

Why Suffering?

Why suffering? Why does it exist? What is its purpose (if any)? How can I endure it? Or, can I endure it at all? These are questions that most, if not every person, who has ever lived, and will live, has either thought or outright asked, because no one on earth is a stranger to suffering. These questions are not easy to answer, and some may not like, or be satisfied with, the answers we provide. But the answers, like suffering itself, are ours to bear, whether we like them or not. No one wants to go through trials. And no one wants to suffer. However, those of us in the faith know we will suffer, as it was plainly declared to us by our Master Yahshua, in John 16:33 (The *New American Standard* is used throughout):

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

Here, Yahshua told us that while we are in the world, we will have tribulation. Tribulation encompasses many troubling experiences. The word comes from *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, G2347, *thlipsis* which means pressure, affliction, anguish, burdened, persecution, trouble.

The Apostle Paul encouraged those to whom he had preached to continue in the faith, saying, that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of Elohim” (Acts 14:22).

Contrary to popular belief, the way of righteousness and following Messiah is not easy. It is a road filled with many trials and tests, many of which are painful. The notion that a life transformed by faith is going to be sunshine and roses is a deception. Continuing steadfastly in the faith is certain to supply the trying of our faith, because for one thing, trials work patience in our lives; and patience, experience; and experience, hope that we might become perfect and whole, wanting nothing (James 1:3-4; Rom. 5:3-4).

Suffering Patiently: A Key to the Kingdom

Our Master suffered for us and left us an example to which we have been called to follow:

For you have been called for this purpose, since Messiah also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth, 1 Peter 2:21-22. And we will walk the same way He walked (1 John 2:6).

He said, “The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the servant above his master. It is enough that he be as his teacher, and the servant as his master ...” (Matt. 10:24-25).

Yahshua’s example of suffering and giving His life for us exemplifies the sacrifice and love we should supply to our brothers and sisters in the faith and even, to our family members. In speaking to His disciples, Yahshua said,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another ... This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends, John 13:34-35, 15:12-13.

Laying down one’s life for another is the greatest form of love, and may also be the greatest form of suffering. The Apostle Paul commanded, furthermore, that husbands love their wives even as Messiah loved His Body, the Assemblies ... nourishing and cherishing their wives, bringing them into the knowledge and maturity of the Sovereign Savior, Yahshua.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Messiah also loved the Assembly and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the Assembly in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless, Ephesians 5:25-27.

Sacrificial love of this sort, is seldom seen today. The Apostle Paul observes that for a righteous person, few would die (Rom. 5:7). Among brothers and sisters in the Assembly, we must be willing to suffer, even to lay down our lives, one for another. For there is no greater love that we could have, and no greater witness to the world, than to manifest ourselves as Yahshua's disciples by the sacrificial love that we have for each other (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16).

Yahshua, our Master, endured much suffering, and we must also endure suffering to enter into eternal life. For though one should be hated by all for His Name's sake, it is he who endures to the end that shall be saved (Matt. 10:22). He who endures and overcomes

- will not be hurt by the second death (Rev. 2:11)
- will be granted to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of Elohim (Rev. 2:7)
- will be clothed in white garments, his name confessed before Yahweh and His angels (Rev. 3:5).

He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Assemblies, Revelation 3:6.

Enduring Suffering: The Mark of the Disciple

Suffering is a continuing theme in Scripture and which we must endure to the end of our mortal lives to be saved. The Scripture suggests that we should not be disheartened by our sufferings. In the book of Acts, when the Apostles were reprimanded by the Sanhedrin for proclaiming the Name of Yahshua (Acts 4:17), they returned to the Assembly and reported everything that had been said to them by the chief priests and elders. Upon hearing this, the brethren were encouraged to speak even more boldly (Acts 4:31).

Afterward, the Apostles were flogged for speaking about the things they had seen and heard. However, they did not complain about their suffering. Instead, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer for their Master. This is recorded in Acts 5:40-41.

How were they able to rejoice in suffering? They were prepared and had been told they would suffer for His Name:

But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My Name's sake, Luke 21:12.

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, "A slave is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My Name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me, John 15:18-21.

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time comes, that whosoever kills you will think that he does Elohim service. And these things will they do to you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me, John 16:2-3.

The Apostles knew that in speaking the truth, the world would hate them, persecute them, and even kill them. The Messiah warned them of this. But being persecuted and suffering only affirmed their faith, and manifested they were true disciples of the Master. Like their Master, they suffered. And just as Yahshua had told them, it was enough for them to be like their Master (Matt. 10:25).

We, too, should approach suffering with the same mindset. We can't escape suffering; we have been called to it and to persevere, rejoicing in hope that our endurance has made us accepted in the Beloved (Rom. 12:12).

Rejoicing in Suffering

Besides all this, we don't gain anything by complaining about our sufferings. Complaining won't relieve us of suffering, but it will give occasion to Satan to tempt us to yield to our fleshly passions and give place to sin. Why not turn our affliction into an opportunity to witness to others by doing the unexpected: Exulting in our tribulation?

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with Elohim through our Master Yahshua Messiah, through Whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of Elohim. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, Romans 5:1-3.

Rejoicing in tribulation not only bears witness to our faith, but also shows Whom we follow. This sets us apart from the rest of the world and assures us that we shall not receive the plagues inflicted by Father Yahweh, but that He will welcome us (Rev. 18:4; 2 Cor. 6:17). Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our Elohim and the Father is this: that we keep ourselves unstained by the world; for whoever is a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of Yahweh (James 1:27, 4:4).

Separated from the world, empowers us to become, by our good works, a light to the world and give occasion of their report that Yahweh is in us (1 Cor. 14:25), that He might be glorified (Matt. 5:16). After all, that is one of the reasons for being set apart. Who wouldn't want to appear as a wonder to many? (Psa. 71:7). Hopefully, those who sit in darkness will come to Yahweh, inspired by the Light shown in our set-apart behavior.

A second reason the Apostles could rejoice in suffering is because, like Yahshua, they were looking forward to the promises set before them and the glory of the age to come. For having their eyes fixed on Yahshua, the Author and Perfecter of their faith, and for the joy set before them, they could endure tribulation, despising its shame (Heb. 12:2) and look forward to sitting with Yahshua in His throne, as he was set down in His Father's throne (Rev. 3:21). And so, if we are to be imitators of Messiah, we should do the same (1 Cor. 11:1).

Paul declared he imitated Messiah and told us to do the same. If Messiah was able to not only overcome but also find comfort in His sufferings, even joy for the promises set before Him, should we not do the same? Even Moses did not regard the pleasures and wealth of this world as worth more than the joy of anticipating the promises set before him, and because of this, he, too, endured much suffering. He endured anger, temptation, strife, grumblings, complaints, rebellion, threats, the wilderness, etc. He endured it all for the joy set before him, just as Messiah Yahshua did.

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of Elohim than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Messiah greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him Who is unseen, Hebrews 11:24-27.

We also have promises set before us, and regard the troubles of this present time as but a light affliction and for a moment, not worthy to be compared with the glory that should afterward be revealed in us, which will empower us to hold fast to the end (2 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 8:18). Indeed, Yahweh has prepared for those who love Him, "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man ..." (1 Cor. 2:9). So, we conclude, *Blessed is*

a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which Yahweh has promised to those who love Him, James 1:12.

