

SUFFER

TO

GAIN

**HOW THE RIGHTEOUS SHOULD
OVERCOME DIFFICULT TIMES**

JAMES YAMOAHA

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FOREWORD

Kwame lay on his hospital bed quite oblivious of what was happening around him. He was embroiled in thought about all he was missing; the nights out with Nsowah and friends, he missed especially Aunty Grace's Saturday morning rice balls. He was almost at the point of taking his first bite of the rice ball when he was jolted out of his day dream with the shouts of "praise the Lord; praise the Lord!" The elders of his church had come to visit him. This time, they had come with some members of the women fellowship. They ended their visit with a time of prayer.

Elder Peter's prayer summary left a bitter taste in Kwame's mouth. He wished he had been left alone to chew his rice balls. Elder Peter prayed for about ten minutes asking the Lord to forgive Kwame and restore him to health. Kwame was alarmed that Elder Peter could be insinuating that he was in hospital because he had sinned. Only a few weeks earlier, Elder Peter was at the receiving end of a scathing extra-marital affair investigation that almost ended his fifteen years marriage. Everyone in the church knew he was still at post as an elder because of his relationship with the senior pastor. Kwame could not help it but echo the words of Job, "miserable comforters!"

James Yamoah has given us a very practical examination of the book of Job leading us to consider how the righteous should react to difficult times and suffering.

The book of Job yields several themes, most of which James has covered very well. As we join James in the journey through the book, I pray that its lessons will not be lost on us. The book of Job reminds us that it is possible for the righteous to suffer diverse tragedies. But thankfully, the Lord has initiated bold support systems for us. One, He will not let us suffer beyond our ability to endure. And also He calls all believers to be our neighbor's keepers. We are to help bear the burdens of other believers. We dare not fail our fellow believers. It is not our portion to be *miserable comforters*.

James reminds us that our suffering is but for a season. For some, the Lord will make a way of escape so they are able to endure. For others, the Lord knows how to bring swift relief. James writes, "The link here is that no matter the extent of dark clouds that one faces in life, let the person continue to hope that the sun will appear in the sky one day; but even in the night hours, stars will brighten up the path to peace."

Dr. Manual Budu Adjei (President)

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ways cannot be quantified under any circumstances. Upon them and on all their endeavors I pray God's unlimited blessings.

Let me narrow the scope further down to my core family of Mrs. Florence Yamoah, whose comforting presence gave me the most needed encouragement to produce this work, and my children; Jemima, Emmanuel (who did a lot of the typing), and Joseph. Their interactive presence kept me awake to finish this project, and they constituted the immediate 'power-house' behind this book. I pray God's abiding presence with them eternally.

Above all, I am forever grateful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for always being there for me in accordance with the promise, "...Great is His faithfulness," (Lam. 3:22-23). To Him alone is the glory, Amen.

James Yamoah

DEDICATION

To all who have suffered loss, pain, misfortunes and those still facing these challenges as a result of commitment to the ministry of the Savior Lord Jesus Christ, I dedicate this book. May you find restoration in God, and experience gain in the end. Amen.

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INTRODUCTION

Life is a journey which is full of ups and downs. There is a saying that the path of life is never straight: it is crooked, sometimes bumpy, other times muddy, and the like. There are lots of unfortunate experiences including losses, pains, and hardships which in the wish of mankind should be avoided. Though some of such challenging experiences can be explained away easily, others are hard to understand let alone explain. Yet generations past, present, and those unborn in one way or the other have had no chance to avoid such a road to reach the other end of the journey.

This volume; ***Suffer to gain: How the righteous should overcome difficult times***, is expected to bless its readers with some insights into the issue of suffering. The book tries to spell out some of the possible ways to understand and handle unfortunate situations in the life of people, particularly, the righteous. It uses the life of Job in the Bible book of Job as a test case to unearth some of the critical, controversial, and yet crucial issues that confront life in general. The discussion begins by looking at the truth or otherwise of the existence of this

biblical figure, and uses his experience as basis to draw lessons for its readers, especially Christians.

The book will help persons who have experienced loss, pain, difficult situations, and/or continue to do so to understand and overcome the overall effects of such negative events of life. By applying the lessons in this book, the reader will develop a deeper relationship with God that will help to overcome the trauma of loss, the sting of pain, and the sucking effect of difficult times and build hope in the light of these challenges. In the end, the righteous should know that, 'it shall be well with them.

The book is not only inspiring; it is educative and informative. Both Christian and non-Christians who use this book will be blessed with spiritual insights to also share with other people who might encounter similar circumstances.

CHAPTER 1

EXPLORE THE GREATEST BOOK ON SUFFERING

Who should be blamed for the suffering of humanity in general? Why should you, as a righteous person, suffer or face difficult times, when scripture says it will be well with the righteous (Isa. 3:10)? How should you behave when you experience loss, pain, and difficult situations of life? Is there a way to overcome suffering at all? Well, this book offers some answers to such challenging questions of life. To engage the issue head-on, the discussion considers specific facets of life where suffering is most experienced. Though the deliberations mention some personalities, it is every righteous sufferer who is the overall focus.

This chapter explores one of the greatest records of the events of suffering in life. It looks at one personality whose story clearly rings bells in considerations of suffering and can be used as a typical example of how the righteous could deal with difficult times. This person is Job, revealed in *Job*, the eighteenth book of the Bible.

Before delving into the story of this noble man of blessed memory, and because of the insight that Job brings to life and the controversies that surround his historicity, it is important to establish the facts of the book that presents his story.

Experientially, the book deals with issues that resonate with the enormity of suffering in the world. Whether it is genocide or slave trade or (civil) war or terrorist attacks or deadly diseases or poverty, it is abundantly clear to me that many people *suffer from and for* 'causes' that are difficult to understand emotionally and intellectually...¹

As has been indicated, it is important to dedicate some time to discussions that establish the historicity of *Job*, the greatest book on suffering. It is the first of five books of the part of the Bible commonly referred to as "The books of Poetry." The others are *Psalms*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, and the *Song of Songs* (or *Song of Solomon*). They are so called because they are written in poetic style in contrast to the narrative style of most other books. The reason for such classification is the presence of many primary characteristics of Hebrew Poetry such as rhythm of thought; synonymous parallelisms where the second line is usually a restatement of the first, or antithetic parallelisms where

the second line is usually the opposite of the first, or synthetic parallelisms where the second line completes the thought of the first, etc.

There are also clear cases of rhythms of sound and form. The books of poetry are also often referred to as “Wisdom Literature,” especially the books of *Job*, *Proverbs*, and *Ecclesiastes*. The Bible book of *Job* is one of the books which have been subjected to critical scrutiny by Bible scholars over many centuries.

The position of the book of Job in the Bible

Like other books of the Old Testament (OT), e.g. *Ruth*, and *Esther*, *Job* is named after the main character whose life experience is presented in one of the most beautiful forms of literary styles in the Bible. The placement of *Job* in the canon is clear because the book has always been part of the Kethubim, i.e., the third division of the OT canon. Within this group, *Psalms* is usually listed first, which is reflected in Jesus’ word in Luke 24:44: “Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled”” (NAS).²

The position of the *Masoretes* is also important in this discussion. They are described as scholars who between AD 500 and 950 gave the final form to the

text of the Old Testament, and were so called because they preserved in the writing the oral tradition (*masorah*) concerning the correct vowels and accents, and the number of occurrences of rare words of unusual spellings.³ According to one scholar, the *Masoretes* grouped *Job*, *Proverbs*, and *Psalms* together and gave them a special poetic accentuation, “emeth,” that is, books of truth. Additionally, the books of *Ecclesiastes* and the *Song of Songs* were included in a special subgroup of writings called the Megilloth.⁴ The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the Septuagint, also called LXX) places all poetic books after the Books of History and before the Prophets; *Psalms*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Song of Songs*, and *Job*.

But the Vulgate placed *Job* at the head. The books of Poetry had special significance at special times; *Song of Songs* was usually used at Passover, *Ruth* was at Pentecost, *Lamentations* reminded the Israelites of the destruction of Jerusalem, *Ecclesiastes* was used during the Feast of Tabernacles, while *Esther* was used at the Feast of Purim. Some later scholars claim that there was a comparison between Job and Jesus. For example, one of them writes that ‘it was a common practice among the early Christian community to read the book of Job during the Jewish Passion week.’⁵

Poetry was often assigned to the Maccabean period because most 19th Century critics claimed that

ancient Hebrew writers were incapable of writing poetry. If any, they were influenced by other nations. As a result, the authorship of the book has come under great criticism. Different names belonging to wide range of periods are usually suggested. But archaeological findings confirm poetry's existence in ancient Egypt, Babylon, and Ugarit, in the 2nd Millennium BC. Today, it is acknowledged that poetry comprised about one-third of the OT, though it might be the less used section of it.

In the English arrangement that also emerged from developments that arose within the Septuagint (or the LXX), Job comes first among the books of poetry. Such an arrangement could not just be a coincidence; it is an indication of the importance that is placed on the book of Job.

Controversies over some issues in the book of Job

There are major controversies over the authorship of the book of Job. One of them is that concrete evidence for determining the authorship of the book is very scarce. Hence there is no agreement among scholars concerning this issue. There are also controversies over the date of writing of the book. As a consequence of the confusion about these two areas; authorship and the date of writing, the determination of the period in which Job lived has become very debatable and equally subjects

his historicity to question. There are five main views maintained by scholars on the date of authorship today: 1) in the patriarchal age; 2) in the reign of Solomon; 3) in the reign of Manasseh; 4) in the generation of Jeremiah; 5) during or after the exile.⁶

These different dates occupy quite a wide range of time. Archer writes that “there is the widest divergence of opinion on this point, some estimates, as we shall see, deferring the time of authorship until after the Babylonian Exile.”⁷ To begin with, most critics deny that Job could write the book that bears his name, and thus suggest Moses as the main author. They claim the book has a possibly Aramaic origin which was translated into Hebrew by Moses. According to them, Moses penned the whole of the book as he did the Pentateuch. For example, the early rabbis dated the book to the time of the biblical patriarchs in support of the authorship of Moses. There are still other scholars who present a compromised double authorship, that is, both Job and Moses co-authored the book. These posit that Job wrote down the speeches and Moses found these during his stay in Midian and added the prologue and the epilogue to bring the book to its present form.

Another group of scholars place the book of Job in Solomon's time for reasons that the Wisdom Literature style that it presents belongs to that time. Solomon is thus suggested as the author.⁸ For example, some

believe that one of the later prophets wrote the book because of particular sections of Jeremiah; 20:14-18 (cf. Job 3), and Isaiah; 41:20 (cf. Job 12:9) in the book.

