

WHY Must Men SUFFER?

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous," says Scripture. WHY? "I am the Eternal . . . I create evil," says Isa. 45:5,7. HOW can this be? Who was responsible for Adam's sin? Did Satan thwart God's purpose? Was God unable to prevent it? The real meaning of the book of JOB brings the true answer.

by Herbert W. Armstrong

WHY DOES God permit war? WHY does God allow *human* suffering and misery? "If God is GOOD — if God is LOVE — if He is MERCIFUL, He would not wish for people to suffer," is the reasoning of many humans. "And if He is ALMIGHTY," they conclude, "He could prevent it. So why doesn't He?"

What's wrong with this reasoning?

The common conception is this: that God *finished* His Creation as described in the first chapter of Genesis; that God created the first man *perfect, immortal*; the work of Creation was finished — complete. Adam was *perfect* in character — innocent of sin — endowed with immortality.

But then, when God wasn't looking, these people believe, Satan entered and succeeded in overthrowing the man, wrecking God's perfect specimen of human creation. In so doing, of course, Satan thwarted God's purpose.

When God returned and beheld what Satan had done, says this conception, He was forced to think out some plan for repairing the damage. And what is that damage supposed to have been? The man's *nature* had been changed. He had "fallen" from the nature of perfection, innocence and holiness to a fallen, sinful nature.

According to this concept, God must have shaken His head in near-unbelief and near-frustration. But He did think out a plan to repair the damage — a plan to restore man to a state and condition *as good as Adam*, before the "fall." The plan of salvation is, therefore, regarded as designed to restore damaged mankind to a condition *as*

good as Adam at creation. But, of course, Satan didn't give up and go away. He has been around ever since, opposing God's efforts, and winning the contest.

What Men Don't Understand

Either this common idea is true, or the only alternate possibility — that God *was* looking, expressly *permitted it*, and that God therefore is RESPONSIBLE FOR IT!

And the preachers, the churches, and the professing Christian people of this world simply cannot believe this! Yet, to reject it makes Satan more cunning, more powerful than God. The common idea represents Satan as outsmarting God.

What men do not understand is GOD'S PURPOSE, and GOD'S PLAN for accomplishing His great purpose.

Yes, God *is* responsible! And being responsible, God *will see to it* — He and He alone is responsible for accomplishing His great original purpose. But being *responsible* does not imply being guilty. Nor does it imply God *caused* it.

All that has happened is a necessary *part* of that great design. Satan can do nothing God does not allow. "My purpose shall stand," says God.

There is NO CONTEST being waged between God and the devil. God reigns SUPREME, and every creature and every being stands subject to God's will!

Becoming the Sons of God

What the world does not grasp is that God is *reproducing Himself* — creating, in mortal humans, His very own divine CHARACTER — permitting

humans to *learn by experience*. For character cannot be automatically or instantaneously created, imparted or imputed — it must be *developed*, and this only through EXPERIENCE; and experience requires *time*.

We humans must *have our part* in the development of righteous and holy character. We must first come to realize the true values, and to thoroughly repent of the false way. We must come to *seek*, with our whole hearts and minds, God's true way of righteous character. We must set our wills in till with God's will.

Then we must come to realize our utter helplessness, and learn to rely on God, in living FAITH, for the power, the strength, the understanding, the righteousness we ourselves are incapable of attaining.

We receive eternal life, and all righteousness, from GOD. But we have *our part to do!* We must come to *desire* it above all else — to *seek* it with all our might — to *yield* ourselves utterly to God's will, and to trust implicitly and unswervingly in HIM. In no other manner could we become the supreme characters which it is God's PURPOSE to make of us.

To this end, we must now be begotten as God's own children, inheriting His divine nature. Through His power, through feeding on His Spirit, we GROW in grace and knowledge and spiritual character, until, at the resurrection, we shall be BORN of God as His very SONS — elevated to His plane and level!

That's God's supreme purpose. It can be achieved only through EXPERIENCE,

and in process of TIME. And men LEARN by *suffering*.