We have something to look forward to – the many promised blessings reserved for those who suffer and endure, for both His and His Father’s Name. In the famed Sermon on the Mount, Yahshua severally declared to His audience:

- *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;*
- *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted;*
- *Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth;*
- *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied;*
- *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy;*
- *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see Elohim;*
- *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of Elohim;*
- *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;*
- *Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me;*
- *Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets, Matthew 5:3-11; Luke 6:23.*

We see from our Master Yahshua’s words and His example, that those who suffer for the sake of righteousness are greatly blessed. The Apostle Peter affirms that because of the blessings we will gain, we should not be disturbed:

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, 1 Peter 3:14.

The adversary and his servants – principalities and powers, spiritual wickedness in high places and the rulers of the darkness of this world, and his human agents yielded to his subtlety and cunning – think that by inflicting upon us suffering, they are doing us harm. But we will incur harm if we don’t endure, and rejoice with the endurance. So, the next time you suffer, rejoice in it. Be confident in knowing that having endured the adversity, you will receive blessings beyond measure – some in this life, but much more abundantly in the age to come!

To reiterate, we should rather rejoice in suffering and look forward to the promises set before us, appreciating that contrary to how we feel, there is no trial but what is common to all men. We should rejoice that Yahweh is faithful not to permit our suffering to go beyond our ability to bear it but will, with the affliction, make a way of escape that we might, with the trial, bear it (1 Cor. 10:13).

Suffering, Like Misery, Loves Company

Many times, we feel alone when we suffer. We think we are the only ones who know what we are going through and that no one understands or appreciates our pain. We, as humans, are often self-centered. Our suffering becomes all about us, our pain, our struggles. We’ll even present with a sad countenance and disfigure our face, to capture other’s notice. Or, we’ll drag others down. If we’re not happy, no one can be. The old saying, “misery loves company,” becomes as real as it sounds.

But this is not how it should be. We should not present ourselves with a sad countenance, disfiguring our faces, or dragging others down because we feel bad. We shouldn’t let our suffering

disregard the needs of others while we sit on our pity pot or go on a pout, exalting our own needs above theirs. Such an attitude violates the second greatest commandment:

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). Love, “there is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:31).

Indeed, from the breadth of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament), we are given to understand that Yahweh, our Heavenly Father, puts more emphasis on loving our fellow man than on loving Him. In fact, in 1 John 4:20-21, the writer says, *If a man say, “I love Elohim, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love Elohim whom he has not seen.” And we have this commandment from Him, “That he who loves Elohim love his brother also.”*

Yahshua told us that if our brother has something against us while on our way to give an offering to Yahweh, we are to suspend presenting our offering and first be reconciled with our brother (Matt. 5:23-24).

Yahweh emphasizes the importance of loving others above ourselves, as we are representatives of His set-apart nature on earth. Our ability to love our fellow beings is a reflection of our love for Yahweh, for every individual has been made in His image, bearing the impress of Yahweh's signature within them. Just like every piece of art bears the unique fingerprint of the artist, each person is unique, with their own characteristics that reflect the one who created them.

It is said that to hate your fellow man is to hate Yahweh, and to love them is to love Yahweh. Therefore, the next time you find yourself struggling with suffering, remember that bringing others down is only a way to exalt yourself. Yahweh still resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).

To reiterate, we should find joy in our sufferings and remain hopeful for the promises that lie ahead of us. Even though it may seem like our struggles are unique, they are actually shared by others. Therefore, we should rejoice in the fact that Yahweh is faithful and will not allow us to suffer beyond our ability to handle it. He will provide us with a way to overcome our challenges so that we can bear them and grow from them (1 Cor. 10:13).

Prime Examples of Sufferers

The Scriptures are replete with mentioning many who suffered. Joseph was one such individual who suffered affliction. The favorite of Jacob's (*Ya'akov*) twelve sons, he had dreams from Yahweh that foretold a future time in which his brothers would bow to him (Gen. 37:5-11). These dreams infuriated them.

Once, seeing him approach from a distance, they thought to slay him and afterward, represent him to their father, as slain by a wild beast (Gen. 37:18-33). But a passing trade caravan of Ishmaelites supplied them with another idea: Why not sell him as a slave?

In Egypt, he became indentured to Potiphar whose wife, through cunning and subtlety, sought to tempt him to compromise his heart's integrity (Gen. 39:7-18). Subsequently, he was incarcerated in prison, but Yahweh made him prosper (Gen. 39:21-23). His ability, which came from Heaven to interpret dreams, facilitated his release to stand before the pharaoh whose troubled musings, none of all the sorcerers of Egypt were able to render a meaning (Gen. 41:1-8). So impressed was the monarch, that he appointed Joseph as viceroy to oversee the storage of grain during the years of plenty, and its distribution in the following years of famine (Gen. 41:25-44).

Arrest, incarceration, elevation to authority – all this, was Yahweh's plan to reconcile him with his brothers and restore him to his aged father, Jacob. Again, we see those sent by Yahweh seem to suffer for righteousness, but we know as our Master Yahshua told us that those who suffer for

righteousness' sake are blessed for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Joseph came to understand it was all part of Yahweh's plan. We should consider that perhaps our suffering is for a greater purpose, as well.

Another is the prophet, Jeremiah. His own people (from his hometown) sought to slay him and threatened to kill him (Jer. 20:1-2) if he spoke the Word of Yahweh to them.

Therefore, this is what Yahweh says concerning the people of Anathoth, who are seeking your life, saying: "Do not prophesy in the Name of Yahweh, so that you do not die by our hand," Jeremiah 11:21.

Jeremiah, known as the weeping prophet, suffered greatly. He was falsely accused, arrested, beaten, and put into stocks. He was then thrown into a dry cistern to die (Jer. 27:13-38:6). Jeremiah not only suffered physically but also endured mental anguish as he tried to faithfully minister Yahweh's Word to a people who had asked him to intercede with Yahweh for guidance (Jer. 42:2-3). But when he returned with Yahweh's will, they rejected his advice and criticized him (Jer. 43:3-4). At one point, Jeremiah became discouraged and decided not to speak Yahweh's Name anymore. However, he couldn't help but speak what he had heard from on high because Yahweh's Word was shut up in his bones. Like the apostles standing before the Sanhedrin, he was weary with forbearing.

In the book of Daniel, we read about the story of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who were also known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They refused to bow down and worship any other god except Yahweh. This was in defiance of King Nebuchadnezzar's decree, which mandated that whenever the instruments of music were played, everyone in the empire had to bow down before an image of gold. Failure to comply with this order would result in being thrown into a fiery furnace. (Daniel 3:5-6)

Knowing the consequence for disobedience, nevertheless, for righteousness' sake, these three declined the kings' command to bow down to the image, saying, "We are not careful to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our Elohim Whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your Elohim, nor worship the golden image which you have set up" (Dan. 3:16-18).

They stood firm in faith believing that Yahweh was able to save them, but even if He didn't, they were content to die in their integrity. This account is one of the most amazing testimonies of Yahweh's grace and salvation to those who hold fast to Him. These did not resist being thrown into the fire but willingly put their trust in Yahweh, and Yahweh did save them. Their steadfastness of heart prompted the king to acknowledge Yahweh, and to exalt Him above all the king's pagan deities, as well. Yahweh always seems to have a purpose and benefit for suffering.