Yet, others think of someone who was a resident of southern Judah, on the borders of the Idumean desert, in the time of the monarchy but before Amos. Their reasons are that Amos quotes largely from *Job*: Amos 5:8; cf. Job 38:31; Amos 9:6; cf. 38:34; Amos 8:9; cf. 5:14; Amos 9:2; cf. 20:6. Modern scholars tend to assign the book to one of three eras: the seventh century BC, during King Hezekiah's reign; the Sixth Century BC, after the fall of Jerusalem; and the fourth or third century BC, during the time of the second temple.⁹ Even, a post-exilic date has been proposed and has gained considerable support. One scholar commented that "Most recent writers are in agreement that in its original form the book was of Post-exilic origin, and the secondary parts of later composition."¹⁰

There are other possible clues to the authorship. There appears to be a close link between the period that Job lived and the time when the records in his book were written: "It might naturally be supposed to have been written soon after the events themselves."¹¹ Along the same line of argument, it is interesting to note the following statement:

No other biblical work shows such a complete ignorance of Israel or any aspect of her history. Only one conclusion can be drawn from all of this, and that is that Job must have been composed outside of Israelite circles altogether and that it must have been written before there ever was any such theocracy as the commonwealth of Israel established in the land of Canaan.¹²

It appears this is a good view of the situation, and quite a number of scholars agree to such importance attached to the book and its agreement with other inspired books. The author was almost certainly an Israelite, judged by his familiarity with other portions of the Hebrew Bible.¹³ This also presupposes that the book is historical, more so if it becomes clear that it was written during the period before Moses. The traditional Jewish view is that the book belongs to the patriarchal period, probably from the Genesis period to Moses. Hence they attribute the book to Job himself, who is identified as Jobab of Genesis 36:33.¹⁴

In spite of the seeming confusion, the Jews hold the book in high esteem; and this is seen in its inclusion in the Hebrew canon despite all the uncertainties surrounding its authorship. This is why one of the scholars on the issue could comment: "The Jews have tenaciously kept the book of Job in their canon of

Scripture. It is said to be the oldest book extant to have been written some two thousand years before Christ.”¹⁵ The recognition of the book by the Jews is one of the tangible bases for the factual nature of the book, and one of the strongest arguments in favor of the truthfulness that the book presents on life in general.

How will you classify the book of job?

As a result of the arguments put up by some scholars against the historicity of Job and thereby claiming that the book is not historical, it has been classified in various ways; fiction, parable, allegory, poetry, or other forms of these. But some of these classifications have been equally countered by other scholars.

The book is not a true story; it is fiction: The book of Job lends itself to the accusation of being fiction on many grounds. First, Job is presented without any reference to very basic historical circumstances: “He is given no genealogy and no reference point in biblical chronology.”¹⁶ This might stem from the backdrop that the literary style and the language are not simple and differ from those of other books of the Bible. Apparently, some of the languages are quite simple and can be understood easily, but in some places it is somewhat obscure. Besides, the circumstance in which the story is

presented without much specificity makes it open to many criticisms. For example, some scholars comment that since the book is a work of wisdom, “there is little information of a historical nature in its content to help us date either its events or its composition.”¹⁷

It is important to understand that the book can apply to many people in similar life circumstances. This is because, “Job’s life circumstances are left deliberately vague so that they can represent any person at any point in time; people of any era in any location can identify with Job ...”¹⁸ As a result of such weaknesses, various views would definitely be put forward that Job is not a historical figure. Additionally, the book’s place in the poetical section of the Hebrew canon and not in the historical section is an indication of its fictional character. Consequently, Bible critics have classified the book into different genres, and often proposed Job as an individual created by the author.

The book is a Parable: Many have contended that the book of Job does not describe a historical character but is a parable. According to one school of thought, “As early as the Babylonian Talmud, the opinion was expressed that Job was created as a parable, that he never really existed.”¹⁹ This is to mean that the Joban story can only be a parable because it is without any convincing historical background. Lots of reasons may

be assigned for this position. One of them is that it is impossible for God to enter into a bet or bargain with Satan as presented in the prose prologue. Another reason is that the author does not present Satan accepting or acknowledging defeat in the prose epilogue.

The parable argument, however, cannot completely disapprove the validity of Job. This is on the basis that, "The Holy Spirit used the parable widely in the New Testament. I should not wonder at His using it in the Old."²⁰ Therefore, the parabolic nature of the book cannot refute the historical authenticity of Job's personality.

The book is an Allegory: People who do not believe that the issue of Job is real life event interpret the message differently. Accordingly, "The book of Job has been supposed by some to have every mark of an allegory."²¹ This position agrees with some who believe that it is an allegorical interpretation of the spiritual confusion into which the downfall of the state and temple had put the Judean people. This can be seen by the round numbers in the book: exact doubling of Job's substance; exact restoration of his children.

However one can deduce from the scriptures that the overwhelming calamities of Job became known far and wide, and were probably a subject of public conversation everywhere, for months (7:3). It is likely that some people even wrote their opinions on what

they believed were happening to Job (13:26). One commentator agrees that the specifications of places and names in the book are not such as would occur in an allegory, and that, "Had it been merely a supposed case to illustrate some great truth, these specifications would have been unnecessary, and would not have occurred."²² It is therefore not unsafe to conclude that the book contains some of the things that Job, and his friends, and God said.

The book is Poetry: Another area of objection to the historicity of the main character is the poetic nature of the work. The book begins with a prose-prologue, and chapter three in particular is seen as part of the poetic body of the book. Then there are portions of lament and others involving cycles of debates and rounds of speeches. These chapters contain all the dialogues between Job, his friends, Elihu, and then God, beginning from chapters 4-42:6. Then the book closes with a prose epilogue. One of the arguments of scholars is that the presentation of the story in poetic form elevates the book from a specific historical event to one with universal application. The book is so organized to meet the interest of a larger community than to serve just a historical narrative. That is:

The speeches are most elaborate; are filled with accurate and carefully prepared argument; are arranged with great care; are expressed in the most sententious manner; embody the results of long and careful observation, and are wholly unlike what would be uttered in unpremeditated and extemporary debate...No men, it is said, talk in this manner; nor can it be supposed that beautiful poetry and sublime argument, such as abound in this book, ever fell in animated debate from the lips of men.²³

But some scholars differ from the above position. Nevertheless, it can still be argued that even if the various speakers have a poetic character, and in reality never spoke in the form presented in the book, “still this would not invalidate the evidence which exists of the historic truth of the facts stated about the existence and trials of Job.”²⁴ It might be considered that Job himself was well versed in poetry and that after he suffered and recovered he himself might have put all that he experienced into this poetic form that we now have. Although the dialogues are all in poetic form, “we have nothing like transcripts of the conversations that took place...They may be accurate without being precise ...”²⁵

It stands to reason, therefore, that the poetic nature of the presentation does not necessarily make the content fictitious. Even if it were admitted that there

is something poetic in the form in which the book is written, it should also be realized that wisdom literature normally employs some situations and dialogue which in themselves are hypothetical without necessarily stressing factuality. Thus, if the book is even accepted as a poem, "It might be called a Historical Poem, that is, a poem based on an event that actually occurred."²⁶ Furthermore, the classification of *Job*, together with *Proverbs* and *Psalms*, by the Masoretes as "emeth" (truth) is very important. Although "emeth" is just a mnemonic device, the inclusion of *Job* with two other books whose historicity is not in doubt is probably an indication of the factuality of the book.

This chapter has delved into the background of the book of *Job*. At this stage, it is reasonable for one to note that all the objections which have been raised against the historical character of the book are not well founded. In the next chapter, the personality of *Job*; whether a historical figure or the creation of somebody's imagination, would be considered.

CHAPTER 2

WAS JOB A REAL PERSONALITY?

Over the years a lot of arguments have been raging on concerning the main character of the book. The issues have been raised by some Bible scholars with regards to the facts about the reality or historicity of the man, Job. This chapter and the next will consider some of the arguments put forward against or in defense of the existence of Job. That is, was Job a historical person, a real person who actually existed? Is he more like a character in one of Jesus' parables, that is, a parabolic creation, other than a historical individual? Or is he only a literary character, that is, the creation of a wonderful theologian or philosopher?

A. Biblical issues against Job

This book bases its arguments on evidence from many sources, including the book of Job itself, and other biblical and non-biblical materials. It offers an evaluation of the ongoing arguments and discussion and arrives at a

tangible conclusion. It is expected that at an appropriate stage of the discussions, the reader will be able to justify Job as a historical figure. Let us look at some of the arguments advanced by scholars against his historicity.

Some argue that Job never lived: Many Bible scholars uphold the factuality of the story in the book in spite of the many uncertainties regarding places and names of people. Such people argue as follows: “We believe that Job was a man of history from the land of Uz, whose journey to faith through suffering is essential to God’s revelation in Scripture.”²⁷ Others cannot convincingly accept or defend Job’s historicity for lack of enough evidence both from within the scriptures and outside it. Uncertainties about the place and the period that Job lived have also compounded the problem and added to the speculation that the book is a fictitious record.

In addition to the immediate argument, “There is no way to prove or disprove Job’s existence outside of the book that bears his name, for instance, through archaeological attestation.”²⁸ Some scholars also accept only part of the book and not all as historical, “The first two chapters of the book and part of the last chapter are simple historical records.”²⁹ At the extreme side, however, many arguments have been put forward to the effect that Job is just a created character by the author of

the book. These arguments are based on certain factors, some of which are mentioned hereafter.

Some argue that facts about Job are mysterious: The account of the confrontation between God and Satan is presented in chapters 1-2. This is questioned by some, because of the lack of probability of such a conversation between God and Satan, and because of how such a conversation was received by the author. It throws an air of fiction over all the historical statements of the book. Against such an argument, "The information contained in the first two chapters, relating to the encounter between God and Satan in the celestial audience chamber (1:6-12; 2:1-6) could only have been disclosed to Job by divine revelation."³⁰

Furthermore, "The existence of such a being as Satan is everywhere recognized in the Scriptures...and it is impossible to prove that he does not even now perform the same things in the trial of good men, which it is said that he did in the case of Job."³¹ Upon this note, it might be accepted that even if this were not to be regarded as a literal transaction, it does not disprove that such man as Job lived, and that the transactions in regard to him were not real.

Some argue that Job's possession is exaggerated: The figures mentioned in connection with Job's

possession have also been argued against by the critics of Job's historicity. They posit that there is something artificial in the manner in which the "sacred numbers," "seven" and "three," are used. Also, there are only round numbers mentioned in enumerating his possessions. Here, not much can be said about the numbers. But with regards to the exactness of possessions, one might argue that the third person description of Job's virtues, attainments, and possessions in chapter 1 and also in chapter 42 certainly sounds like the work of a careful listener.

It is informative that such a person recorded the remarks of all the disputants in the case, and later in conversation with Job himself may have learned from him the material in the prologue and epilogue, which could have come only through God's revelation to Job.³² That is, if such is what really happened, then "whoever composed this masterpiece must have been working quite closely with Job himself from start to finish."³³

Some doubt Job's friends and other figures: Another argument that some Bible scholars have raised against the Book of Job in favor of its fictitious nature concerns the friends of Job; primarily their background and their conduct. Their sitting down for seven days and seven nights without saying anything when they had come purposely to console him is quite hard to justify. This

picture subjects the records to much criticism. One scholar sums up the arguments of the critics when he notes that such a scene is a wholly improbable circumstance, and looks as if the whole were a supposed case.³⁴

Besides, there are issues bordering on other areas like their native lands and some of their comments during their interaction with Job. However, others think these are not strong points for critics to doubt the factuality of the story. Accordingly, "It is intrinsically unlikely and unthinkable that a folk-tale should have introduced three visitors with no other function than to be accused by the God of Job in few words."³⁵ The fact that specific names were cited with the author carefully mentioning the details of their native lands or ancestry is also an indication of real evidence. With regards to the records of Job's friends; Eliphaz, the Temanite; Bildad, the Shuhite; Zophar, the Naamathite; and Elihu, "the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram," One scholar asks rhetorically: "Why are the places of residence of these persons mentioned unless it is meant to intimate that they were real persons, and not allegorical characters?"³⁶

Another issue which is often cited as a reason to reject the historicity of the book concerns the roving band of raiders or robbers mentioned in the text. But there is a valid argument to refute their rejection:

The single word “robbers” that is used for the band of raiders would have answered the question and “unless the transaction were real...an inspired writer would not have charged this offence on any class of men, thus holding them up to lasting reproach, unless an event of this kind had actually occurred.”³⁷

This is a good note to end the discussions on the issues against Job’s historicity. While lots of issues can be raised against the facts of the book, no solid conclusion can be drawn at this juncture, whether the arguments advanced by most critics contain or lack merits. Thus one has to consider the other side of the arguments.