Jesus suffered. "For it became him . . . in bringing many *sons* unto GLORY, to make the captain of their salvation [Christ] perfect *through sufferings*" (Heb. 2:10). Again, "Though he were a Son, yet *learned he OBEDIENCE by the things which he suffered*" (Heb. 5:8).

Now see how Job's experience explains all this.

LET'S UNDERSTAND IT!

Job's Experience Explains It!

Thousands of years ago, there was a man named Job. You've heard of the man. He lived, as *you* live today, for a PURPOSE. And the solution of this whole question is made clear by the life experiences of Job. Many know the story, but *few* understand its MEANING!

This Job was a wealthy man — the wealthiest in all the East. Solomon may have possessed greater wealth. But, as Solomon was the *wisest* man who ever lived, so Job was the *most righteous!*

So let's glimpse, briefly, this thrilling story and its revealing lesson.

"There was," begins the scriptural record, "a man once in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters; also in livestock he possessed seven thousand sheep and goats, three thousand camels, five hundred pair of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, besides a very large household; so that this man was the greatest man in all the East" (Job 1:1-3, Moffatt translation and Authorized Version).

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the ETERNAL, and Satan came also among them.

"And the ETERNAL said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the ETERNAL, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

"And the ETERNAL said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is none like him in the earth*, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth [shuns]

evil?" (Verses 6-8, A.V., except "Eternal" from Moffatt.)

"Satan answered, 'But is it for nothing that Job reverences God? Have you not hedged him safely in, his house and all he has? You have prospered him in his business, and his flocks are teeming on the land. Only put out your hand, touch whatever he possesses, and see if he will not curse you to your face!'" (Verses 9-11, Moffatt, except "Job" and "Satan" from A.V.)

This World's Philosophy

Notice, please, Satan couldn't point out one imperfection in the man's righteousness. Even God said it was perfect. Yes, undoubtedly Job was the most righteous man who ever lived.

But Satan tried to get around it. He argued that it *paid* Job to be righteous. So, Satan argued, just take away from him *what he has*, and the man will lose his temper and start cursing God!

Well, God deliberately PERMITTED Satan to take away Job's possessions, and put Job to this test.

"Then said the ETERNAL to Satan, 'There! I leave all he has within your power; *but lay no hand upon the man himself*'" (verse 12, Moffatt).

Notice, will you, Satan did this *with God's permission!* Satan was the active agent. But he did it with God's express permission; he could go just as far, in inflicting evil, as God permitted, and *no further!* God *set a limit* on how far Satan could go! There is no contest here between God and Satan — no equality. GOD IS MASTER OF THE SITUATION! He gives the orders, grants permission, sets the limitations!

"So, away went Satan from the presence of the ETERNAL."

What Happened to Job?

Then one day a servant came running to Job with the startling news that Arabs in a foray had carried off all his oxen and asses. Even while he was still talking, in dashed another servant shouting that lightning had just struck and burned up all the sheep, goats, and shepherds. While he was yet speaking, another rushed in breathlessly announcing three parties of Chaldeans in a raid upon the camels had carried them off,

slaying all the servants except the one who escaped to bring the news.

And even while he was yet speaking in burst another.

"Your sons and daughters," he exclaimed, "were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother, when a whirlwind swept across the desert and struck the four corners of the house, till it fell upon the young folk; they are DEAD; and I alone escaped to tell you" (verses 12-19, Moffatt).

Well, now Job was stripped of all his great wealth — wiped out! Worse, all his children were killed!

Did Job blame this ill-fortune upon GOD? Did he lose his temper and curse God? Did he sin, as Satan expected?

"Then Job rose, tore his tunic, shaved his head, and dropped upon the ground in humble worship, crying, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I must return: *the Eternal gave, the Eternal has taken* — blessed be the Eternal!' In all this Job did not sin, nor did he give offense to God" (verses 20-22, Moffatt).

Notice, Job attributed ALL to God. The wealth he had had, *God gave*. The good — the prosperity — all came from God. But also "The ETERNAL *has taken*"! The Eternal, too, was responsible for the disaster! NOTHING happens contrary to God's purpose!