A good example of enduring suffering is the Apostle Paul. He faced many difficulties in spreading the Word of Yahweh, especially from his fellow countrymen. This was because he preached to the gentiles who were considered unclean animals by the Jewish orthodoxy of the time. Despite this, Paul continued to preach to them and told them that they were co-heirs to the promises of the Covenant with the Jews. He also acknowledged that the Jews were still advantaged because they were given the Oracles of Yahweh (Rom. 3:1-2). Paul wrote that the adoption, glory, covenants, giving of the Law, service of Yahweh, and promises pertained to the Jews (Rom. 9:4).

Because of his assumed defection from Judaism, he suffered much "... in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys,

in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the Assemblies” (2 Cor. 11:22-28).

The Apostle went through a lot of difficulties and challenges. Not many of us could even begin to list the kind of struggles he faced. However, he taught us that nothing in this life can compare to the blessings that await us in the future (Rom. 8:18). He also believed that if he had to boast about anything, it would be his weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:30). In fact, he found pleasure in his infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses for the sake of the Messiah (2 Cor. 12:10).

He was troubled by his past, realizing that he had not left it behind as he had hoped. He felt deep sorrow and regret for his past actions, which included blasphemy, persecution, and causing harm to others. He had been filled with anger towards followers of the Nazarene sect, and had gone to great lengths to capture and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished or even killed. However, he later underwent a profound transformation and became a devoted follower of the very same faith he once sought to destroy.

Indeed, he was a chosen vessel. However, when he was called out of darkness into the Light, he was made aware of the immense sufferings he would have to endure (Acts 9:15). Similar to the Psalmist who declared, “my sin is ever before me” (Psalm 51:3), Paul’s past sins continued to haunt him. Judaizers attempted to accuse him and undermine his ministry.

Nevertheless, as he was so fervent in his past misdeeds, so was he now more fervent, more zealously affected for the future in the Spirit. He was manifesting himself as more than a conqueror in Messiah, more than an overcomer.

Truly, there are many examples of faith – e.g., the personages of Hebrews, Chapter 11 – many people who suffered for the sake of righteousness and many of whom the world is unworthy. But can we say that of ourselves? Suffering happens to all people, but heroes of faith submitted to their trials and endured them. We, too, can and must do the same, as only those who endure to the end shall be saved.

All people will and have suffered, and we have examined but four from the Biblical narrative. Yet there is One more Whom Yahweh was pleased to bruise, to put to grief, and to make His soul an offering for sin (Isa. 53:10) — His Dear Son, our Master Yahshua.

A Perfect Sufferer

Forty days in the wilderness, tempted of the devil and afterward, sorely tried whether or not He would succumb and yield to the lust of the flesh; to the lust of the eyes; to the pride of life (1 John 2:16). The Scripture affirms that we have a High Priest Who knows our struggles and Who can sympathize with our weakness, because He was in all points tried as we, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). We can take comfort in that He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (Heb. 2:18).

We are grateful that His life was a perfect sacrifice, without blemish, and a perfect atonement for our sin. His life is exemplary to us, so we look to His life - what He went through and how He endured - to find the answer to the question, "What would Yahshua do?" or rather, and more accurately phrased, "What did Yahshua do?"

In order to follow our Master's example, it's important to understand how He overcame His trials instead of giving in to temptation. So, how did He do it? We need to know the process so that we can handle suffering properly as well. The answer can be found in Matthew 4:1-10.

In the Evangel account of Matthew, Chapter 4, and its parallel in Luke, Chapter 4, Yahshua gives us an example on how to overcome sinful temptations. He cited Scripture in order to resist the evil thoughts and temptations Satan was trying to place in His mind. We also must do the same. The devil is a liar. Scripture is Truth. And the only way to overcome a lie is with the Truth. We are sanctified by His Word, and His Word is Truth (John 17:17). Just as Our Master resisted temptation, we can, and must.

Yahshua was falsely accused of multiple things, many times. For example: He was accused of

- having a demon (Matt. 9:34; John 7:20, 8:48, 10:20);
- being a gluttonous man and a drunkard; a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 11:18-19; Luke 15:1-2, 19:7);
- perverting the nation, forbidding to pay tribute (Luke 23:2);
- breaking the Sabbath (Mark 3:2; Luke 13:14; John 5:8-16, 9:16); and,
- making Himself equal with Yahweh (John 5:18).

The Apostle Peter wrote, *For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward Yahweh endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it if, when you are buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently? But if when you do well, and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with Elohim,* 1 Peter 2:19-20.

Those who opposed Yahshua's Message were relentless in their attacks. Yet, He continued in love, humility, and gentleness, and as his audiences were able to hear it, speaking the Truth to the common people who received Him gladly.

When we are falsely accused and reviled, should we respond in kind? We should not, as responding with aggression only escalates the situation. Instead, we should respond to anger and false accusations with calmness, like extinguishing fire with a cold bucket of water or by simply walking away and letting the situation resolve itself. This should be our approach when dealing with those who are angry with us or who falsely accuse us.

Our Master Yahshua was also falsely accused of breaking the Torah. But whose Torah? Certainly not Yahweh's, as Yahshua always did those things that pleased His Father (John 8:29). We can be sure that this false accusation, which came from some, was probably the most common, as there were many laws at this time that were not from Yahweh but which were held in the same esteem as Yahweh's Torah.

Man-made laws had overtaken Yahweh's Law as religious rules at this time. They had been set on a high pedestal. Yahshua had many confrontations with the Pharisees over their oral tradition, in which they covered up the Oracles. These Pharisaic traditions had made the Commandments of Yahweh of none effect (Matt. 15:6). Yahshua did not observe these traditions and the Pharisees and the rulers of the Jews seized the occasion to falsely accusing Him as a Sabbath breaker. Their observance of Sabbath, for example, was fraught with man-made rules.

Concerning Yahshua's Sabbath observance, Yahshua's answer to some who would put forth the finger toward Him in judgment, ought to serve as the last word on the matter. Because so many of His miracles of healing occurred on the Sabbath – even within the synagogues of Jewry – He was watched closely by His adversaries, to see if He would heal on the Sabbath. Once, one of their own had challenged Him before the assembly, saying, “There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day” (Luke 13:14).

The Master replied, “You hypocrite, does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead him away to water? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” (Luke 13:15). Well, might He have replied right here, as He had at another time, and in another synagogue, saying, “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?” (Mark 3:4) Wisely, the rulers of that synagogue held their peace as they could say nothing about refraining from doing good on the Sabbath.

So, while it may seem Yahshua was breaking the Sabbath, He was only transgressing the sabbath of the Pharisees whom He reproved, saying, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not the man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Sovereign also of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28).

Many had heard Him openly defend Yahweh’s Torah (Instructions).

To the multitudes assembled in a mountain, He declared, *Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter shall pass from the Law, until all is accomplished!* Matthew 5:17-18.

Nevertheless, though many had heard these words, yet some still spoke evil of Him if only for reason that what was written might come to pass – “Those who hate Me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; those who would destroy Me are powerful, those who oppose Me with lies ...” (Psa. 69:4).

We’d said earlier that a prophet has no honor in his own country. Aside from suffering false accusations, Yahshua endured revilement from those of His hometown. Early in His ministry, He had come to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Him. And He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

The Spirit of Yahweh is upon Me, because He anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of Yahweh, Luke 4:16-19.

