Job is really suffering here

Job 2:9-10 Job’s wife is done with this.

Thanks a lot, Job’s wife!!!

Who might Job’s wife be for you? Who might tell you it is time to quit?

v. 10 Job accepts “trouble” from God. In all this, he did not sin. (but look at Job 3:1-26)

Summary so far:

We need to find a healthy way to deal with suffering loss and grief.

The existence of evil and suffering does not mean that God does not love us or has stopped loving us.

There are no simple answers.

Mourning for loss and suffering is OK

But we need to find a way to trust God in all this.

2:11-13 Pretend you know nothing about Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Q: How would you describe them, based on this passage alone?

 (joke: Who is the shortest person in the Bible? Bildad the Shuhite)

These guys are the ideal friends. They are sitting with Job and listening. They are “Sympathizing” with him. That is what we need when we suffer loss.

It will be OK NO!

You will get through this. NO!

God will use this for his benefit. NO!

He/she is with God now. NO!

Sit, listen and sympathize (feel what they are feeling).

The central question of the rest of Job is this: Why did Job suffer? (the big, fancy technical word for this question is theodicy)

Q: Why do we suffer? (take lots of time for answers here)

 a. sin of others

 b. our own sin

 c. natural causes (earthquakes, weather, diseases, aging, death)

 d. God disciplines us (Heb 12:3-11)

 e. Helps us to grow (James 1:2-4)

 f. Our godly response gives God glory (Jn 9:3)

 g. Come to know Christ (Col 1:24)

Q: Of these, why did Job suffer?

Job 3:1-11 Q: How is Job feeling? How is he doing spiritually?

In the past I would have assumed Job is sinning here. Now, I am not so sure.

Eliphaz: Job 4:1-9, 17-18 Why does Eliphaz say Job is suffering? (his sin) Is he correct?

Q: Do you ever tend to think this way? Might you be right?

Job 6:2-3, 14-23 Q: Is Job’s analysis of his friends fair?

Job 6:24-30 7:20-21 Q: According to Job, why is he suffering? (he is righteous and does not deserve to suffer)

 Q: Is Job right? (answer: no! He is a sinner)

You may not want to do all of the following:

Job 8:1-7 Q: What is Bildad’s opinion? Why suffering?

Job 9:21-22 10:1-8 What is Job’s attitude? Q: How might we be like that?

Job 11:13-19 Q: What is Zophar’s opinion? Do you agree with him?

Job 13:13-19 (19:1-7) Job’s bold response. What is Job feeling?

Job 29:7-20, 31:1-12 Q: How would you describe Job’s position here?

Job 32:1-5 Q: Describe Elihu in a couple of words.

Job 33:8-26 Q: Why is Job suffering according to Elihu?

It seems that Elihu, of the five, is closest to getting the question of suffering correct. Interesting, since he is the young guy.

Job 38:1-15 Job challenges God and asks him why. Q: In essence, what is God’s answer? Did God answer the question?

Q: How does this apply to us (that God does not answer Job)? Q: How does this apply to Covid-19?

Summary: Job 40:1-2 Q: Why does God seem so harsh here?

Job 40:3-5 Q: What is Job thinking now?

Job 40:7-14 Just in case Job did not get the idea….

Job 42:1-6 Job repents. Q: What did Job learn? How does this apply to us?