Satan Tries Again

"One day the sons of God again came to present themselves before the Eternal, and among them came Satan.

"Where have you been?" said the Eternal to the Adversary; and the Adversary answered, 'Roaming here and there, roving about the earth.'

"Then the Eternal said to Satan, 'Have you noticed that there is no one like my servant Job on the earth, a blameless and an upright man, who reverences God and shuns evil? He still holds to his loyalty: it was idle of you to entice me to undo him.' But the Adversary answered,

"He has saved his own skin! A man will let all he has go, to preserve his life. Only put out your hand, touch his flesh and bones, and see if he will not curse you to your face!'" (Job 2:1-5, Moffatt.)

Notice, there is no contest here

between two equals. God sits in authority supreme. Satan cannot do one thing without permission from God!

And here, in this heavenly court, God permits Satan to advance his arguments — even to put them to the *test of experience* on the most righteous human on earth! It is a thrilling drama here being enacted — a drama with great purpose — tremendous meaning!

“So the Eternal said to Satan, ‘He is in your power; only, *spare his life!*’” (Verse 6, Moffatt.)

Notice again, ALL AUTHORITY comes from God. It is GOD who put poor Job in Satan’s power. Satan was permitted to devise his most cunning and cruel affliction — with but one restriction: “Spare his life,” commanded God. Satan could go no further than God specifically authorized! And God did permit this evil! WHY, we shall soon see!

So, “Away went the Adversary from the Eternal’s presence, and he smote Job with painful ulcers from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, till Job took a potsherd to scrape himself.

“As he sat among the ashes, his wife said to him, ‘Still holding to your loyalty? Curse God, though you die for it!’”

Was God Just and Fair?

But Job retorted to his wife, “‘You are talking like an impious fool. Are we to take *good* from God’s hand, and not evil too?’”

Notice, all the GOOD had come from God. Also *all the evil!* Besides Him there is no God — no power equal or superior to His. God is responsible for EVERYTHING — both good and evil — because God’s power is SUPREME — *absolute!* Is this a sin to charge the EVIL, as well as the good, to God?

“In all this,” answers God’s Word, “*Job sinned not* with his lips.” Charging this evil to God, then, was no sin — no error. It was the TRUTH!

Job’s Friends Have an Argument

“Now, when Job’s three friends heard of all the trouble that had befallen him, they came, each from his own home, Eliphaz from Teman, Bildad from Shuah, and Zophar from Maân;

they arranged to go and condole with him, to comfort him. But when they caught sight of him at a distance and could not recognize him, they wept aloud; every man of them tore his tunic and flung dust on his head. For seven days and seven nights they sat beside him on the ground; none said a word to him, for they saw how terrible was his anguish” (Job 2:9-13, Moffatt).

Here is human suffering to compare with the horrors of World War II. Here is anguish almost beyond description! Satan inflicted it. But God *permitted it*, and therefore is RESPONSIBLE!

Now in the long conversation that followed between Job and his three friends — a conversation occupying the next 34 chapters in the Bible — Job’s friends blamed it all on JOB. Their idea was a good deal like many people believe today. Since God is GOOD, it was impossible to attribute this evil to GOD.

But Job continually denied his friends’ allegations. Continually HIS OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS he upheld and maintained. He attributed it all, rightly, to God — *yet, without imputing any blame or fault* to God. JOB UNDERSTOOD GOD’S GREAT PURPOSE being worked out here below!

And it is important that *we* understand! For here Job, as one single individual, is used as an illustration *for our learning* TODAY, typical of all the mass suffering we see about us in this world today!

God Enters the Argument

Finally, after all these long conversations run themselves out, God Himself takes a hand in the conversation.

Now we begin to see WHY this affliction had come to Job.

“Then the Eternal answered Job out of a storm, saying:

“‘Who darkens MY DESIGN with a cloud of thoughtless words? Confront me like a man; come, answer these *My questions!*’” (Job 38:1-3).