He rolled up the Scroll, returned it to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all the people in the synagogue were intently directed at Him and He begins to say, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:20-21). After hearing His gracious words, the same people wondered about Him and noticed His family and humble status. Filled with rage, they rose up to push Him over the crest of the hill on which their city was built (Luke 4:28-30).

Even though He had done them no wrong, they thought to do wrong to Him.

Even His own brothers would set out to prove the saying that reads, “a brother is born for adversity” (Prov. 17:17).

Preceding a certain Feast of Booths, while he was walking in Galilee (since he was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him), his brothers said to him, "Move on from here and go into Judea, so that your disciples may see the works you are doing. For no one does anything in secret when he is striving to be known publicly. If you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." For even his brothers did not believe in him (John 7:3-4, 6).

If there is anyone in the world we might think would have our back, it’s our family. However, when you walk in righteousness, as our Master did, you may discover that your enemies will be members of your own household (Matt. 10:36).

Aside from some of His family members not believing Him, many of His disciples also abandoned Him because they could not understand His words (John 6:49-66).

The twelve who remained weren't perfect either. After having been complimented by Yahshua with the knowledge given him from Yahweh, that Yahshua was the son of Yahweh, Peter began to rebuke Yahshua for the very reason Yahshua had come.

From that time Yahshua began to point out to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem and to suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and to be killed, and to be raised up on the third day. And yet Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying "Yahweh forbid it, Master! This shall never happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on Yahweh's purposes, but men's," Matthew 16:21-23.

Peter had given in to Satan's will, which caused trouble for Yahshua. However, that was not the end of his disappointments. Later in the Evangel chronicles, it is written that Peter denied knowing the Master three times in the high priest's courtyard. This was despite his earlier pledge that he would never do such a thing. This denial caused Peter even greater grief than his reconciliation with the Master.

It was undoubtedly very painful for Yahshua to experience Judas, someone who had followed Him from the beginning of His ministry, betraying Him for thirty pieces of silver – the price at which He was valued. This act led to the forfeiture of Judas's being and ultimately resulted in his profound sorrow, culminating in his perdition and destruction. The love of money, which is the root of all evil, ensnared Judas and led him into many foolish desires (1 Tim. 6:10).

One man's covetousness supplied another's pain, and at the most trying time in His life, He revealed His humanity as He sought release from the cup from which He was about to drink (Luke 22:42). Yahshua had conflict and struggle like the rest of us, but note well: He prayed! (Luke 22:41).

His suffering intensified before His impalement (nailing to the torture stake). His friends slept during His anguish (Matt. 26:40, 43) and abandoned Him when He was arrested (Matt. 26:56), leaving Him to face the darkness alone.

Just imagine – you've been betrayed with a kiss; your acquaintance denied by one whom you'd called "Friend;" deprived of a night's sleep as you're interrogated by hostile inquisitors, their purpose corroborated by false witnesses whose testimonies were not in agreement; then shuttled from the court of the Sanhedrin, to the Roman governor, to the king of Galilee; mocked, spit upon, pummeled with fists, scourged, and then processed before public view along the Via Dolorosa to Golgoeth, where you're impaled with, and numbered among, two transgressors. There, you're subjected to more taunts and ridicule, before your side is lanced with a spear, and you utter your last words, "It is finished" ... but not before, you acknowledge that in death, even Abba Yahweh has forsaken you.

Yahshua had done nothing to deserve all this, yet He had been born for this purpose and had come into the world for this reason (John 18:37). He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, even shedding blood (Heb. 12:3-4), as a redemptive atonement for the sins of humanity.

Perhaps, in these final moments, He experienced separation from His Father for the first time – indeed, the only time – in all eternity. For the sake of us all, He remained faithful to His end and proved His Father's commendation, "This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Until the very end, He had done all things well, pleasing His Father."

Let's talk about suffering. His didn't end here at the stake. His apparitions to His own were met with fear, skepticism, even doubt. And the past two millennia have witnessed countless times, the species impaling Him afresh and trodding underfoot the blood of their redemption through continuing in sins that so easily beset them.

Nevertheless, by His patient endurance in well doing, loving not His own life unto death, we have hope by His resurrection from the dead, so that we who follow Him faithfully have received promise to rise like He, in His likeness. But the question is, are we willing to follow His example?

For all that will live righteously will suffer (2 Tim. 3:12) and, moreover, will embrace it; endure it; and rejoice in it.

Suffering Builds Character, Teaches Obedience

We have such a great cloud of witnesses of those in the faith before us who endured suffering for the sake of righteousness. They endured because they saw beyond the present moment toward the joy that was set before them: the promise of eternal life to the glory of Yahweh the Father. And have we considered **THE** example of righteousness, Yahshua the Messiah and our Master Who, though He was the Son of Elohim and heir of all things, He learned obedience by those things which He suffered (Heb. 5:8)? In bringing many sons to glory who are also co-heirs with Him (Rom.8:17), we are to arm ourselves to this same purpose. “For he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin’ (1 Pet. 4:1).

Suffering happens and is common to all men. But now the hard question remains. Why suffering?

People suffer in this world, especially those in the faith of Yahshua Messiah. There are many reasons why we suffer in this world, yet principal among all, is that suffering, when endured, builds character.

Character is like a muscle. When great pressure or strain is applied against muscle tissue, the muscle yields to the pressure. But after the muscle rests and heals, it mends stronger and is therefore capable of accepting greater pressure and more strain.

Just as the strength of muscle increases under tension and strain, so suffering that is endured builds character enabling one to affirm, “when I am weak, then am I strong ... I can do all things through Messiah Who strengthens me” (2 Cor. 12:10; Phil. 4:13). In fact, one might conclude as the Apostle Paul, that he’s glad to glory in his infirmities that the power of Yahshua, that the grace of Yahshua, might rest upon him; that His strength might be made perfect in his weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). And suffering’s outcome? That we would become conformed into the image of Yahshua Messiah, our Master (Rom. 8:29).

Spiritual growth occurs when we patiently endure suffering. Conversely, spiritual regression and loss of hope happen when we try to avoid the suffering that is part of Yahweh's plan for us. Seeking to escape suffering goes against the purpose of enduring it.

Suffering often becomes the outcome of having sown the corruption of sin to our flesh, and we will never be able to elude that harvest attributable to what corruptible seed was sown to our flesh (Gal. 6:7-8). Chastening, come of Yahweh for our faults – never joyous, but grievous – and which is not despised, but endured, is necessary to yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Chastening endured is a mark that Yahweh loves us enough to save us from the error of a past life ridden with sin and that we become, therefore, His children. But they which faint under, or who despise His reproof and correction and rebuke, manifest themselves as none of His (Heb. 12:5-11).

Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent, Revelation 3:19. It is the goodness of Yahweh that leads men to repentance, and that often through suffering (Rom. 2:4).

So, we must continue steadfastly, even while suffering. To give up is to surrender hope and, by extension, incur the loss of faith. Faith is the certainty of things hoped for, a proof of things not seen, and without it, it is impossible to please Yahweh (Heb. 11:1, 6).

Current Suffering Incomparable to Future Glories

We may not understand why we suffer at times, and we may never know the specificity of reason, but we must trust Yahweh. Faith trusts that Yahweh knows the end from the beginning and that He has directed our lives through the best course. Always remember, the sufferings of this present time are but a light affliction and for a moment, not worthy to be compared with that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which is working in you, and which should afterward be revealed in you (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17). We may not see it at the time, but everything Yahweh does or allows is for our eternal benefit. Current sufferings are incomparable to future glories. So, take heart, and consider all the suffering He permits us to experience is building our character and preparing us to be worthy of the Kingdom that will soon come.