B. Biblical issues for Job

In this section, it is important to establish what reasons there are for believing that such a person as Job lived, and how far the transactions referred to in the book are to be regarded as historically true. Since the book names no author and claims no definite date for its composition, it is considered anonymous and in such situation information on its introduction might best be obtained from elsewhere.

This might also be the reason most scholars do not agree on certain important issues of the book. But if the book professes to be historical, then what evidence show that the events described in it actually occurred? Some

Bible scholars are quick to point out that there is much evidence from the book of Job to prove his historicity. One of these is the literary style of Job. Agreeably, there may be several styles in the opening and closing of any literary material. Some scholars posit that the first lines of a text are often important for genre identification, since they set the tone for what follows.³⁸ Then, the first few lines of the text could be considered on their own merit. Job 1:1, literally translated, begins this way: "There was a man..."

Others argue that such a phrase is similar to other phrases that we encounter in clearly historical books, noting, "At the beginning of 1 Samuel, we read: 'There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham...This is obviously dealing with historical characters. Judges 17:1 begins in a similar manner.'"³⁹ Thus another scholar supported that Job 1:1 certainly conforms to other Biblical narratives that are historical (Job 1:1; cf. 1 Sam 1:1 and Luke 1:5), and this is a good reason for believing that the text of Job is historically true.⁴⁰ The inference here is that since the literary style is typical of historical documents, that is, it starts like other books of history in the Bible; the book has credibility of its historicity.

The Land of Uz, where Job lived, was a real place:

The account says Job was from the land of Uz. The precise identification and location of Uz is still quite uncertain, and therefore, there are a lot of unanswered questions about it. Some biblical passages suggest a location near Edom in the Arabian Desert (Gen. 36:28; Lam. 4:21), while others suggest otherwise. For example, in Lamentations 4:21, “the daughter of Edom” is said to dwell in Uz, while in Jeremiah 25:20, Uz is mentioned separately from Edom, alongside the Philistines, and therefore is not in the south, but probably a location north of Palestine. One should be able to realize that in the latter passage the kings of Uz are mentioned between Egypt and the Philistines...while in the former, the “daughter of Edom” is said to be residing “in the land of Uz,” and concludes, “Uz must have been fairly close and accessible, therefore, to the refugees from Edom.”⁴¹

Another point for consideration on this issue is the phrase in Job 1:3, “...of all the people of the East.” The argument here by some scholars is that the “East” here might mean east of the Jordan. In support of this, one scholar notes that once Job is described to have been the “greatest of all the men of the East,” it implies that his residence was in the land which was known familiarly as the country of the East, and that, “This location would place Job so near to the Chaldeans, that the account of

their making an excursion into his country (chapter one), would be entirely probable.”⁴²

One scholar refers to an appendix to the book of Job in LXX, which is said to be taken from the “Syriac book,” in which Job’s home is located as being on the borders of Idumea and Arabia, saying, “this location is favored by some modern scholars,” but adds that others favor a location northeast of Palestine in the Hauran, because “Job is presented as a foreigner, and not a Jew.”⁴³ It is very likely that the land of Uz forms a link with the Aramean, Edomite, and Arabic regions, as the name is associated with all of them as the discussion would show. Other Bible scholars agree to the above identification. For example, one source states: “Job is located at the confluence of the great civilizations of Arabia and Syria. His name is one that transverses a great time span and numerous languages. Job was known as a venerable nobleman of ancient times.”⁴⁴

The name “Uz” is found also in some genealogies. In Genesis 36:28, Uz is said to be a son of Dishan and to belong to the land of Seir. In Genesis 10:23, Uz is a son of Aram, and Nahor’s eldest son was named Uz (Gen. 22:21). Some scholars maintain that wherever the location of the land might be, “Uz, while not definitely located, is clearly not within the boundaries of Israel (Gen. 10:23; Lam. 4:21).”⁴⁵ However, there appears to be no agreement on Uz but there are certain clues as to its

location: Portions of it were suitable for plowed crops (1:14), it was near the desert or wilderness (1:19), and it was near to the homelands of Job's friends (2:1). Most probably, the land of Uz where Job dwelt is somewhere to the east of Palestine, north of Edom, in or near the Arabian Desert, and it is quite possible that it is not part of the Holy Land. It was also within raiding distance of the Sabaeans and Chaldeans of the Euphrates region (1:15, 17). There is no doubt therefore that Uz was a real place.

Job had a distinct nationality: The place where Job lived is expressly stated as Uz, a land in the East. That clearly makes him a non-Israelite, and this is the view of many scholars. According to one group of scholars, the individual named Job shows no indication of being an Israelite; rather the names of the place suggest that he was Edomite.⁴⁶ This is to mean that, "Though the Book of Job is thoroughly Hebraic in its outlook, Job himself is not represented as being an Israelite. (After all, there were no Israelites until the time of Jacob.) "Most telling is that Job is a non-Israelite."⁴⁷

Some scholars even dare to assign a nationality to Job. This might be based on inferences from scripture coupled with other non-biblical sources. For example, "Job is described consistently as an Arabian Prince."⁴⁸ Interestingly enough, the title Shaddai ("the Almighty") occurs not less than thirty-one times in Job as against

its sixteen occurrences in the rest of the Old Testament. Conclusively, “This evidence from the use of the divine names certainly tends to confirm the theory of a non-Israelite background.”⁴⁹

But one may wonder how the story of a non-Israelite might have gained acceptance in Jewish religion and finally become accepted as part of the canon. Most likely, it might be as a result of the high premium that the Jews place on the story of Job and its historical value. Apparently, Job might have become a folk-hero in Israel, since the story of his agony and ultimate blessing might have been told and retold around the campfires on a thousand hills, over a period of perhaps a thousand years. Thus, “gradually the story crystallized into a traditional form that was hallowed by centuries of repetition.”⁵⁰ This point might be well substantiated by the many instances in the OT where the Jews acknowledged people who showed faith in Yahweh.

Job lived within the Patriarchal period: Though not all the details of Job’s existence might have been expressly declared in the book, the narrative has all the appearance of being a simple record of an actual occurrence. But another hurdle to clear in this discussion is when Job actually lived. The fact is that the book gives no direct specification of the period of the events. Consequently, Bible scholars have struggled with the

issue of dating the period in which he lived in order to ascertain some of the cultural issues that pertain to the period. This is the comment that one scholar has passed on the situation, "Inasmuch as Job contains no references to historical events and reflects a non-Hebraic cultural background concerning which we possess little or no information, it is not easy to assign a probable date for the lifetime and career of Job."⁵¹

While for some Bible scholars the date of events is shrouded in mystery, others are of the view that there are some indications that give clues to the setting of the events of the book. However, it is reasonable to note that one cannot base any speculations on the various settings in the book alone to arrive at a suitable date. Therefore, a distinction must be drawn between the historical period when Job actually lived and the time when this record of his ordeal was composed.⁵² Some Bible scholars hold the view that the setting of Job is pre-Mosaic, that is, the events of the book have been dated roughly before or within the patriarchal period, the age of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Defenders of this position consider that the plot of these events could be deduced from the simple details found in the text itself.

The arguments in favor of this view are that the details of the customs and mannerisms presented in the book, such as the measure of one's wealth, Job's long

life, the form of worship, priesthood by the head of family, etc., belong to the patriarchal period.

The measure of one's wealth. First, Job is considered a patriarch much like Abraham, because Job's great wealth is measured in terms of the number of cattle in his possession and the many servants in his employment (Job 1:3; 42:12). Some scholars are quite positive, and one of them commented that "Like the patriarchs, Job's wealth is measured in terms of cattle and servants."⁵³

Other scholars think the prose account belongs to the Patriarchal age because, "Wealth is measured in animals and servants (1:3; 42:12)."⁵⁴ Well, such a position cannot be far from right because when the culture of any group of people is clearly determined, it might be an important hint to the period within which they lived. It is based on such a revelation that one scholar posits that the story of the book is set in the patriarchal era depicted in Genesis because like Abraham, Job's wealth consists of his animals and his servants, and he himself as head of his family offers sacrifice without the intervention of any priest.⁵⁵

The Priesthood was not well defined. The text says that Job himself used to offer sacrifices for the entire family as a regular custom (1:5). Again, this means that just like in the time of the patriarchs, there is no

priesthood or central sanctuary. This could have been “an act unthinkable after the formal priesthood was established at Sinai.”⁵⁶ But here, Job functions as a priest in offering sacrifices for his family (1:5), and is typical of the patriarchal period, when the fathers, the patriarchs in the family, would sometimes build altars and offer sacrifices and perform priestly functions of a sort. He, being the head of a large family, serves as priest, much as Abraham did for his family (Gen 12:7).

It should also be noted that the prose account belongs to the patriarchal age because, “The family head offers up sacrifice (Job 1:5; 42:8).”⁵⁷ Additionally, sacrifices and offerings done by family heads are likely to be an indication that there were simple family units during the days of Job, and the practice might have been popular with the people’s way of worship, “Job’s period, “Family/ clan organization is basic (no nation of Israel).”⁵⁸

Presence of roving bands. There is another piece of supporting internal evidence of the patriarchal setting of Job. This is due to the mention of roving bands of Sabeans and Chaldeans (Job 1:15, 17), reflecting a time before those bands of people became organized into stable and independent city states. Some scholars view this as a probable situation, “The Sabeans and the Chaldeans are presented as wandering tribes (1:15, 17).”⁵⁹ The reason might not be very far; “Sabeans and

Chaldeans are roving bands because the Chaldeans were not settled, as they became later in history.”⁶⁰

Nevertheless, some scholars might not put much weight on this issue for lack of concrete evidence. Though Hill and Walton agree that this issue suits best the early Second Millennium BC, they note: “There are no real problems with this view, though it must be recognized that the evidence is scant.”⁶¹

Longer years of life. Again, a careful reading suggests that the events of the story of Job are set in patriarchal times. This is because the lifestyle and longevity of Job are most similar to those recorded about the patriarchs in Genesis. It is recorded in the text (Job 42:17) that Job lived 140 years after his trial. It is very likely that he was between 50 and 70 years old at the start. In support of this, one Bible scholar writes that Job’s lifespan of 140 years (after his suffering) is a patriarchal type of lifespan.⁶² There are many other Bible commentators who also favor the reasoning that the prose account belongs to the patriarchal age because of the description of the glory of Job’s long life (Job 42:17).⁶³

Not only is Job put within that period, but some even assign him a limited time frame. Some scholars appear to agree, by estimation, on the period of a few generations after Noah, and probably, a little beyond Abraham (based on Job’s age). This might be for the

reason that the number of years of the patriarchs from Abraham's time shows a decline. Apparently, longevity drastically declined after Jacob. Some of the scholars even point to a more specific period. For example, some scholars refer to the period of the Egyptian sojourn (1876-1445 B.C.) as the most likely period for the origin of Job⁶⁴ and others agree with that line of argument, thus: "His longevity is typical of the patriarchs...For such reasons I would place him somewhat contemporary with Abraham, (i.e., ca 2000 BC)."⁶⁵ Once again, these are just hints in the direction of seeing the accounts as taking place or being set in an early time.