Let me interrupt here with an interesting sidelight explanation which throws light on the conversation to follow. Some authorities believe that Job was the architect and director of the building of the Great Pyramid — still today one of the largest buildings on earth, and prior to the construction of

the Woolworth building, the tallest. That Job was proud of his righteousness is plain. That he also might have been puffed up over constructing the world’s greatest building clears up much that God says now to him.

Job was too well aware of his righteousness. God now proceeded to deflate his ego. Can it, then, be possible God now compares *His* creation of the earth, and all that is, to the comparatively insignificant accomplishment of building the Great Pyramid? It’s interesting to keep this possibility in mind.

“‘When I founded the *earth!*’” God opened up on Job, “‘where were you then? Answer me that, if you have wit to know! Who measured out the *earth?* — do you know that? Who stretched the builder’s line on *it?* What were *its* pedestals placed on? Who laid the cornerstone, when the morning-stars were singing, and all the angels chanted in their joy?’” (Verses 4-7.)

It is significant that a *pyramid* is the *only* kind of building on earth where the *cornerstone* is the *top* stone — *the last stone laid* — at the COMPLETION of the building! And here God represents the symbolic “cornerstone” of the EARTH as being laid at *its completion* — when the angels shouted for joy!

And so God continued to deflate poor Job. Job may have been the most righteous man on earth — yet how *insignificant* he was, *compared to GOD!*

Man was created *to need GOD!* Man cannot live his full life, fulfill his mission, or be happy, unless he keeps himself in his right relationship with GOD! *That is the very first lesson man needs to learn and keep ever in mind!*

A first principle in character — in the PURPOSE of our existence — is to exalt and worship only GOD, to *humble* the self, to realize man’s utter helplessness, and his total DEPENDENCE upon GOD!

“‘Who helped shut in the sea,’” God asked, “‘... when I swathed it in mists, and swaddled it in clouds of darkness, when I fixed its boundaries ... saying, *Thus far, and no further!* Here your proud waves shall not pass!’” (Verses 8-11.)

“‘Have *you* ever roused the morning, given directions to the dawn? ... What path leads to the home of Light, and where does Darkness dwell? Can *you*

conduct them to their fields? . . . Have *you* grasped earth in all its breadth? How large is it? Tell me, if you know that! (Verses 12-18.)

“Can *you* bind up the Pleiades [cluster of stars] in a cluster, or loose the chains of Orion? Can *you* direct the signs of the Zodiac, or guide the constellations of the Bear? Can *you* control the skies? Can *you* prescribe their sway over the earth?” (Verses 31-33.)

GOD does all these things. How MIGHTY is God! And how *little*, how *weak*, how *impotent* and *insignificant* is man—yes, even the most righteous man, Job! How Job must have begun to shrivel up in his own estimation! Smaller and smaller Job shrank, as God continued. Job didn’t seem too important, now!

“Who then,” God is not through yet — “is able to stand before ME? Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? *Whatsoever is under the whole heaven IS MINE . . .*” (Job 41:10, 11, A.V.). And so God continued to bring down Job’s self-righteous importance — and to show the unmatched, awesome MAGNITUDE of God, through four whole chapters, before He finished.

And by the time God finished, Job’s estimation of *himself* was exactly *nil*. All through his conversation with his three friends, Job stoutly maintained *his own righteousness*—his *self-importance*! Even though Satan had taken away his wealth, his children — even though reduced to a pitiful sight, covered with nauseating boils — Job’s *own righteousness* he stoutly maintained!

Job was able to maintain his case against Satan — against his friends. But now he could not answer GOD! Job’s trouble was not what he had *done*, but what he *was* — SELF-RIGHTEOUS! The *self* in Job had never died!

In just 5 verses of Job’s conversation, he used the personal pronoun 15 times (Job 27:2-6); and in the 29th chapter alone, he used it 50 times!

Now, for the first time, he began to realize the TRUTH — he began to catch a vision of GOD!

The Lesson Learned!

“Then Job answered the Eternal, and said,

“I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. I thoughtlessly confused the issues; I spoke without intelligence, of wonders far beyond my ken. . . . I had heard of thee by hearsay, but *now mine eyes have seen thee*, wherefore I ABHOR MYSELF, and REPENT in dust and ashes” (Job 42:1-3, 5-6 A.V. and Moffatt).

