

# Stricken, but NOT Destroyed

## Looking to the Eternal, Pt. 1

When affliction strikes an individual, a community, or nation, confusion ensues and questions arise: "What went wrong? Where did the suffering come from? Who brought it? [Did *I* or *they* do something wrong?] How does God fit into this? Why would God bring (or allow) such terrible things to happen to the people whom He has chosen for His own? [Why isn't He doing anything about it?]"<sup>i</sup>

Just as Job's human companions sought explanations for his suffering, we cannot *always* explain a sovereign God's reasons amid our trials. Oftentimes the greatest challenge during calamity is maintaining trust in God's character and purposes when we cannot see the future nor understand His ways; trusting Him when all appears to contradict His promises. (Hebrews 11:13, 29)

Fortunately for us, the Bible provides numerous examples of those who have endured the same troubles (1 Peter 5:9) and what resulted in their lives, revealing God's purpose for suffering.

Although we may not comprehend His thoughts and ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), we can confidently declare that God sees and knows the affliction of His people (Exodus 3:7), our suffering *will* end (2 Corinthians 4:17), He *can* deliver us from any hardship, He promises to use every difficulty for our good (Romans 8:28), and one day we *will* receive the promise (Hebrews 12:40).

Romans 8:18 says, "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.*"

### ***The Question***

1. Turn to Genesis 18 and read verses 16-33. Abraham apprehensively, yet persistently inquires of the Lord. What is his primary question?<sup>ii</sup> (v.23)
  
2. Why does he ask this? What is his concern? (Consider Genesis 13:10-13.)

3. What does Abraham call into question? (v.25) Do you believe he was wrong to do this? Why or why not?
  
4. In addition to the "righteous", what did Abraham hope would be spared? (vv.24, 28)
  
5. When you think of God "saving, rescuing, or preserving" an individual or people from calamity, what do you imagine?
  
6. Now read Genesis 19:12-29. How did God preserve the "righteous"?
  
7. What was lost in the process?
  
8. In what ways was God merciful to Lot? (v.16)
  
9. Was the promise to preserve the righteous or to preserve his assets?
  
10. Was it Lot's fault that his home and belongings were destroyed?

Do you tend to think that you have fallen out of favor with God when He allows tribulation to transpire in your life? Why or why not?

11. Throughout the Bible, it is not uncommon for the righteous to suffer alongside of the ungodly. Examples include, but are not limited to: Joshua and Caleb (forced to wander in the wilderness due to Israel's unbelief); Boaz and other God-fearing individuals (subjected to famine, pestilence, and enemy oppression due to Israel's disregard of Jehovah); Daniel (exiled to Babylon due to Israel's rebellion), etc. List additional examples if you have them.

Have you ever felt that God was unjust by allowing those who "did-not-deserve-it" to suffer? Have you ever suffered because of another's poor choices?

12. What might be God's purpose in allowing the believer to suffer alongside of those who do not know Him? Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.

13. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-10. What purpose of suffering is found in this passage?

### ***The Offense***

When God fails to act as we think He ought, it can be difficult not to become offended. Sometimes He elects *not* to rescue or relieve us from the trials of this life. John the Baptist is one such example.

14. Turn to Matthew 11:1-11. John the Baptist, a man set-apart to the Lord, found himself in a predicament he did not expect. What was it?

15. Why did John and his disciples call Christ's identity into question?

Why is this common even among professing Christians?

16. How does Christ respond in verse 6? What did He mean by this?
  
17. Per Matthew 24:4-10, for what additional reasons will believers become offended at God?<sup>iii</sup>
  
18. According to Matthew 14:1-12, what resulted?
  
19. Return to Matthew 11. What did God think of John? (v.11) Why is this important?
  
20. Turn to John 11. Read verses 1-37. Why do you think the author, John, felt it was necessary to convey to us Christ's feelings for those affected? (vv.3, 5, 33, 35-36)
  
21. What assumption did Martha and Mary make in verses 21 and 32?
  
22. Is God absent just because one cannot physically see, hear, or feel Him?

23. What is presumed about Christ's will in the situation?

Do our desires and God's will always align? What was God's ultimate purpose? (Read verses 40 and 42.)

24. Now let's compare Job and Naomi. Faced with similar hardships, both were stripped of their families and possessions, and yet, they reacted differently. Contrast their responses to their trials. Read Job 1:20-22, 2:9-10, then Ruth 1:13, 19-21.

25. What might be the reason for the disparity in their response? (See Job 1:1-5 and 23:10-14.)

26. Return now to 2 Corinthians and continue reading 5:1-8. What rules the thoughts and actions of those in the world? (v.7)

27. What perspective enables believer to endure trials and tribulations?

In closing, Philippians 1:20b-21 says, *"In nothing I shall be ashamed.. Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

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<sup>i</sup> Simundson, D. J. (1992). Suffering. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 6, p. 219). New York: Doubleday.

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<sup>ii</sup> Note: While the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was an act of judgement against their depravity, trials are not always the result of God's judgment against sin.

<sup>iii</sup> The Amplified Version states Matthew 24:10 this way: *"And then many will be offended and repelled and will begin to distrust and desert [Him Whom they ought to trust and obey] and will stumble and fall away and betray one another and pursue one another with hatred."*