The Scriptures make it clear that Yahweh loves those whom He disciplines. It is also noteworthy, that the Scriptures compare Yahweh's love to that of our earthly fathers who, for reason of loving their children, measure discipline when discipline is required.

For whom Yahweh loves He disciplines, just as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights. Proverbs 3:12.

So you are to know in your heart that Yahweh your Elohim was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son, Deuteronomy 8:5.

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him. ... Do not withhold discipline from a child; though you strike him with the rod, he will not die ... He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently ... Bruising wounds clean away evil, and blows cleanse the innermost parts ... The rod and a rebuke give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother, Proverbs 13:24, 23:13, 22:15, 20:30, 29:15.

The Efficacy of the Rod

The Scriptures prescribe the use of a rod – H 7626, *shebet* which is rendered, a stick (it can also mean scepter or staff) – for discipline. Some might consider the use of the rod, harsh, even cruel. But crueler still, are parents who do not discipline their child and harsher still, is the hardness of life come to unchecked pride and entitlement than the rod that ought to have been exercised by a loving parent. Many who had not the benefit of the exercise of the rod on their backside while under the tutelage of their parents, learn as adults, that “the way of the transgressor is hard” (Prov. 13:15) and that experience, therefore, is not always the better instructor.

We acknowledge many today have erroneously come to the conclusion that all spanking is abuse. True enough, improper appropriation of the rod – particularly, when a parent is angry or otherwise unable to rule their spirit – is abuse. Some oppose spanking on the premise that it is abusive. Yes, it can be, depending on the disposition of the administrator. But to conclude that all physical discipline is abuse would by extension be calling Yahweh abusive, because He sometimes uses physical discipline to correct us. There is an appointed time for everything (Eccl. 3:1) ... including physical discipline, and a loving parent always administers it at the proper time.

Physical discipline is like a rod or firearm. Prudently used by someone it can be beneficial, but in the wrong hands with the wrong attitude, it can become deadly. It is possible to turn what was purposed by Yahweh – the use of the rod – as a tool to facilitate obedience into an instrument of terror.

Parents may often be heard saying to the child, before the execution of physical discipline, “this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you.” Why? because a child transgressing his parent's

commandment deprives the parent of complimenting or rewarding the child for acceptable behavior and, moreover, may generate the parent feeling he had been lax in training, nurturing, and admonishing the child in the way he should have gone. Loving parents don't want the need to physically discipline their child. But physical discipline is purposed to modify behavior, by purging sin and that, to the eternal benefit of the child that he might share Yahweh's holiness.

Therefore, discipline strengthens the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble and makes straight paths for their feet so that the impaired limb may not be dislocated but rather be healed.

Suffering, Come of Others

Suffering occurs, at times, through no fault of one's own, but because of other people's actions. Sometimes, people do very evil things, and inflict harm upon, and injury to, others because their hearts are set to continually do evil. As it was in the days of Noah, so it is today: "... the wickedness of mankind was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5).

The natural inclination is to render evil for evil, though Yahweh's way is to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). We must always remember no matter what injury someone inflicts upon us, vengeance and recompense belong to Yahweh, and apart from their repentance, He shall surely requite (Deut. 32:35; Jer. 51:56). Instead, bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you (Matt. 5:44), that you may prove yourself to be a son or daughter of your Father Who causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45).

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors, do they not do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Even the Gentiles, do they not do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect, Matthew 5:46-48.

Yahshua said, furthermore: *Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat people the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil people. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful, Luke 6:29-36.*

Easy to do? No, you'll suffer as you lay aside the pride of life that resists deferring to the humility required in doing good without expecting good in return; loving more abundantly, though being less loved in return; spending and being spent, and regarding these as but whole duty and reasonable service toward pleasing Yahweh. It might be helpful, too, remembering that Yahweh had compassion on us when we were ignorant and out of the way (Heb. 5:2); when we were in our most vile state, living but dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1).

If Yahweh had mercy and kindness for us when we had no care or thought for Him, should we not also do the same for others? The answer Scripture gives is, "Yes." Scripture even goes so far as to say if we don't forgive, we will not be forgiven (Matt. 6:14-15).

But Elohim demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Messiah died for us. Romans 5:8.

Therefore, be imitators of Elohim, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Messiah also loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to Yahweh as a fragrant aroma, Ephesians 5:1-2.

For if you forgive other people for their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive other people, then your Father will not forgive your offenses, Matthew 6:14-15.

OUCH! Yahshua holds forgiving others to such a high standard that He plainly tells us if we won't forgive – from the heart (Matt. 18:35) – we should not expect forgiveness. How? like, as far as the east is from the west (Psa. 103:12); like, blotting out their sins as a thick cloud (Isa. 44:22); like, casting all their sins into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19); like, remembering their sin no more (Jer. 31:34).

Suffering for Righteousness' Sake

Have you ever noticed that the more righteous your behavior, the more suffering you experience? When we are doing what's right, Satan is not happy. Remember Job? "Perfect and upright, and one that feared Elohim, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). Sorely tried was he, and yet, he held fast to his integrity while suffering the loss of property and family. No, he wouldn't defer to his wife's urging him to foolishly charge Yahweh and to curse Him.

Satan hates it when we do what Yahweh expects of us, and he wants to hurt us to cause us to think Yahweh is unjust or to lose faith in Yahweh's mercy and in His power to deliver us from all evil. Satan will even present what is forbidden by the Commandment as good, pleasant, and desired (Gen. 3:6) – sin, by any other name. In those moments, we are confronted with the choice of enduring suffering or giving in to the temporary pleasure and indulgence of sin.

It's here, where suffering will reveal our character. Satan is trying to separate you from following Yahweh, so he'll use tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, or whatever so you can respond by proving yourself more than a conqueror, more than an overcomer. Being "fully persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate *you* from the love of Yahweh, which is in Messiah Yahshua our Sovereign" (Rom. 8:35-30). Indeed, the only thing capable of separating us from Yahweh is sin, as it is written:

But your iniquities have separated between you and your Elohim, and your sins have [His] face from you that He will not hear, Isaiah 59:2.

Satan sees you as a threat to him, otherwise he wouldn't care so much. So, he is focused on trying to steal back what he has lost to Yahweh. However, if you continue to resist him, he will flee from you (James 4:7).

Nurturing confidence that your righteous walk is pleasing to Yahweh and displeasing to the adversary, is a good motivation to keep walking forward. Remember always, Lot's wife how that she looked back (Luke 17:32); or the sower, how that he looked back after setting his hand to the plow (Luke 9:62), and both were unworthy of Yahweh's Kingdom.

We must remember we have been called from darkness to Light (1 Pet. 2:9) and passed from death to Life (John 5:24) and that what lay behind us, is only darkness and death. Walk toward the Light, and you'll be in the Light (1 John 1:7).

Yahweh, Evil for Allowing Suffering?

Yet, would some protest. They would argue that suffering is unjustifiable. And that Yahweh is evil for allowing suffering.