It is becoming quite convincing at this point for one to associate Job with a specific people, period and place. According to one scholar, "...the book...seems to have its setting among the early tribes that descended from Abraham along the northern border of Arabia, and contemporary with Israel's sojourn in Egypt."⁶⁶ The setting of the historical events within the "Patriarchal" period, sometime between Noah and Moses, makes Job a possible contemporary with Abraham. But other scholars even attempt to narrow the period further, "In terms of the progress of redemption, Job is best understood as having lived before the Abrahamic covenant, which narrows the covenant community to a particular family."⁶⁷

The unit of currency. The text makes mention of a particular kind of money or jewelry, called “qesita,” which is mentioned in Job 42:11, and is not found elsewhere in the Bible except in Genesis 33:19 and Joshua 24:32. Here too, Hartley mentions that the prose account belongs to the patriarchal age because, the “qesita” is a unit of currency (42:11; cf. Gen. 33:19, and Jos. 24:32).⁶⁸ This currency was probably known to the period before the Israelites finally settled in the Promised Land as a nation. One scholar refers to this when he notes that the mention of “qesita” as a piece of money (42:11) suggests a date at least as early as Joshua (cf. Jos. 24:32), if not the patriarchal period (cf. Gen. 33:19).⁶⁹

Other internal issues. Other significant issues that place Job in the patriarchal period are worth considering here. These include the lack of mention of the Mosaic Law in the book. The key elements of Hebrew faith, the Law and the Temple, are missing, and, ‘the sacred name, Yahweh, is found but rarely.’⁷⁰ The rare mention of Yahweh seems to confine the book to a pre-Mosaic era. There is also a likely reference to a flood, Job 22:16, probably that of Noah’s day. Even the type of divine name(s) used in the text might give some clue to the validity of the book. It is important to note that the names that Job and the friends use for God (Shaddai, El, Eloah) are identical to those used by the patriarchs.⁷¹

Most probably, there is a hint of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Job 15:34; 18:15, and some names mentioned in Job are listed among the descendants of Ishmael and Esau in Genesis 36. A typical example is the name mentioned in Job 32:2. There is therefore abundant evidence of the patriarchal setting of the whole story of Job. However it must be noted here that some of these indications alone could not be a yardstick for proof, because there might be some cultures today in which, for example, possessions are measured in livestock.

Different periods of time suggested: There is some evidence suggesting periods other than the patriarchal for the book of Job. One such passage has been argued as showing an awareness of the Mosaic Law, and some critics of the patriarchal setting of the book use it to support a Mosaic. This passage is Job 24:2-11. Mention is made here of the wickedness of keeping pawned clothes overnight (Exod. 22:6), the charitable measure of reserving the gleaning of the fields of the rich for the benefit of the poor (Lev. 19:9), and the monstrous evil of moving an ancient boundary marker (Deut. 19:14). It is however expedient to explain that 'this passage alludes to no legal provisions at all, but simply describes the lamentable state of those who are so poor that they have to glean the fields of the rich and pawn their clothing to

buy food.’⁷² Thus this evidence would not point to the Mosaic period, or beyond.

Another period which has been suggested is that of the monarchy. But here too there are no clear links to it. Archer notes that if the scene was set in North Arabia near Edom, then the clan type of society may well have persisted there as late as the time of the Hebrew monarchy, concluding: “Possibly private sacrifices by the heads of families persisted alongside the official tribal priesthood.”⁷³ Thus all the arguments in favor of other periods appear quite weak in the light of those advanced for the Patriarchal era. Apart from the detailed information about Job in his book, he is mentioned three times in other books of the Bible. These texts show the extent to which Job is regarded by some authors of the scriptures.

Support from the book of Ezekiel: Bible scholars agree that apart from the book itself, Job is mentioned twice in the book of the prophet Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 14:14, it says: “Even if these three men - Noah, Daniel, and Job - were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord.” In verse 20, it reads: “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they could save neither son nor daughter. They would save only themselves by their righteousness.”

In reference to the text, one scholar writes that Job is spoken of as historical in a historical context, and that prophet Ezekiel puts him alongside Noah and Daniel as an exemplar of piety, or 'as a master of intercessory prayer.'⁷⁴ Apparently, by his mention in Ezekiel, the account of the existence of such a man is regarded as historically true by the inspired writer; Job is referred to as a historical character as distinctly as Noah and Daniel. Another scholar acknowledges that Ezekiel picked out Job with Noah and Daniel as very righteous men in a list that might have included others such as Abraham, Samuel, David, or one of the great prophets, indicating that all the people listed are historical figures.⁷⁵ For Job to have been included in the list of those who lived means he also lived.

The argument here is that if Ezekiel is regarded as a prophet of God and if his messages are inspired, then God's mention of Job alongside other people in His warning to His people should be regarded as His acknowledgement of Job's historicity once the existence of such men as Noah and Daniel could not be doubted. The appeal is one that could have been made only to a real character, and there can be no reasonable doubt that Ezekiel regarded Job as having really existed; or rather, since it is God who speaks and not Ezekiel that speaks of Job as having actually existed.⁷⁶ One might therefore need to consider whether God would have

mentioned Job with Noah and Daniel as three righteous men, if Job indeed was only a figure of fiction created by somebody's imagination. The answer obviously is, "No!"

The references to Job in Ezekiel 14:14, 20 also show that at least some versions of the story of Job, or even his name, was known in Israel by the early Sixth Century BC. To appeal in this instance to the case of one whom Ezekiel does not know and regards as a fictitious character would be very unlikely for this sacred writer. At the same time, it is very interesting for a person who might be regarded by some scholars as a non-Israelite (or a fictitious figure) to be closely attached to others who are highly recognized as devout persons. Interestingly, whether one regards this as evidence of Job's historicity would depend on how the person regards the historicity of Noah and Daniel which, according to one scholar, 'is more evidence of the historicity of Job.'⁷⁷

If Job was not a real man, then why should Ezekiel (no doubt, one of the highly recognized prophets of the Old Testament) mention him among the Bible's list of righteous heroes? Thus, there is no reason to doubt that Job was a historical individual whose story was well known, accepted and respected by the Israelites. The inference here is best represented by the position of one Bible scholar who states that the Prophet Ezekiel (in 14:14) refers to Noah, Daniel, and Job as three historical individuals.⁷⁸

Support from the book of James: The same intention of historicity is evident from a reference to Job by the Apostle James: “Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy” (5:11). James, the brother of Jesus, and probably a leader of the Apostolic Church of the First Century AD, cites the experience of Job as an illustration of what God can do for any righteous person who perseveres. He is so remembered by James that he lifts him up as a model of patience in the face of suffering. In fact, James mentions him just as he does Elijah (5:17); and so far as this historical record goes there is the same evidence of the actual existence.

Additionally, the author of the epistle of James groups Job with the recognized prophets of Israel. Thus, one Bible scholar indicates that the mention of Job right after the prophets (that is, 5:10 and 5:11) suggests that ‘the writer of James would regard Job as a prophet. Certainly we regard the prophets as historical individuals.’⁷⁹ Other scholars share a similar view that the Apostle James speaking of Job and including him among the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, and who were examples of suffering and of patience is indicative of the fact that Job is among the blessed ones who endured.⁸⁰ Clearly, these go to support the fact that Job really lived as a man and that whatever happened to him is a historical fact.

C. Non-biblical records on Job

There appears to be more information from tradition on the subject of Job than there is from scripture. It is therefore prudent at this point to consider some of the sources that have shown interest in the subject over the years. Many sources could be considered, but only a few relevant ones will actually be mentioned.

Jewish tradition; the Talmud: The book of Job is said to have gained acceptance into the Jewish canon without much difficulty. One scholar mentions how the rabbis debated the canonicity of controversial books like the *Song of Songs* and *Ecclesiastes* until a century after Christ, but *Job's* inclusion in the official list was never seriously questioned, concluding that, 'Jews and Christians alike recognized the book as Holy Scripture in spite of its challenging subject matter and language.'⁸¹ Jewish tradition generally upholds Job as a historical figure and even tries to involve Moses in his life.

Most probably, these people give the book of Job and the man as much recognition as the Torah and all the figures mentioned in it by Moses. One scholar, Halley, mentions how ancient Jewish tradition ascribed the book to Moses for reasons that he could easily have learned of the story of Job from the man's own immediate descendants, or that Job himself may still have been alive and may have personally related the story to

Moses, stating: “We believe the traditional view is more likely to be correct.”⁸² Additionally, one scholar writes that, ‘The Jewish sect of Qumran also accepted the book and even made an Aramaic translation of it.’⁸³

It is also interesting that Job is mentioned as a historical figure in different Jewish traditional documents from different sources. The Babylonian Talmud records that Job lived in the time of Abraham and that he was married to the daughter of Jacob, while another tradition of the Talmud connects Job with Jethro and Balaam, who were consulted by Pharaoh on the question of the genocide of the Israelites. According to one Bible scholar, this tradition says that Job was punished because he failed to protest this crime.” However, ‘the Greek appendix to the book of Job identifies the man Job with Jobab the king of Edom, grandson of Esau.’⁸⁴

Greek records; the Septuagint (LXX): Apart from being the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint also contains many Jewish traditional beliefs which exist as comments on the main text. The Septuagint refers to the traditional acceptance of the time when Job lived. Barnes writes about an account which is appended to the Septuagint which mentions that Job ‘was a son of Zare, one of the sons of Esau, and the fifth in descent from Abraham,’ inferring that, ‘the Hebrew writers generally concur in describing him as living in

the days of Isaac and Jacob.’⁸⁵ This position buttresses that of those who point to Job as a real figure who without doubt lived during the Patriarchal period.

Ancient Near Eastern tradition: Since the book of Job mentions its main character as a great man in the East, there is likely to be a kind of tradition that will evolve from people who might want to establish a link with the fame of this Bible character. For example, there are speculations that a lot of monuments and memorials of Job are still preserved or referred to in the East. Some of these may be considered as providing some evidence of the fact that such a man as Job lived, and also an indication of the region in which he resided. The fact that the name Job is held in high esteem in such a region may indicate the importance attached to the figure. The original meaning of “Job” might be unclear; however, it was a name that is quite common and is widely attested to in the literature of the ancient Near Eastern world.⁸⁶

• **Arabian records.** Some Bible scholars indicate that there are numerous traditions respecting Job, many of them are indeed stories that are entirely ridiculous but all showing the firm belief prevalent in Arabia that there was such a man. Barnes confirms this when he states: “Arabian writers always make mention of Job as a real person, and his pretended grave is shown in the East

to this day.”⁸⁷ In line with the importance attached to Job, Long points out that “in ancient Near Eastern extra-biblical literature, the name Job...is well known as a personal name...is not necessarily some kind of mythic name.”⁸⁸

- **Nabatean records.** Another group of people who hold to traditions of Job’s existence is the Nabateans. One scholar describes these people as a powerful North Arabian tribe known to have dominated most of Transjordan from Eilat to Damascus, and makes mention of a fairly extensive collection of inscriptions on stone, largely composed in Aramaic, left behind by them.⁸⁹ Information available from the records of this people buttresses those from other sources on the facts of Job’s historicity.

Comparison of traditional sources: The description of the ancestry of Job from both the Septuagint and Arabian records is similar to the one given in the traditional beliefs of these Nabateans. Thus, all three sources give comparable information about Job.

- **Job is the same as Jobab.** Both the Septuagint and the Nabatean records mention Job as a historical figure, identify him with Jobab, and trace his roots to Edom. They refer to a passage in Genesis: “And Bela died, and

Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his stead” (Gen. 36:33). This text shows that the second king of Edom was Jobab, though not the son of the first king Bela, but the son of Zerah, the son of Reuel, a son of Esau. The link between Jobab and Edom serves as a possible connection between him and Job, whose background is traditionally traced to Edom. Such a linkage of both to Edom is also confirmed by the Septuagint.