That was Job’s SURRENDER to Almighty God, a surrender every human must make before he can be converted — before God’s PURPOSE in him can be fulfilled! A man may be naturally GOOD — but even the *self-righteousness* of a Job, God says, is like a filthy rag to Him! The only righteousness that is really good is the righteousness of GOD, imparted to us BY FAITH!

Job at last had learned his lesson! Just human goodness is not enough. GOD is all in all. And the only goodness that is good is *God’s own goodness*, imparted, through God’s Holy Spirit, *within us*! All true righteousness comes from GOD.

ALL humans have this great lesson to learn. It’s the *one supreme lesson of life*! To learn it, and conform to it, is the PURPOSE of human existence!

Job’s calamity and great suffering proved a great blessing to him, in the end! Actually, great good, double prosperity, and eternal happiness, came of it! For, after he repented, and came to really *know God*, he was given another seven sons and three daughters, and *twice* the material possessions he had had before!

“So the Eternal blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning,” it is written (Job 42:12, A.V.). And verse 11 speaks of “*all the evil that the Eternal had brought upon him.*”

Satan Never Altered GOD’S PURPOSE

So notice this! Satan has never upset God’s program — *never* altered God’s purpose! In Job 42:2, the alternate marginal translation of the original inspired Hebrew words is: “*no purpose of thine can be restrained.*”

Almighty God is SUPREME in the universe! Supreme not only in love, and in power — but in WISDOM! There is divine WISDOM in God’s permitting

Satan to afflict Job. Out of all this experience of suffering, Job was humbled, his ego deflated, his self-pride removed. It *hurt* to have these things torn out of his character — Job suffered — even as you and I suffer, today! But he was brought to *repentance*, surrender to GOD, dependence upon GOD, a filling of God’s Spirit, without which he never could have known real happiness, never could have gained eternal LIFE!

All Job originally had was material wealth and possessions, and more *human* righteousness! Now Job had double the material possessions — but infinitely greater, he now had the supreme security of the faith of God, and that true source of happiness, reliance upon the Supreme One and the indwelling of all His attributes! God’s Spirit in us is the only thing that will satisfy the heart-hunger — the *only* thing that can warm, fill, and energize with happiness and joy the human soul!

The True ANSWER to Our Questions!

Now we are ready to see, and to UNDERSTAND, the true answer to our questions!

The real answer was brought out by Job during his conversation, even as it is illustrated by the experience of his life.

“If a man die, *shall he live again?*” asked Job (Job 14:14).

And the answer is the answer to all our questions! Here it is:

“All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: *thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands*”!

The part of what Job said that is most often carelessly overlooked is the part that answers the questions of this article! *Notice it again!*

“*Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands*”!

STUDY THAT! Job knew he was merely the *work of God’s Hands*! Merely a clay model, which God, the Master Potter, was to mold and fashion and reshape. Let Isaiah explain it: “WE are all as an unclean thing, and *all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*; and we all do fade as a leaf; and *our iniquities*, like the wind, have taken us away. . . . But now, O ETERNAL, thou

art OUR FATHER; *we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand*" (Isaiah 64:6-8).

Our own righteousness will not save us. We must REPENT, surrender unconditionally to GOD, come to Him through Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, and then God PROMISES to beget us with His Holy Spirit — actually put HIS SPIRIT *within us*. His Spirit is His very LIFE — His Love, His understanding and wisdom, His power, His faith, His righteousness. *We drink in*, through His Spirit, HIS NATURE AND HIS CHARACTER.

Through a long life of Christian liv-

ing — of *overcoming* self, of growing spiritually, through the very power of GOD imparted to us, we develop spiritually ready to be finally BORN OF GOD — by a resurrection, or instantaneous conversion from mortal to immortal — from human to divine — from weakness to power — from dishonor to GLORY!

And what about all these human sufferings which work character within us?

The Apostle Paul settled that: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the GLORY which shall be

revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the SONS OF GOD" (Rom. 8:18-19). □

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