

The Bible & Suffering

Our focus is to look at what the Bible says about (this week) suffering. We shall be looking at this topic in two halves: first, looking into what the Bible says about suffering generally (big picture), and second, looking at what the Bible says about suffering in our lives (personally).

Big Picture

There are different causes and types of suffering.

- Some suffering is a result of **divine command** (like the punishment for wrong-doing);
- some is a result of **divine permission** (like Job);
- some is a result of **sin** (like Cain and Abel); and
- some is a result of **persecution**.

As a side note:

Persecution is always viewed by the Bible as a blessing:

- Matt 5:11-12 You are blessed, so rejoice.
- 1 Peter :12-16 Glorify God with it.

We also need to note that there are contrasting views of God's response to suffering: in Deuteronomy 28 we see a clear picture of "good" coming to those who are obedient and "bad" to those who are disobedient; yet in Job we see God allowing the suffering almost as a test of obedience (Job 1:8-12). God is also pictured as the healer of sickness and disease (Ex 23:25, Ps 103:3).

In the New Testament we also need to recognise the tension between Jesus the Healer, and the endurance and perseverance of those who are His disciples (is this endurance just through persecution and opposition or does it apply to sickness as well?). Jesus told the disciples to heal the sick as a sign of the Kingdom of God (Luke 12:9) and yet He warned that believers will need to endure hardships and persecution (Matt 24:9-14). God is described to us the one who "comforts us in affliction" (2 Cor 1:4).

The Bible also makes clear that suffering has a purpose. Jesus is described as learning obedience through suffering (Heb 5:8).

So what can we learn?

For the rest of this session we are going to look at the Bible's teaching on how we handle and respond to suffering.

- **2 Corinthians 4:7-18** tells us that our focus is important (v18), and points us to a future end goal.
- **Romans 5:35** tells us that what is produced in us is significant.
- **James 1:2** tells us that how we "count" things is important. Do we consider them constructive or destructive?
- **2 Corinthians 12:8-10** tells us that our ability is not as important as God's grace.
- **Romans 8:18** tells us that we need to be careful what we value.
- **1 Peter 1:6-7** tells us that our faith can be proved real.

Conclusion

1. God is God - Job 42:1-6
2. You have a future – John 14:1-6
3. You are not alone – John 14:15-18