The appendix to the Greek translation of Job places Uz on the borders of Edom and Arabia and makes Job one of the kings of Edom at a city named Dennaba.⁹⁰ This is accepted by Halley, who also notes that the Septuagint, in a postscript, following ancient tradition, ‘identified Job with Jobab, the second king of Edom’ (Gen. 36:33), and that, ‘names and places mentioned in the book seem to give it a setting among the descendents of Esau.’⁹¹

• **Job lived in the East: the Land of Uz.** Writing about the Nabateans, one scholar notes that Jobab was king of Edom, living at the city of Bozrah, and that Edom itself (probably in reference to the daughter of Edom), dwelt in the land of Uz (Lam. 4:21).⁹² Now, if Jobab was living in Edom, he also might have lived in Uz. According to the text, Job also lived in the land of Uz (Job 1:1; cf. Lam. 4:21). By this, we find both Job and Jobab in the land

of Uz; both lived in the same country. As a reasonable consequence of deductive reasoning, it is likely both Job and Jobab could be referring to the same person.

• **Information on Job's friends**. There is also a strong tie between Elihu, the young man mentioned in the book of Job as the son of Barakel, the Buzite (Job 32:2), and Jobab through Abraham. According to one position, 'Elihu came from the Buzites, who probably lived adjacent to the Chaldeans in northeast Arabia.'⁹³ Many deductions can also be made in reference to the friends of Job to arrive at the relationship that exists among them. One of such deductions is that "if the young man Elihu the Buzite of the kindred of Ram in Job 32:2 is to be linked with Abraham's relatives 'Buz' and 'Aram' in Genesis 22:21, then the ties linking Job with Jobab, a descendant from Abraham, are strengthened."⁹⁴ Another scholar writes an Arabic translation about Job thus:

Job dwelt in the land of Uz between the borders of Edom and Arabia, and was before called Jobab. He married a foreign wife, whose name was Anun. Job was himself a son of Zare, one of the sons of Esau; and his mother's name was Basra, and he was the sixth in descent from Abraham. But of the kings who reigned in Edom, the first who reigned over the land was Balak, the son of Beor; and the name of his city

was Danaba. And after him Jobab, who is called Job; and after him the name of him who was prince of the land of Teman...And of the friends of Job who came to meet him, was Elifaz...⁹⁵

A further comment is that Eliphaz, the oldest of the three friends, came from Teman, a prominent center in Edom.⁹⁶ The mention of Elifaz, of the land of Teman in the Arabian record, compares favorably with Eliphaz the Temanite from the Nabatean documents about whom Gibson writes:

...Eliphaz, Esau's eldest son...of Abraham, we find that this Eliphaz...about 100 years of age or more, before Jobab...Job's chief friend was a man named, Eliphaz the Temanite...This description of him as a Temanite greatly assists the identifying of Jobab with Job, for Eliphaz, Esau's son, was actually the progenitor of the Temanites through Teman his son, as we have noted before (Gen. 36:11, 15)...And Eliphaz, through his father Esau, and his grandfather Isaac, would possess much knowledge of God, such as is displayed in his discourses with Job.⁹⁷

The possible inference here is that Job might be traced to both Abraham and Esau.

Evidence from secular history sources: There are some historians whose records of world events have proved unquestionably reliable and are therefore acknowledged over the years. Information from some of these acclaimed historians throws light on certain issues in the book of Job and thus gives credence to the historical nature of Job.

- **Josephus**. According to one Bible commentator, the existence of the native land of Job is mentioned by Josephus (Antiquities 1.6.4) thus, 'Uz, one of the four sons of Aram, founded Trachonitis and Damascus (the area of Syria in the north).'⁹⁸ This Uz is likely to be the same person who might have founded the land that bears his name, looking at it from his genealogy in Genesis 10:22-23 and the period he would have lived.

- **Eusebius**. One scholar comments that 'Eusebius places him [Job] about two 'ages' before Moses. The opinions of the Eastern nations generally concur in assigning this as the age in which he lived.'⁹⁹ This shows clearly that some renowned secular historians acknowledge the historicity of Job, thus affirming the traditional Jewish belief, and the evidence of scripture. At this juncture, many concrete deductions might be made from the discussion.

What is the agreement on Job's historicity?

It is safe to posit that many Bible scholars are comfortably asserting that there is little doubt about the historicity of the biblical Job. This is in spite of the lack of elaborate details in the book itself and the very little evidence from other scriptures.

One question that might pop up however, is, on what basis do scholars agree on Job's historicity? Obviously, there are many. Most scholars agree upon the customs and practices peculiar to the time he lived, which arguably is the patriarchal era. Then also the land where he lived, Uz, even though it is not easy to locate, is no doubt a place within or close to Palestine. The argument that the literary style of the first verse of the book is common to most historical books still holds. Some even go to the extent of arguing that the literary genre of the book is a plus to its factual information. In support of the above position and contrary to the argument by critics that the literary style of the book is much advanced for his period, 'Archaeological finds confirm poetry's existence in ancient Egypt, Babylon and Ugarit in the 2nd Millennium BC.'¹⁰⁰

Some scholars have even gone to the extent of linking Job and Jobab, who is mentioned in Genesis, especially using a lot of traditional sources. The scriptural reference to King Jobab is indeed short. The link between the traditional beliefs from different backgrounds

concerning Job might mean that either one tradition borrowed from the other or that the information about him was popular to many cultures at the time. However, some scholars think that “the links between the two, Jobab and Job, are so numerous that the identification is very probable, to say the least...”¹⁰¹ This firm belief is perhaps another piece of evidence for Job’s historicity.

The deduction above is in line with that of many scholars who are very positive of Job’s existence. For example, one of them comments: “I shall declare that in my fallible opinion, Job was one of the historical characters who lived in the land of Uz and suffered most bitterly before his final victory...I think that it reflects a historical event, though I may be badly mistaken.”¹⁰² Here is what another scholar says: “Some doubt that Job really existed, but both OT and NT refer to him as a real person.”¹⁰³ Other Bible commentators have important notes: “Equally, there is no reason to doubt that the narrative is based on the experience of real people.”¹⁰⁴ Some have even gone to the extent of giving details of Job’s family after his ordeal as indicated here: “Job’s second set of children are borne to him by Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, thanks to an identification of Job with Jobab.”¹⁰⁵ Another reads thus:

Since Job himself lived after his trials one hundred and forty years, there is the possibility that, “In the leisure

which he enjoyed, he...thought it worthy to present the argument...in a more perfect form, and to give to it a more poetic cast...the main historic truth would be retained, and the real argument would in fact be stated.”¹⁰⁶

The list could include many others. In my candid opinion, there are enough biblical and traditional information to link Job with the Jobab mentioned in Genesis 36:33, leading one to conclude that Job, the sufferer and patient one, and Jobab, the king of Edom, may well be one and the same person. Therefore, it will be better at this juncture to declare Job as a man of history until there are enough reasons to prove it otherwise. There is also little or no doubt about Job's link with Esau and his descendants.

With the historicity of Job discussed, what one must consider next are certain details in the text and facts from elsewhere which provide information on the status of the man before God and in society. This is the objective of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

ARE YOU RIGHTEOUS? BEHOLD JOB!

The man, Job, is the main character of the book of the Old Testament that bears his name. The Hebrew name, translated “Yiob,” probably came through Latin into English as “Job.” Though the precise meaning of the name is uncertain, it was widely used by tribal leaders in Palestine and the surrounding territories in the Second Millennium BC.¹⁰⁷ However, another also notes that “Job” probably comes from a root word meaning “come back,” or “repent,” and hence may signify “one who turns back (to God).¹⁰⁸

Job’s pious and priestly background

The first chapter of the book which historically introduces the main character of the book, Job, presents a lot of facts on the man to reveal his real value. With regards to piety, few people ever lived will match the very high standards revealed about him (1:1-5). The text says he was blameless; that is, was perfect, complete,

and rounded out in character; he was upright, sound in relationship with others; he feared God; and he shunned evil, meaning he probably avoided any action that his conscience would convict him of.

One important aspect of Job's life is the fact that he regularly atoned for unconscious sins on behalf of his family through regular sacrifices and offerings. This clearly was an exclusive role of the priests during the OT dispensation. This presupposes that either Job was a priest, or he was performing a function that was foreshadowing the priesthood of all believers, an ordinance that would be established by the Lord Jesus Christ, for all believers in Him. Regarding the former, scripture reveals in the OT that the priest was the only one who had access to God and who alone could make sacrifices. It was the High priest who alone could enter into the holy of holies once, to make sacrifices. Clearly, the first designation of any group of people, being in the OT as priest, was in reference to Aaron and that only his sons were priest by virtue of their natural birth.

Under the Old Testament dispensation, quite a number of the offerings that were brought were animal sacrifices, and only the priest had the duty and the privilege of bringing them to the Lord. Since the Latin word for priest is "pontifex" which means bridge-builder, the priests were also the men who brought others to God by building a bridge for them.¹⁰⁹ During the Patriarchal

period, religion centered on a family altar, i.e., it was a parental duty to teach their children the things of worship and also to explain to them the meaning of the religious observances. The other things the Hebrew child was taught by way of religion included the recital of the prayer, 'The Shema,' which is in reality, the quotation of three passages from the Pentateuch (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21; and Num. 15:37-41). Job thus performed this function for his family regularly as one who was well qualified before God.

The family unit in Job's time

The facts of Job's family status are also described in chapter 1:1-5 of the book. From the Old down to the New Testament, several aspects of the life which continue to receive attention is the family life. The family is the functional unit of every society and the building block of a tribe (or the clan, when such exists). Families could be small or large depending upon the social and economic status of the head, which biblically and probably universally, is the man. Every family can be regarded as a little kingdom within itself, over which the father is the supreme ruler.

As expected, the authority of the father extends to the whole family, which is usually made up of the wife, the children, the children's children, his servants and all included in his household. If such a person is the

tribal leader, it extends to all the tribe. With regards to her husband, the wife usually occupies a subordinate position. Jewish women were responsible for making the clothing for the family (Prov. 31:21-24), and also washing of clothing. The younger women usually go to nearby sources of water to fetch some (Gen. 24:15-16).

But the Old Testament does not picture the wife as a mere slave of the husband. She is seen to exert a great influence for good or bad over the husband. Though the Mosaic Law does not forbid polygamy (Deut. 17:17) a tendency towards monogamy was quite common among the Israelites. Men like Adam, Noah, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, had but one wife. Also the High priests (Lev. 21:14) and the prophets, as far as Bible records show, were monogamous. But under certain circumstances, the men in biblical times would take more than one wife as happened with Abraham and Jacob. Job belongs to the former group; he is recorded in his book as having only one wife in spite of his status.

The attitude of Hebrew people in Bible times was that of a universal longing for and joy in giving birth to children. Matthews indicates that the primary purpose of a marriage in biblical times was to produce an heir.¹¹⁰ Thus there would be the desire on the part of the mother and father that the baby shall be a boy rather than a girl. Other reasons are that boys are wanted to increase the size, wealth, and importance of the family group or

clan. When they grow up and marry, they bring home with them their wives and children of such unions, and perpetuate the father's house. If boys increase the house, then girls are thought of as decreasing it, because when they marry they usually go to live in the husband's house. In all, Job had seven sons and three daughters. There are indications from the rotation of celebrations among the children that the whole family was a unit.

