

SOVEREIGNTY, SUFFERING, AND SYMPATHY IN THE BOOK OF JOB

PRINCIPLES OF SOVEREIGNTY AT WORK IN JOB

Principle #1: Much of God's Plan is Unknown to Us

- In order to make any sense of suffering, we must realize that much of God's plan is and will always be unknown to us
- None of the parties involved in Job knew why Job suffered (cf. 1:20-22; 2:9-10)
- Therefore, we should also be very careful about drawing inferences regarding the reason for the suffering experienced by ourselves and others
- Kidner wrote, "Once and for all, these opening scenes make it clear that suffering does not necessarily imply any guilt in the victim, nor any failure in his precautions or in his faith."¹
- As much as we may try to figure out the plan of God, we never will. At most, we will see "the fringes of His ways" (26:14a)
- **Discuss:**
 1. God may not reveal a clear reason for our suffering. So, when we are in the midst of suffering, how much effort should we spend striving to know reasons for our suffering?
 2. How can our mental energy be better spent?
 3. How does Job 1-2 inform our answers to #1-2?

¹Derek Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes: An Introduction to Wisdom Literature* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 57.

Principle #2: God is in Control of Everything, Even Satan

- Although many people attribute various measures of dominion, power, or even “legal authority” to Satan, we must remember that Satan was not able to *independently* smite Job. Doing so required the approval and commission of God (1:12, 2:6), because “God gives Satan power over Job but only up to a point.”²
- Thus, although Satan is responsible and accountable for what he has done, he was, in reality, a *secondary cause*. Since God has ultimate authority, He was the *initial and primary cause*. Notice also that God allowed Satan to use forces of nature and people as *secondary causes*
 - Satan used the Sabeans (1:15), fire (1:16), the Chaldeans (1:17), and wind (1:19) to attack and kill. Of course, within the providence of God, the Sabeans and Chaldeans acted according to their own will and desire.
 - So we have *three layers of causation*, (1) God’s ordination, (2) Satan’s directives, and (3) the actions of people
- It is critical to understand that God did not use Satan as a puppet. Nor did Satan do so with the Sabeans and Chaldeans. Although God ordained the work of Satan, and Satan directed the people, each evil party (i.e. Satan and the murderous people) acted by their own volition in accordance with their own evil desires (see Genesis 45:5-8; 46:1-4).
- **Discuss:**
 4. What limitations has God placed over Satan as the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2)?
 5. Why is it important to correctly understand the layers of causation?

² Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* (Allen Park, MI.: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 1:344.

Principle #3: God Acts According to His Plan, Purpose, and Good Pleasure

- We must recognize that this principle is true from a *global* perspective
 - Although God ordains isolated acts of evil, He does so for the purpose of working them together toward the overall purpose of His plan. One must have an eternal perspective to see this.
 - The cross of Christ is the single greatest example of God ordaining something He hates to accomplish something He loves (cf. Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23, 4:27-28). Christ's death on the cross was the single most heinous and wicked act in all of history. Yet, without it, there would be no redemption, no salvation, no Savior.
 - Some isolated evil acts are allowed in order to work together toward God's glorious and perfect plan (cf. Romans 8:28).
 - The temptation to look at an isolated evil act and conclude that God is not good must be avoided at all costs.
- When we read that "*God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases*" (Psalm 115:3), we must understand that God does not simply operate on the basis of some arbitrary or capricious pleasure, but on the basis of His *good* pleasure (Isaiah 46:9-10; Philippians 2:13).
- **Discuss:** Why is it important to view evil from an eternal perspective? What should a believer's attitude be like toward evil? How should we understand God's good pleasure?

Next Lesson(s): After the prologue (i.e. the first two chapters), which give us a bird's eye view of the behind the scenes spiritual activity leading up to Job's suffering, the book presents an extended dialogue between Job and his friends (chapters 3-37).