At this point, a brief digression is necessary. Arguments made protesting Yahweh is evil for allowing suffering, fall short for several reasons. Usually posited by the atheist or the agnostic, they assume a moral high ground, but without acknowledging a Solid Foundation (Yahweh). These would eliminate a Higher Authority (Yahweh) than mankind as they propose an “objective morality” that defines wrong as wrong, and what’s wrong has always been and will continue to be, wrong. But how can they establish what’s wrong as a precedent without acknowledging the Standard of Determination (Yahweh)? Morals are not physical concepts bound to the physical world. What’s moral first requires a Higher Mind and Intellect (Yahweh), a Higher Authority and Creator (Yahweh) than mankind, to set them into place – a Mind and Intellect that surpasses what’s physical.

A second response is “societal morality” which claims a standard superior to Yahweh. Societal morality permits a community, in part or in whole, to decide what is right or wrong. Like pure democracy by which the mob rules, morality is fluid and inconsistent and can change upon the whims of the people – that is, whether something is best for the community’s prosperity. But something isn’t right or wrong just because a majority think that something isn’t right or wrong.

For example, what if a community determines murder is actually good? One only needs to look back no further than 80 years, when a majority in Germany agreed with Adolf Hitler’s implementation of “the Final Solution” which resulted in more than 6.5 million persons being extirpated (exterminated), simply because they didn’t fit the profile of the Aryan race and were blamed for a society’s economic disparity. From an economic view, who could argue that aborting more than 70,000,000 prospective contributors to a society’s gross domestic product and increasing a government’s revenue stream through taxation has been good for society? These holocausts are reasons sufficient to decry trusting a community or society the determination of what’s right and what’s wrong.

Moral relativism, too, would remove Yahweh from His position as the Final, Absolute Authority on what constitutes right and wrong. Moral relativism has gained ground in contemporary society. It denies a communal moral standard altogether, in favor of leaving to every individual the decision of what’s right and wrong. Moral relativism says, “That may be right for you, but it’s not right for me.” Moral relativism would say, on the one hand, that $1+1=2$; and on the other, $1+1=3$. Obviously, both can’t be right.

Moral relativism equates opinion with truth. But truth cannot be reduced to what’s relative, because if it was to become so, then it would produce confusion as to what is, and what is not, acceptable behavior. Those who believe in relativism believe that there are not absolutes and thus, make their position to become. This would be in legal terms, incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial and, moreover, irrational, illogical, and dishonest. Perhaps, however, the one good outcome moral relativism has produced, is that it illuminates Morality and Truth as synonymous which is exactly what the Bible severally declares:

In those days [there was] no king in Israel; everyone did [what was right] in his own eyes, Judges 17:6, 21:25.

The way of a fool [is] right in his own eyes: but he that hears counsel [is] wise, Proverbs 12:15.

There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof [are] the ways of death, Proverbs 14:1.

Every way of a man [is] right in his own eyes: but Yahweh ponders the heart, Proverbs 21:2.

[There is] a generation [that are] pure in their own eyes, and [yet] is not washed from their filthiness, Proverbs 30:12.

Morality requires a Creator, specifically Yahweh. Any moral standard that claims superiority but departs from acknowledging Yahweh is borne of self-interest. Seeing Morality as bound in Absolute Truth enables us to understand why Yahweh allows even 'good' people to experience suffering.

They who protest that Yahweh is evil because He permits and does not always intervene in suffering must use the Bible upon which to make their claim because the Bible is the only source from which they could possibly impeach Yahweh's authority. The burden of proof, then, falls upon the antagonist, who will be hard-pressed to impugn Yahweh when so great a cloud of witnesses testifies of His goodness.

These should consider:

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no Elohim." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. Yahweh has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after Elohim. They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one, Psalm 14:1-3.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares Yahweh. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts," Isaiah 55:8-9.

Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting, Psalm 107:1.

"And Yahshua said ... 'No one is good except Yahweh alone'" (Mark 10:18).

The Scriptures are clear that Yahweh is good and that it is we, who are, in fact, wrong and evil. Nevertheless, the testimony of the Scriptures states that its adversaries will continue to assert their moral superiority due to the stubbornness of their hearts.

Suffering: The Product of Sin

Now that we have established Yahweh's goodness and His Moral Superiority, we can move forward in answering the question, "Why does Yahweh allow suffering?"

Principally, because we live in a fallen and imperfect world it should be noted that mankind, and mankind alone, is responsible for this fallen world. When Yahweh made Adam and Eve, He warned them not to eat the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:17). Yet, despite His admonition that disobedience would bring death, Eve, then Adam ate the fruit. Mankind and the earth (ground) have been cursed ever since (Gen. 3:15-20).

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned, Romans 5:12.

Because of this one sin, the world has been suffering ever since. Yet, the earnest expectation of the creature waits, groaning and travailing in pain to be delivered from the bondage of corruption; waiting for the manifestation of the sons of Yahweh. We, too, groan within ourselves, awaiting the adoption, the redemption of our bodies, and Yahweh's manifestation of us in glorious liberty as His sons (Rom. 8:19-23).

Yes, all creation groans waiting for the return to the perfect world that Yahweh originally made, a world in which man can assume his rightful place of subduing and taking dominion over Yahweh's created order. It will be a perfect world where again the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard with the kid, and the calf with the young lion; and their young ones feeding together; and the lion and the ox eating straw; and the sucking child playing on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child ... and these neither hurting nor destroying, as predator to prey any more (Isa. 11:6-9).

But till that time, when Yahshua has put down all rule and all authority and power and all things are subdued under His feet, including the last enemy, death (1 Cor. 15:24-28), Yahweh allows suffering. Why? because through mankind's continuing in sin is being made to eat the fruit of his doings (Isa. 3:10). In working that which is unseemly, he is but receiving that recompense of his error which is due (Rom. 1:27).

Till that time, we hope and cling to the promise of that day when every tear will be wiped away and there will be no more pain, suffering, or sorrow, for these will have passed away, and all things will have become new (Rev. 21:4).

Free Will: The Progenitor of Suffering

Free will, too, cannot be discounted as a forerunner of suffering. It's the freedom to choose whether to love and obey Him or to hate and disobey Him; the freedom to do good and the freedom to do evil. What should be noted, however, is that free will does not mean freedom from consequences. Yahweh wants us to choose the right, and He rewards us for doing the right. But He promises consequences for doing wrong, too. He spoke these words to ancient Israel, and they are as applicable to us:

“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love Yahweh your Elohim, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that Yahweh your Elohim may bless you ... But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other mighty ones and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days ... I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving Yahweh your Elohim, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live ...” (Deut. 30:15-21).

Yahweh gives to every man a conscience to discern good and evil. He will not otherwise intervene in the expression of our free will to bring harm to ourselves, or even to others. All things are naked and opened before His judgment, however. Whether in this time, or later, everyone will answer for their deeds – whether good or evil, concealed or revealed – the books will be opened, and every thought, word, and deed, judged. And though judgment may not be speedily executed, that doesn't mean it never will be.

Yahweh takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (the consequence of willingly continuing in sin) whom He urges to repent and live (Ezek. 18:32, 33:11). And so, because Yahweh delights in bestowing mercy, judgment may be deferred or suspended for reason of opportunity being given for contrite repentance and confession. Truly, “Know therefore that Elohim exacts of you less than your iniquity deserves” (Job 11:6).