Job's economic background

In the OT, houses of more than one room were usually owned by those who were more prosperous. It is believed that houses of not more than one room were in the village, and those of more than one room were in the cities. The book of Job pictures him and his children as occupying separate houses, an indication that the man was well to do. Although the upper room or chamber was well-known and frequently referred to in the Bible (2 Kings 1:2; 23:12), one of the most famous being the prophet's chamber built for Elisha (2 Kings 4:10), there was no particular reference to any in Job. In OT biblical times, the camel was an important help to the families because it was the means of transport of goods and people. Possessing a good number of them plus other stock therefore indicated great wealth.

The following gives evidence of Job's greatness and prosperity: he probably had an animal farm, with

7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 donkeys, some crops farms, and a huge estate under the care of a large number of servants (1:4).

Job's social background

The pedigree of Job as mentioned in the book is worthy of mention. Few in the world today might match a description. He is presented as the greatest man among all the people of the East; a man of honor, a figure of importance at the city gate, and even aged men and princes gave him respect (29:5-11). He was an impartial judge, a friend of the widow, the fatherless, and those who had no help (29:12-17). In fact, his generosity was unparalleled, according to chapter 31:9-20. It is very likely that he was well connected because he had friends spread out through different cities/towns of the region. Most likely, he was a person with reasonable amount of clout, and was quite popular to the extent that whatever happened to him could become an issue that spread beyond his immediate environs.

In this chapter, Job's devotion to God and his status in the society of his day has been established. It is very likely that Job's religiosity, his family, economic and social statuses were also known and attractive to most of his acquaintances. But there was another interested personality in Job's life besides God and the society; Satan. Since Satan is the avowed spiritual enemy of

humanity, there is need to unveil him. Soon, calamity would befall Job. This calamity would involve a great loss of property, suffering of pains, and endurance of difficult period. Who would orchestrate such a calamity, would it be God or Satan? In the next chapter, the discussion would deal with all these issues.

CHAPTER 4

WHO ORCHESTRATES SUFFERING, GOD OR SATAN?

Suffering has been the lot of God's people ever since Adam and Eve fell to the deceptive scheme of the devil. The Bible has evidence of many of God's people, the righteous, who have gone through various forms of suffering and how they came through them. The book of Job is one of the most remarkable books of the Old Testament. Apart from the general inspiration of the book and the fact that it is sometimes considered as a literary production, it also bears the stamp of revealing some of the mysteries of divine providence in the suffering of the righteous.

Causes of suffering

Difficult times and suffering may arise from a lot of factors all of which can be defined as calamities or its synonyms like disasters and catastrophes. These are generally seen as unfortunate situations of life that occur

either naturally or accidentally. They include occurrences such as famine, drought, earthquake, flood, landslides, tornado, hurricane, tsunami, volcano, and loss of a relative (a child or children, father, mother, sibling, or somebody very close to you), destruction of properties such as houses, farms, factories, vehicles, or any valuables of life through disasters: hurricane, tsunamis or floods, fire outbreaks, and other related forms.

Another form of calamities or disasters which affect people emotionally with negative consequences relates to the physical body of a person, i.e., various forms of health challenges, diseases, and injuries to the body. There are still other forms like broken or soiled relations some of which lead to various conflicts, persecutions, character defamation, and related types. Disasters of all forms no doubt affect people in one way or the other with difficult moments associated with suffering, grief, pains, sometimes trauma, and in very extreme situations death, as the consequence. While certain calamities that happen to mankind might be predictable, others occur unexpectedly.

How will you feel when you lose the things you value as your means of happiness and survival on earth? For example, when news reaches you that your only large scale farm plantation which you have secured a loan to establish is flooded and all the plants destroyed completely? Imagine how you will react to the news

that your factory is engulfed in flames of fire, or a new heavy duty machine or vehicle you have purchased for commercial purpose is burned down to ashes at the time you have not completed your insurance cover. Well, not easy, right? Can you stand the information that as a result of electrical fault your family building together with all your personal effects in the house is totally engulfed in flames? How will your reaction be?

Can you cope with the sudden loss of your child (or children) through some form of accident, or will you survive the pains of loss of parent(s) who happen to be your main source of support? How will you fare with the challenges of life as a youth without the support of responsible parents? Will you have the strength to endure miscarriages or stillbirths? How will you take the news that you have contracted a deadly disease such as Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) through no fault of yours? How will you take the news of your spouse seeking a divorce because of childlessness, or your prospective life partner announcing a break of the relationship at the point of final preparation for marriage? How will your reaction be when an organization you have helped in every sense to establish, for example, a school, business organization, church, etc., plot your dismissal without any genuine case, or give you the sack without a genuine reason?

At such instances as mentioned above, will you yell at the messenger, burst into tears, lift up your voice and curse the Almighty God, be able to remain calm, or shout a word of praise to the Living Lord? Definitely, none of the above unfortunate instances is easy to bear in life. Such a loss can be so painful that it might be hard to heal or endure. In some instances, such situation might generate other cases which lead to aggravation of the disaster. Many people have suffered such difficult times in life; while some are able to overcome and turn things around for their good, others become so devastated that they break down completely and are never able to rise up again.

The story of Job is a typical example of people who suffer loss, pass through pains, experience difficult situations, etc., and do not just survive but are able to turn things around for their good. To such people, any loss, pains, life perils, or difficult circumstances might become stepping stones to be transformed into better life situations.

Why does calamity befall the righteous?

The headline question is one of the paramount ones to humanity. From creation, mankind has learned and understood from inspired writings and cultural/traditional beliefs that God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and all merciful. If these attributes of God

are anything to go by, then why would this God not prevent suffering from befalling the righteous? Better still why would this God not prevent suffering from wherever it originates, whether from the enemy or nature? Attempts to find answers to questions such as above have engaged the minds of people of different backgrounds: religious, educational, social, economic, traditional or cultural, etc. Consequently, many reasons have been put forward.

Underlying most religious beliefs (Christianity inclusive) and that of many cultures is the fact that God reserves the right to act. This means that the power to do all things absolutely rest with Him. Revelations from the inspired writings clearly indicate that God has a personality, and in this personality there is a 'will' which governs the universe and the life of mankind. He does everything in accordance with His will. God's 'will' is immutable and men (whatever the sex) generally have to invoke it or accept it in salvations that seem beyond human power. This will of God is exercised in a just way, because God is just, essentially good and merciful, showing kindness and taking pity over mankind.¹¹¹ In the light of all the righteous attributes of God, why does He allow evil or suffering to cross the path of the people?

One of the common cultural phenomena is for some people to think that unfortunate situations happen to people as a result of something negative they or

somebody related to them might have done. In many cultures there is the belief that God (or the gods, for those who believe in the lesser gods) punishes people for the wrong they do. Such cultures uphold the belief that evil is frowned upon by God (or the gods). Anytime calamity strikes it is seen as a punishment for evil. Wrong-doing might also incur the wrath of the people in society to the extent that they invoke a curse on those who might have committed the wrong. Invocations such as this are believed to be a call on God (or the gods) to punish evil, though it does not make God act on anything invoked in His Name.

Moreover, the kind of traditional concept where people attribute wrong doing to those who are at the receiving end of calamities, or that God (or the gods) punish people for wrong-doing, was very common among Israel in biblical times. In the OT, and specifically in the book of Job, one scholar noted:

...The traditional explanation of evil is put into the mouth of the three friends who come to comfort Job after they hear of his sufferings. The first of Job's friends asks him, "Who that is innocent ever perished?" (4:7) and advises him to "despise not the chastening of the Almighty" (5:17). The second friend suggests that Job is being punished for the sins of his children

(8:4), and the third assures Job “that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves” (11:6).¹¹²

In fact, all three friends were convinced that Job might have committed evil against God hence the disaster in his life.

Eliphaz presents arguments from what he has known by experience and heard from experienced men. He declared from experience that disasters strike as the reaping of the wickedness they had sown, that misfortune is the result of wrong doing, and suffer God's punishment. He argues that God's greatness is such that he upholds the darkest deeds of men, and duly punishes the wicked (chap. 4-5, 15, 22).

Bildad also argues from tradition that God never twists justice; He will never abandon the faithful or give help to the evil. He reproaches Job for not being sensible - he is claiming self-righteousness and showing anger with his friends and God. He devotes his speech to the fate of the wicked, the unrighteous (chap. 8, 18, 25).

In the case of Zophar, he insists that Job is a sinner and might be suffering from secret sins. Even then, God is not giving him all of the punishment he deserves! He argues that since creation the joy of the wicked lasts only a moment in spite of their self-

esteem. God will vent his burning anger against him for the heavens will expose his guilt (chap. 11 and 20).

These friends of Job could not come to terms with the fact that a righteous man can face suffering and pains when he had done nothing wrong. From these premises they tried to convince Job to accept that he had done evil, and that he should confess his sins in order to be forgiven, healed, and restored by God. But Job did not understand this tradition or philosophy; more so when he knew from deep self-evaluation that he had committed no offence and that as a priest of his family he had regularly sacrificed to atone for any wrong doing which any member of the family might have committed.

In the NT, during the ministry of the Lord Jesus, some of the people who still had this kind of notion attributed wrong-doing to what had befallen people. There was a blind man that the Lord approached to heal (John 9:1ff). The disciples asked the Lord whether it was the father or mother or the boy himself who did evil for such a calamity to befall him. But He correctly answered them that neither the father nor the mother nor the boy had committed evil but whatever had happened to him was for the glory of God to be revealed.

It might not be surprising to realize that the concept of suffering and pains in the life of the righteous being as a result of sin is still being held by some people

even including Christians. To such people suffering and pain are not part of the package of things that believers received from God. That is, the God of all righteousness will never allow anything evil to befall his children. But that might not be the case. A position such as this is contrary to what the scripture teaches that, God can test people's faith through hardship, sufferings and pains as happened to Abraham, Daniel, some of the prophets like Jeremiah, etc. The following might hold true as main reasons for the suffering of the righteous:

- In order for God's will to be done, He sometimes allows suffering to come to the righteous. Thus, in spite of the extent of service Apostle Paul rendered for God's Kingdom, he still suffered setbacks; shipwreck, hunger, persecution, pains, etc., 'so that the work of God will be established' (John 9:3).
- Suffering might come upon the righteous in order to humble them before God. The thorn in the flesh of Paul is a typical example (1 Cor. 12:1-7).
- Suffering might happen to the righteous in order for God to win victory over the enemy. Most of the time, Satan challenges God that when the righteous face trouble, they will turn away from God. But God always wins. When people are in trouble, they cry to God. Thus, evil might happen so that the power of God over nature and Satan will be manifested.

- Suffering sometimes happens to the righteous so that they will have testimony: “Once I was blind but now I can see (John 9:18).” Such a testimony is able to draw people to God, i.e., when they see what God did for a person during the period of calamity. What happened to Job probably spread to the then known world. In the same vein, when God reinstated him, the world around him heard of it.

The above notwithstanding, it is not far from right to hold to the spiritual concept that evil usually happens to those who engage in it. This might be inferred from the statement the Lord Jesus Christ made to the lame man who was healed by the pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda, near the Sheep Gate at Jerusalem. Scripture records: “Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you”” (John 5:1-14).

Clearly, then, calamities and sufferings might come as a consequence of evil that people do. But believers have to be careful when assigning causes to such unfortunate situations in life. Where then do we stand with regards to our views of where loss, pains, and difficult time originate? We shall consider some of the views vis-à-vis the position of scriptures as revealed in the book of Job and others.

