

SUFFERING IN WISDOM LITERATURE

THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST

THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN SUFFERING

The question about suffering in all of wisdom literature is: how can God who is omnipotent and good allow the faithful to suffer and the wicked to prosper?

THE BOOK OF JOB

The main notions of sufferings in wisdom literature are found in the book of Job. Job was a righteous person. Job's questions are from his personal experience of the suffering of the innocent. The book of Job gives three ideas on suffering:

- ✓ *There is one God who governs all things according to his will.*
- ✓ *God is good and loving*
- ✓ *Human suffering is a reality.*

Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar assume that the faithful prosper materially while the unfaithful suffer afflictions. They believed that Job's afflictions are due to some of his unrepentant sin in the past. God punishing people for specific sins and then blessing the faithful is a common teaching in the Bible. In contrast, Job's faith grows even though the suffering is real and hard.

HUMAN SUFFERING AND PLAN OF GOD

What does God expect from human beings when He allows some sufferings? The answer is in the book of Job. The Accuser predicted that Job would curse God when he lost everything. But Job did the opposite and blessed God when God seemed to be cursing him. Wisdom literature teaches that when we find ourselves in Job-like suffering, what God wants from us is to hold on to our relationship with him and not give up on him, even though it is human to question God in moments of suffering.

WHY GOD ALLOWS SUFFERING?

There is no one uniform message in wisdom literature regarding human suffering that can be applied to all people at all times. The basic notions of wisdom literature regarding this question are:

- *Suffering comes from God's just wrath for the sake of punishment given to sinners/unbelievers.*
- *Suffering comes from God's undeserved love for the benefit of the sufferer and others, a benefit given to repentant sinners/believers.*
- *God's wrath serves his mercy. God's ultimate purpose is to have mercy, to bring the recipient closer to himself.*

SUFFERING OF JESUS

Suffering is a perennial question and experience every human being faces on earth in one form or the other. The wisdom books in the Bible speak and explain this in a beautiful manner. The question of human, especially innocent suffering and the question of divine silence in such situations have been expressed in the book of Job. But his questions and cry of affliction is answered in the life of Jesus, showing with his passion, death and resurrection that every pain and suffering has a redemptive meaning. His suffering was redemptive. The ways in which the book of Job portrays and interprets suffering in God's economy anticipate and pre-figure the Lord Jesus.

- *If Job was blameless and upright in his relationship with God, Jesus was even more so.*
- *If Job innocently suffered the wrath of God in order to further God's purposes and defeat the schemes of the Accuser, Jesus did even more so.*
- *If Job shows us trust in God in inexplicable suffering, Jesus shows us the same in his prayer in garden.*

The Gospels shows us, Jesus a greater Job, who suffered even more deeply than Job in whom God's purposes were furthered even more deeply, who holds our hand and leads us in our own sufferings through his own pain.