He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, [so] great is His mercy toward them that fear Him ... Like as a father pities [his] children, [so] Yahweh pities them that fear Him, Psalm 103:10-11, 13.

And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that Thou our Elohim hast punished us less than our iniquities [deserve,] and has given [us] such deliverance as this; should we again break Your commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? Would You not be angry with us till You had consumed us, so that [there should be] no remnant nor escaping? Ezra 9:13-14.

Such is Yahweh's longsuffering and mercy. Is it not a good thing that Yahweh isn't wiping people out left and right for committing sins, as He did in Noah's day (Gen. 6:13)? Isn't that what

we deserve? So, how could we be mad at a Merciful Mighty One when the Scriptures are clear that the soul that sins shall die (Ezek. 18:20)? Is it not also clear, that *when a man's ways please Yahweh, He makes even His enemies to be at peace with him*, Proverbs 16:7.

People complain, that Yahweh, allows evil and its consequence of suffering, yet when He does make room for judgment for evil, like destroying terrestrial life with a great flood, raining fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and extirpating Canaanites by the hand of Israel, people complain that His ways are not right and that He is unjust for doing these things. But what if He were to ask them, "Are not your ways right?" (Ezek. 18:25).

When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, and dies in them; for his iniquity that he has done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turns away from his wickedness that he had committed, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considers, and turns away from all his transgressions that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die, Ezekiel 18:26-29.

So, again, He asks, "Are not My ways right? Are not your ways wrong?" (Ezek. 18:29).

Instead, of questioning why Yahweh permits sin and suffering, a better query would be, "Why does He yet extend mercy and not deal with us according to our sins?"

The answers are found in Scripture, and spelled in one word: **LOVE**.

For Elohim so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, not to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16-17).

And though we were helpless, impious, and sinners. Yahshua was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, chastised for our peace, incurred stripes for our healing, and then He yielded Himself to the torture stake (Isa. 53:5).

Wisdom + the Fear of Yahweh = A Life, Well-Lived

Lastly, we must ask: "What do I do with suffering, and how can I live a good life in the fear of Yahweh?"

To answer this question, we must look at what is known as the wisdom literature of Scripture – specifically, the books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. When read together in this order, these three books convey a message that explains how to live a good life with wisdom, and in the fear of Yahweh, even in the midst of suffering. So, we begin with This Word:

When a man's ways please Yahweh, He makes even His enemies to be at peace with him, Proverbs 16:7.

Wisdom proceeds from Yahweh, Whose Word says that if any man lack it, He will give it liberally (James 1:5). And the wisdom that comes of Him is first pure; peaceable; gentle; easily intreated; full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality; and without hypocrisy (James 3:17).

Proverbs opens, declaring men should live by applying wisdom to their lives. The word translated as wisdom is H.2451, *chok-mâh*, not simply intellectual wisdom, but wisdom in exercising morality and discernment in administration.

A paraphrased summary of Proverbs 1:2-7 would read: the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge, given to us

- ✓ to know wisdom and instruction;
- ✓ to discern the sayings of understanding;
- ✓ to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and integrity;
- ✓ to give prudence and discretion to the naïve.

A wise person will hear and increase in learning and a person of understanding will acquire wise counsel, understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. But fools despise wisdom and instruction, saying even, “There is no Elohim” (Psa. 14:1, 53:1).

Scripture explains Itself, making it clear that without acknowledging the fear of Yahweh, you lack real wisdom and are only deceiving yourself.

Mentioned sixteen times in the book of Proverbs alone, we discover that wisdom is part and parcel to the fear of Yahweh. Let’s look at a brief digest –

- ✓ “The fear of Yahweh is to hate evil ...” (Prov. 8:13);
- ✓ “The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom ...” (Prov. 9:1);
- ✓ “The fear of Yahweh prolongs life ...” (Prov. 10:27);
- ✓ “The fear of Yahweh is a fountain of life ...” (Prov. 14:27);
- ✓ “The fear of Yahweh is the instruction for wisdom ...” (Prov. 15:33);
- ✓ “... by the fear of Yahweh one keeps away from evil” (Prov. 16:6);
- ✓ “The reward of humility and the fear of Yahweh are riches, honor, and life” (Prov. 22:4)

The Scriptures have much more to say on the topic of the fear of Yahweh. Together with wisdom, it is essential for living a good life. Living morally right is to be wise and blessed.

Sowing and Reaping and Chance: An Immutable Law?

Do not be deceived, Elohim is not mocked; for whatever a person sows, this he will also reap. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting, Galatians 6:7-8.

Everything a person causes produces an effect, and no book in Scripture more emphasizes the cause and effect of righteousness and wickedness, than the book of Proverbs. For example, in Proverbs, chapter 10, every verse forms a couplet in which one part addresses the plight of the wicked and the other, the blessing of the righteous. Proverbs is replete, contrasting the wicked with the righteous. It shows cause and effect, truth and error, blessing and cursing. Overshadowing all its observations is the benefit of applying wisdom, understanding, prudence, and discernment.

Briefly comprehended, the book of Proverbs presents a cause-and-effect world in which you reap what you sow. But what about those who do good and use wisdom and yet experience bad things? Or what about those who do evil and yet prosper?

The author of Ecclesiastes recognizes these questions and situations. While Proverbs deals more with cause and effect and how the world should work, Ecclesiastes addresses life situations in which reaping is not necessarily what was sown.

Ecclesiastes makes the point that there is nothing new under the sun – *The thing that has been, [is] that which shall be; and that which is done [is] that which shall be done: and [there is] no new thing under the sun. Is there [any] thing whereof it may be said, “See, this [is] new? It has already been of old time, which was before us,” Ecclesiastes 1:9-10.*

Sometimes, Bad Things Just Happen

Depressing, perhaps, but true. Before the fall, everything had a cause and a perfect effect. Entering comes sin, and how things changed with it. At this point, all the earth's foundations began to go out of course. The world and everything in it have been corrupted, and sometimes, bad things just happen. Natural catastrophes like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, floods, etc., can cause suffering, even to ‘good’ people. There is no one good but Yahweh (Mark10:18)

Sometimes, bad things happen to people who may not seem deserving of it. People might attribute this to "an act of God," a glitch in the system, or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In a world that is decaying and moving toward further disorder due to the fall, we have to grapple with what some would call "unfairness."

"... There is a just man that perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongs his life in his wickedness" (Eccl. 7:15). This is what Scripture terms, 'chance.'

*I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to the skillful; for **time and chance** overtake them all. For indeed, a person does not know his time: like fish that are caught in a treacherous net and birds caught in a snare, so the sons of mankind are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them. Ecclesiastes 9:11-12.*

"Chance" in Hebrew is H6294, *pega* derives from H6293, and may be rendered, an occurrence or development of events in the absence of any obvious design.

Sometimes, adverse things just happen without there necessarily being a real cause or reason. People, however, want to blame something, or someone – oftentimes, Yahweh – for their pain and suffering. But sometimes, no obvious thing or no apparent one is to blame other than life goes on and things happen.

Regardless of whether there is cause or reason, or not, or whether suffering is regarded as unfair or come by chance, rejoice – confident, "that all things work together for good to them that love Yahweh, to them who are the called according to *His* purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Aside from realizing that there is nothing new under the sun, we also discover that wisdom brings about grief and pain. The wiser one becomes, the more aware he becomes of evil, including his own.