Suffering and pains: God permits; Satan executes

The contrast between the socio-traditional belief of some cultures and the Jewish believe in demon is that while the former usually believe demons have power to influence all evil and negativities, the latter often bring these under the domain and permission of the Most High God. Simply put: “Yahweh uses Satan as an instrument for accomplishing his purposes”¹¹³ In a realistic sense, it is important for Bible readers and believers not to forget that Satan has not lost the powers given to angels by God; he still commands a limited level of it (Luke 10:18-19; Col. 1:15-17). Satan can thus attack human beings and also manipulate the forces of nature, but it is clear from the conversation between him and God that he cannot on his own authority attack any believer unless with permission from God (Job 1:11; 2:3; cf. John 19:11).

On one hand, trials (or tests) which usually bring suffering and pains are usually orchestrated by God, e.g. Abraham (Gen. 22:1-12; Exod. 16:4-5; 1 Cor. 3:13). In God’s sovereign providence, people who believe in Him are sometimes put to test as proof of their faith in Him. In this testing, He may employ Satan as the tool. Therefore, tests or trials are never intended for believers of God to fall, but are initiated by God as a means to purify such people, and are intended to lead to a testimony. Thus, suffering which comes as part of the

trial or testing of the believer, though is one of the ways by which God ascertains a person's commitment to Him, is executed by Satan and his host of demons.

Temptations on the other hand are executed by Satan solely as a challenge to mankind in general to make them disobey God's commandments and thus lead to their fall. Typical examples are seen from Genesis through Revelation: Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1ff), King David (2 Sam. 11), and even the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 4:1-11) were all tempted by Satan.

The life of Job reveals that in adversity, God may have definite purposes different from retribution. The attitude of this hero towards affliction, his steadfastness to faith in God, and his own integrity as a righteous person is central and amply demonstrated in all the chapters of the book that bears his name. His experience and testimony address the issue of unexpected misery and trouble as a result of the trial of his faith in God who orchestrated it but permitted Satan to execute it.

The issue of how Satan manages to execute his plots against mankind, especially the believers of God, in spite of God's absolute protection, would be a subject of interest to everybody. And this is the issue of discussion in the proceeding chapter.

CHAPTER 5

WHO ARE CLOSER TO YOU: GOD'S ANGELS OR EVIL SPIRITS?

There are so many issues in the life of a person that are unknown to the one. Such issues are not due to ignorance on the part of mankind but because they are within the arena of the spirit beings and therefore belong to the realm of the spirits. One of such issues is which of these spirit beings are closer to humanity? This question is not easy to answer. The dramatic events of the disaster which befell Job unfolded with a scene in the heavenly realm where the holy angels appeared before God and Satan is also seen among them (Job 1:6). In fact, both God's angels and demons are major players in the life of human's on earth. Their roles in the life of believers in the days of the Old Testament are as relevant as it is today.

Any attempt at discussing the major issues of man's life is incomplete without the mention of these spiritual being. It is therefore important that knowledge

of their characteristics and the roles these spirit beings play become known to the present day believer (Heb. 1:14; Ps. 91:11). A lot of the issues on this subject have been extensively discussed in the book, *Yes You Can: You are God's Transformational Leader*.¹¹⁴

Who are Angels?

To unravel the reason for which the angels had appeared before God, this book first looks at who angels are and the roles they play in the scheme of God. From scriptures, angels are understood to be God's messengers. They are supernatural heavenly beings, a little higher in dignity than man (Ps. 8:4-5). A team of scholars have done extensive studies of scripture to help with information of angels.¹¹⁵ Angels were created before the earth was made (Ps. 148:2-5; Col. 1:16; Job 38:4, 7). They are invisible beings and are also called spirits (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:7-14), or sons of God (Job 1:6; 38:7; Ps. 89:6), or stars of heaven (Jud. 5:20; Rev. 1:20; 9:1; 12:4). Angels are not omniscient (all knowing), i.e., they do not know everything (Matt. 24:36; 1 Peter 1:12).

Scriptures reveal that angels were created holy (Gen. 1:31; Jude 6; Ezek. 28:12-15), and are supposed to keep and obey God's word in the Holy Scriptures and angels are not supposed to be worshiped (Rev. 22:8-9; Ps. 103:20). Although angels are stronger than humans they are not omnipotent (Ps. 103:20; 2 Thess. 1:7; 2 Pet.

2:11), neither are they omnipresent, i.e., they are not everywhere at the same time (Luke 1:26). Angels are organized into different services or they have special positions within the angelic order some of which are Cherubim (Gen. 3:24), Seraphim (Isa. 6:2), Archangel (Jude 9), chief Prince (Dan. 10:13). They have names e.g. Michael (Jude 9; Dan. 10:13), Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; Luke 1:19, 26), and Lucifer.

Scripture indicates that angels are uncountable, though not to God (Rev. 5:11). The angelic groups have ranks e.g. principalities, powers, princes, etc. (Eph. 1:21; Col 1:16). In terms of their function, angels stand in God's presence (Matt. 18:10) where they worship Him every moment (Rev. 5:11-12). They are involved in saving the people of God (Ps. 91:11-12; Acts 5:19), and also protect the people of God (Dan. 3:28). Angels help and render special services for God and believers, e.g., rolling of stone of the tomb (Matt. 4:11; 28:2-7). They can encourage the people of God in times of hardship (Acts 27:23-24), and also guide and give special direction to believers, leading and directing them on God's approved paths (Exod. 23:20; Acts 8:26). They can interpret God's will when the need arises (Dan. 7:16; 10:5).

Angels execute God's will towards individuals and nations (Gen. 19:12, 13; 2 Sam. 24:16, 17), and guide special nations as assigned by God (Dan. 10:12-13, 20). They fight for God's people (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 26:53),

and strengthen the saints when need be (Luke 22:43). Angels bring God's message and promises to His people as seen in Judges 6:12 (also Acts 10:3, 4; Gen. 21:17; 22:11; Rev. 1:1), and are understood by many to be the guardians of God's churches (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18). Angels will herald and accompany the Lord Jesus Christ in His Second coming (Jude 14, 15).

Who are evil spirits?

In the midst of all the excellent ministry of God through His myriad of angels, Satan is not missing. Undoubtedly the major enemy of every person who passes the earth, Satan, together with his host of demons (or devils) constitutes the body known as "fallen angels" or evil spirits. Just as knowledge of the role of Satan and the host of evil spirits was relevant to people in the biblical period so it is with believers today. Indeed, knowledge of their characteristics and the important role they play is necessary to every believer in order to resist and continuously overcome them (Eph. 6:10-12; Luke 10:18ff).

The term "evil spirit" occurs in the OT as well as the NT. While it is very difficult to determine whether any idols or real demons were referred to in the OT passages like Deuteronomy 32:17, 2 Chronicles 11:15, and Psalm 106:37, and other such passages, there are clear indications of Jewish understanding of demons

revealed in the OT. For example, demons were probably associated with sacrifices to animals and idols (Lev. 17:7). Additionally, a passage like Psalm 91:3 gives a clue to the evil activities of demons when it mentions God's protection of his people from the snares of demons.

Satan is the head of this group with whom he has set his kingdom or another world (James 4:1-4; 1 Pet. 4:1-4; 5:8; Gal. 5:17). To the Jewish mind the real power behind all calamities is God (Deut. 28:21-24; 2 Sam. 24:16). In a lot of cultures however, such occurrences are usually ascribed to the activities of demons. In line with such a belief, people who had links with demons or associated with communication with the dead, sorcery, or divination (Num. 23:23) were disregarded and prohibited from the Jewish community (Deut. 18:10). All of these practices could be classified as abomination before God.

Origin of demons

One of the important areas that one has to understand is the origin of Satan and demons, altogether referred to as fallen angels. The term "demons" is used more frequently in the NT scriptures. Basically, the NT regards demons as spirits that are operational in the activities of humanity. As a result, demons are fully distinctive in the NT and are ascribed different activities completely. For example, the term occurs in Acts 17:18,

and many times in Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10: 20ff). James also writes of how demons believe in God, (James 2:19). The NT underpins the idea and belief of many cultures and Jewish traditional view that demons are evil spirits. For example, in the gospel demons appear in Matthew 12:27-28; 17:18; Mark 9:20; Luke 10:17, where Jesus was accused by the Jewish leaders of casting demons by the power of Beelzebub.

Apostle Paul warns of increased demonic activities in his first book to his 'son,' Timothy (4:1), and also refers to believer's warfare with demons in Ephesians 6:12. Apostle James also mentions of people using demonic wisdom (James 3:15). Along the same line, Apostle John admonished believers on demonic teachings (1 John 4:1, 3, 6). Also common in the NT is the usage of other nouns for demons. Particularly, "a spirit" which is commonly associated with the adjective, "evil" is used in place of "demon" to mean evil spirit. For example, "evil spirit" is used in Matthew 12:43 and Mark 1:16, and in Revelation 16:13, where it is recorded that an "evil spirit" (instead of a demon) was driven out of a man.

Satan and his team of demons or evil spirits were part of the hosts of God but because they could not hold on to their holy position in heaven they turned to oppose God (Jude 6; Ezek. 28:12-15; Isa. 14:12-15; 2 Pet 2:4; Rev. 12:14, 7-9). Lucifer was in the garden as the cherub that covered (Ezek. 28:12), and all that God created

was perfect and good (Gen. 1:31; 2:1-3). Satan was created full of beauty and full of wisdom (Ezek. 28:12-15). Satan's fall occurred because of his pride of life, self-centeredness, and lust for power (Isa. 14:12-5; Ezek. 28:16-17). As a result of his intention to oppose and set a parallel kingdom to that of the Most High God, and engaged in war with the loyal angels of God in Heaven (Rev. 12:7), Satan was defeated (Rev. 12:8) and was cast from Heaven. He had a third of heaven's hosts which he drew along with him and fell to the earth (Rev. 12: 4, 9; Luke 10:18).

But it is clear that this rebellion of Satan and some of the rebellious angels occurred before the fall of man, for it was Lucifer, turned into Satan, who deceived man in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1). But some of the defeated angels were put in chains in darkness (1 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6), while some of these fallen angels, with Satan as their leader have organized themselves into a force to oppose God or angel of God in their work (Dan. 10:12-13; Matt. 16:23). Satan has appointed some of his followers to positions such as rulers or princes (Dan. 10:13, 20-21; Luke 11:15). He has since become "the god of the world" (2 Cor. 4:4), and chief prince over authorities or principalities (Eph. 2:2), powers (Luke 10:19), prince of the power of the air and over many spirits (devils).

Why Satan and demons are enemies of humanity

There are further questions that would have to be considered as part of the attempts to delve deeply into the present discussion:

- What are the three main avenues through which believers may be tempted as recorded in 1 John 2:16?
- What are the devices of Satan against mankind?
- What are the objectives behind the temptations that Satan devises against the believers of God?

Since his fall, Satan has been on the offensive to make man to also fall from God's eternal plan. That is, they are working in order to let man lose his position by creating false position for man (Gen. 3:4, 5; Ps. 8:5), win glory and worship (Luke 4:6-7), destroy the work of God in man (1 Thess. 2:18), deceive others into disobeying God (Gen. 3:13), bring man into destruction (John 10:10), finally bring man into their fate in the Lake of fire (Matt. 25:36).

The main methods of Satan and his host of demons include the following:

- To set up a fighting force of demonic spirits to fight God's angels and men (Eph. 6:12).
- To set up a kingdom with him as chief prince and have subordinates; demons and other fallen spirits, and then bring humanity under his control.

- To act through seducing spirits, lust, envy, etc., in order to tempt believers and cause them to fall from God's grace of salvation in Christ or to frustrate believers.
- To act through other demonic spirits to posses bodies and destroy them (Matt. 8:28; 9:32-33; Luke 11:24ff).