Some regard Ecclesiastes's content as depressing because it shows that things don't always produce the outcome the book of Proverbs indicates they should. Ecclesiastes even declares that no matter how obedient one is, his end (physical death) differs not from that of the wicked and of animal life.

But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of Elohim. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him. It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun, Ecclesiastes 9:1-6.

While this seems dark, the author of Ecclesiastes has a reason for saying all this. It seems that Ecclesiastes often refutes everything Proverbs says about sowing and reaping. Proverbs lays down the intended order of things: you do well, you are blessed; you do evil, you are cursed. On the other hand, Ecclesiastes notes things don't always work that way. Life is full of vanity and trouble, with uncertainty and pain and suffering for both those who do good and those who do bad. And sometimes, it appears evil people prosper while good people suffer.

Some may wonder what the point in all of this is. The author of Ecclesiastes is not trying to ruin one's dreams or dash one's hopes with all his vanity talk. He is actually trying to get us to realize that life is not in our control. And since it's not, we should stop trying to command every aspect of our lives; to stop worrying, and enjoy the small things Yahweh has given us. For example:

Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that Elohim has given him, for this is his lot, Ecclesiastes 5:18.

So much of our life is wasted on the anxiety of trying to control our lives. Yet, how can we control our lives when we cannot make one of our own hairs white? (Matt. 5:36). Or how, by worrying, can we add a single day to our life? (Matt. 6:27).

The word "vanity" appears often in Ecclesiastes. In some translations, it appears as "futility." The Hebrew is H.1891, *ha-bal'* defined in the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, as worthless or meaningless. The *Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon* brings out a far deeper understanding: vapor or breath, or vanity. Life is like smoke – solid at times, but if you try to grasp it, it will slip right through your fingers. Or if you're in the thick of it, you can't see clearly. It also is constantly changing shape. Ecclesiastes isn't saying life is meaningless but rather, its meaning is not always clear. Neither is Ecclesiastes saying wisdom is meaningless but instead, that it doesn't always give you a clear advantage. Wisdom is profitable but even the wisest cannot escape suffering and pain.

All we can do with life is have a good attitude toward it, strive for wisdom, and enjoy life, both the good and bad, because both are gifts from Yahweh, and that is the wisdom of Ecclesiastes. The author of Ecclesiastes concludes, that the whole duty of man is to fear Yahweh and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13).

Righteousness (and Self-Righteousness) Often Beget Suffering

An overview of the book of Proverbs presents a world founded upon wisdom and the fear of Yahweh. Ecclesiastes shows that life brings uncertainties and concludes by declaring man's duty toward Yahweh, exercising a fear toward Yahweh which corroborates the principal theme of Proverbs.

But we still have to learn from Job in the final lesson. Doing so will allow us to understand fully the proper attitude toward suffering and living well in the fear of Yahweh. Job is the perfect example of someone who was righteous, yet experienced some of the worst suffering of any personage in the Biblical narrative. He is an example of all the previous attributes mentioned in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, a man who conducted life with wisdom and presented himself as one who feared Yahweh but who yet suffered.

Reading Job, chapter 1, teaches us a lot. We learn that he was "perfect and upright, and one that feared Elohim, and eschewed evil" (1:1) and was commended even by Elohim, "that *there is none like him in the earth*" (1:8).

We also learn that Satan accuses Job of simply using the system as established by Yahweh for personal gain that his apparent righteousness is merely a façade. Satan then seeks permission from Yahweh to test Job, which is granted with the one condition that Satan is prohibited from inflicting injury to Job's person (1:12). The outcome is devastating. Job loses everything, including seven sons and three daughters (1:13-19) and estrangement from his wife (2:10). Yet in all his suffering, Job neither cursed Yahweh (though urged to do so by his wife, 2:9), nor charged Yahweh foolishly but instead, rent his mantle, shaved his head, and fell forward prostrate upon the ground and worshipped (1:20).

Having maintained the integrity of his heart in this first round, we read of Satan again challenging Yahweh's confidence in this perfect and upright man, Job. Again, Satan is given permission again, but this time, to prove Job's integrity of heart by afflicting his flesh – "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life" (2:4). But note well: Yahweh restrains Satan from taking his life (2:6). Yahweh is still in absolute control; neither Satan nor any angel can go beyond what Yahweh permits.

Suffer? Indeed, with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (2:7). Yahweh is still in control. Satan was allowed to attack Job, and yet again Yahweh restrains Satan. After Job is attacked and found sitting among the ashes, his friends arrive to comfort him. He goes through an emotional roller coaster ride, expressing his feelings and thoughts.

His friends (really, adversaries) are not very supportive as they begin accusing Job of being responsible for his own suffering, making claims that Job must have sinned and that he is just receiving a just retribution. But miserable comforters are they all (16:2). For while they take the attitude of Proverbs, they lack the wisdom of Ecclesiastes.

Then Eliphaz the Temanite responded "If one ventures a word with you, will you become impatient? But who can refrain from speaking? Behold, you have taught many, and you have strengthened weak hands. Your words have helped the stumbling to stand. And you have strengthened feeble knees. But now it comes to you, and you are impatient; it touches you and you are horrified. Is your fear of Elohim not your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope? Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed? According to what I have seen, those who plow wrongdoing and those who sow trouble harvest it. By the breath of Elohim they perish, and by the blast of His anger they come to an end. The roaring of the lion and the voice of the fierce lion, and the teeth of the young lions are broken out. The lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered, Job 4:1-11.

This passage well expresses the disposition of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar as they all accuse Job falsely of wrongdoing; insisting he must be guilty. And for each "friend's" accusation, Job makes his defense. Back and forth for nearly thirty chapters, Job defends himself from Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar's accusations. This is until Elihu speaks, responding in righteous anger both to Job, and Job and to the others (Job 32-36).

Elihu was angry at Job because he justified himself before Elohim and angry with the others because they had condemned Job without furnishing evidence of his trespass.

There is a lesson here for us. No matter what we are going through or suffer, we cannot justify ourselves before Yahweh. Neither may we condemn others or blame them for their suffering.

Following Elihu's harangue, Job gets what he desires: a reply from Yahweh (10:2), though hardly in the manner he desired and expected (Chapters 38-42).

Yahweh explains to Job all He has made and describes the creation in detail. Then He asks Job how he could presume to understand a Creator Who could create and interact simultaneously with a complex order, knowing the end of every matter from the beginning. When Yahweh concludes His discourse, Job is left in a humble place, declaring, "therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not ... Wherefore I abhor *myself* and repent in dust and ashes" (42:3, 6). This was a good place at which to arrive, whereupon Yahweh restored all that Job had lost. Even twice as much!

Conclusion

One might question what Job learned, indeed what any might learn, from his suffering, as suffering should teach us something. Maybe, what is taught and thus intended to be learned is but one simple lesson. That is, the thing formed has little to say to the One for Whom it is lawful to do what He will with his own (Matt. 20:15). Saying, to the One Who formed it, “Why have you made me thus?” (Rom. 9:20).

Suffering? We may not always know the “why,” but we can know the “Who.” We are to acknowledge Him and trust that the thoughts He thinks toward us are thoughts of peace and not of evil, to bring us to an expected end in glory (Jer. 28:11).

And we know that Elohim causes all things to work together for good to those who love Elohim, to those who are called according to His purpose, Romans 8:28.

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