These fallen angels prevent believers from serving God (Rom. 8:38), and rather demand worship (Luke 4:8). They inflict disease by binding people (Luke 13:16; Acts 10:38), or possessing people (Matt. 8:28-32; 9:32-33), and causing destruction through various forms of accidents, natural disasters like burning, earthquakes or hurricanes (Job 1:12-13, 19; 2:7). They are engaged in tempting people to sin (Matt. 4:3; John 13:27), or influencing people's mind to act contrary to God, and attempting to eliminate both believers and unbelievers, (Luke 22:3). They can even spread false doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:2).

Satan and his host of fallen angels also work against mankind through obsession, suppression, or oppression of human beings (Luke 22:3). Through such assess, they oppress the mind and cause all sorts of unhealthy situations for the person; mental instability as was experienced by King Saul of Israel (1 Sam. 16:14), paranoid situations, grief, fear, shock, lust, etc. Satan attacks believers and unbelievers alike and take them captives for his kingdom (Luke 13:12-16). He and his host of demons have set up many false religions to

compete with Christ for lost souls and these operate by twisted doctrines (1 Tim. 4:1, 2). Sometimes, Satan even transforms into an angel of light among believers of God in order to remain unnoticed and then schemes many negativities; division, temptation, rage, resentment, fear, deception, plots of attacks, frustration, bitterness (2 Cor. 11:14).

Mention should also be made of the fact that Satan and his followers are able to block God's blessings through hardness of people's heart to the word of God, double mindedness, worldliness, doubt, etc. They act through the sin of pride, and cause believers to disown God's Spirit, i.e., by polluting our body with sin which will make God's spirit leave us (1 Sam. 16:14). Satan can also hide behind ancestral and idolatrous practices like the pouring of libation where pronouncements made invoke them into the life of people during child-naming ceremonies, some forms of puberty rites especially practices in certain cultures of Africa, traditional marriage contraction periods, and other outdoor or indoor programs.

Satanic spirits are able to cause general spiritual weakness through contact with symbols or materials possessed by them, e.g. spirit of fornication and lust, through occult initiations, witchcraft (Luke 11:24-26), through food offered to idols in which the demonic spirit pass to posses (1 Cor. 9:17-21; 10:19-21). The work of

Satan also include using false methods of demonic deliverance in which the materials introduced into the body are usually possessed, and also through demonic contacts with rings or turbans, bracelets, etc., which are usually possessed by these demonic spirits and therefore they come to possess them. They can attack people through concoctions, holy waters, etc., which are usually possessed by some demonic spirits and are used by some spiritual churches (Deut. 7:26; 18:9-14). The fate of Satan and all fallen angels is that they will be destroyed finally in the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

Now that the identity and activities of Satan and his team of evil spirits have been uncovered, attention would be focused on how they target specific individuals, for attack. In the subsequent chapter, their attack on Job would leave us with lots of lessons on their schemes.

CHAPTER 6

SUFFERING: SATAN'S DREADFUL TOOL

In his book, *Christian Suffering*, R. B. Thieme Jnr. discusses interesting issues on some of the reasons why believers of God suffer, and Satan's objective to use mankind to prove his own superiority over God.¹¹⁶ It is common knowledge that Satan has no means to achieving his aim since he is not the Creator and thus has no supreme authority over creation. Therefore, as has been indicated already, all Satan does is to manipulate creation and the forces of nature to fulfill his aim. It is this multifaceted policy for achieving this goal that this scholar describes in his book as "Cosmic system." He reveals that Satan's diverse tactics express one strategy, which either encourages human arrogance or sponsors human antagonism to God.¹¹⁷

To achieve such an aim, Satan devices and brings some calamities leading to losses, pain, and difficult situation, etc, that will compel a righteous person to be disappointed in God, that is, to see God as unfaithful to take care of those who trust in Him, cause the person to

break his/her relationship with God, and finally turn away from Him. When this happens, then such a person is not only subjected to all kinds of buffetings of Satan, he/she is lost in the end.

The open challenge; God versus Satan

The encounter between God (Yahweh) and Satan is pictured in the form of a heavenly drama with God as the host in council with spiritual subjects. Then Satan appeared at the scene. When Satan appeared before God, the question that God posed to Satan clearly shows that He was not expecting him among the angels who were probably in the presence of God for very important reasons.

...The setting of the dialogue between Yahweh and the Satan demonstrates the subordination of the Satan to Yahweh. The setting is that of a heavenly council or divine assembly. Such gatherings of celestial beings are well known in the literature of the ancient Near East, and the Israelites used this imagery to describe their understanding of the heavenly realm.¹¹⁸

Without mincing words, Satan made his intention clear to God; “moving to and fro,” on the sphere of the world (Job 1:6-7). Scripture does not fail to reveal the main objective of Satan: “...Looking for someone

to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). At this moment, an argument ensues between God and Satan. God threw in the main statement of defense for Job’s unquestioned dedication to Him, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him...” (Job 1:7).

Such an inviting question was enough for Satan to now narrow his attention on Job whom, from his answer, had tried to attack but had failed because of the hedge of God’s protection on the man. At this point it was enough for Satan to also throw a challenge to God that Job only serves Him for benefit. Satan also contends that, should Job be deprived of any benefits from God, he would turn his back on Him (God) and even curse Him. In other words, Satan saw material prosperity as the root cause of false piety, hence the need to rob Job of such prosperity in order to create true piety.¹¹⁹ To prove Job’s loyalty, honesty, dedication, true fear and reverence for God, the latter is to give (Satan) the opening to attack Job.

Yahweh clearly affirms his confidence in the integrity of Job (Job 1:8; 2:3) and presumably wants Job to pass the tests he undergoes...The Satan, on the other hand, contends that Yahweh's confidence is misplaced and clearly expects...Job to fail the tests to which he subjects him.¹²⁰

Thus Job's commitment to God now came under test and the book reveals successive attacks which the main character of the book, Job, received at the hands of Satan.

Satan's first attack on Job

The outcome of argument between God and Satan was that the latter was given opportunity to test Job, with the aim of causing Job to curse God, i.e., to renounce God and become unfaithful to Him. Satan is given permission to strike only at Job's possessions but not his body. So he enters into the affairs of Job with destructive action, and the drama of Job's suffering and pains now begins. But it should be understood at this juncture that Job was very oblivious of whatever had transpired between his God and Satan, his accuser and enemy, whose only purpose was to 'steal and kill and destroy.'

No wonder, the accuser's immediate move was to strike at Job's material possession and family (Job 1:13-15). He is quick to act and brought utter destruction and an end to Job's prosperity with four strokes. He brought about the following; human loss, that is, all Job's children and almost all the slaves and property including animals, farms, houses, personal effects, probably poultry were lost. Besides such total economic devastation, there was accompanying loss of social

dignity, i.e., his respect and honor in society. All who hitherto upheld his name with respect would reconsider it.

Satan used a variety of means to cause the destruction: human agents, thus the Sabeans and the Chaldeans; and forces of nature or natural occurrences, involving the “fire of God” and strong winds. Within a relatively short period of time, Job had lost every physical property he had faithfully acquired as blessing from God and had been reduced to an empty person. But Satan’s aim of making Job curse God when he loses his earthly possession did not work, for it is written: “Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God” (1:22, NAS). This might mean that at this point and even thereafter, the man did not even pause to blame anybody for the calamity that had befallen him.

Satan’s second attack on Job

Circumstances that led to further destructive afflictions by Satan involve a second spiritual drama, due to the fact of Job's continued faithfulness even in the face of great adversity. God questions Satan, probably with a view of forcing him to acknowledge defeat. But Satan does not accept defeat; he rather employs a second argument he thinks might succeed. His argument is that a man who is in difficulties, whatever they are, will, if necessary, give up all his possessions provided he himself comes out unscathed. Thus, ‘Job has lost much

but not his health.' What this means to Satan is that if Job's physical body is afflicted with anything harmful and painful, it would break him down and cause him to turn against God.

Once again, because of the confidence that God reposed in Job, He accepts this new challenge of the integrity of Job. Thus, Satan is to use all means to affect the body without taking Job's life. Consequently, Satan, this time sets out for an effective means of destroying the health of Job. He attacks Job's body with all sorts of diseases that ended with sores on the skin. In this second attack in which Job again came out victorious, the testimony from the Bible about Job is that he did not say any evil words against God or anybody.

Developments after Satan's attacks

In times of trouble, there are some people who are definitely expected to cling to your side and support you through it. Such persons are most likely to include your marriage partner, that is, if such happens to be alive. But the latest development in Job's situation revealed something different about the woman who all this while was Job's better half. It is quite disappointing considering the attitude of the one who had been with the man all the years of plenty, comfort, and joy. Now, she breaks down and acted strangely. This is what the wife said, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God

and die!" But such a statement coming from somebody who had probably remained faithful to Job through the birth of children was enough to incur a sharp rebuke from the husband. But Job remained resolute and replied: "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" (2:9-10, NAS).

But was Job's situation going to remain a private issue? Not at all. In fact Job's 'downfall' and affliction travelled like wildfire that some of his friends both far and near heard about it. And it is most likely that a contemplation of his predicament became the order of the day among some of the friends. Then, three of them: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, dared to make an appointment to come and sympathize with him (2:11-12, NAS). Surprisingly, they could not recognize their friend and consequently break down in tears and mourning. For seven days and nights they could not speak.

Indeed, it was hard to imagine what had really happened to the man who once was the envy of all the people in the East. Within a flash of a moment, all the earthly things that anybody could boast of had been razed down by the enemy through unexpected means of attack. The predicament of Job is summarized in this way:

It was most probably a time of painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head...Job himself, with a piece of broken pottery in his hands to help scrap his skin, and in ashes suffering the pain of his body infections, sat in grief, and remained in silence all this while.¹²¹

This notwithstanding, Job's trial was not yet over for he had to endure a long stage of pain and agony as a result of the second attack. Day in and out, he had no option than to ponder his great loss, wonder about where he had gone wrong, groan in pains, and without any sense of expectation in human intervention look up to God in hope of restoration.

Our revelation of Satan's attack on Job which has been dealt with in this chapter also necessitates a little consideration of some of the tools or devices that the enemy uses against humanity. One of the major tools is "fear." The next chapter would look at the fear factor more deeply.

CHAPTER 7

THE “FEAR FACTOR” IN LIFE

“Fear” is one of the most used words in the scriptures. While the mention of it in relation to life’s issues reminds one of both pleasant and unpleasant situations, it can be used in relation to God to elicit various responses both positive and otherwise. Admittedly, fear is one of the greatest weapons of the enemy against believers of God. The spirit of fear is able to overwhelm people in such a way that they are overpowered by it as Job testified of, “what I feared had come upon me” (3:25). It is important for believers to understand issues relating to ‘fear,’ so some level of attention is needed in any discussion of this nature.

The tempter had tried to break Job’s spirit and crush him to the earth; but he could not succeed yet in wresting from him his integrity or bringing him to forsake or curse his God. Two strikes have been effected by Satan already and Job has been reduced to an empty and pitiable personality. In spite of Job’s situation, the

tempter, Satan, still seemed not to have relaxed his hold. He had new instruments of torture to apply to the victim already reduced to so pitiable a condition; and would use it in the extremity of misery to a condition; and even push it further to the bitter end. This weapon is fear, a very good virtue as well as a devastating tool. It is one of the weapons that are able to work again against any person from within himself/herself and without. When a person comes under the influence of fear it can eat the one up till the person is completely destroyed.

What is “fear”?

“Fear” can be defined simply as an emotional, physiological reaction, often violent to a real or imagined threat. Fear is believed to be learned rather than instinctive, since the human infant does not display any recognizable fear response until approximately the sixth month after birth. It is closely linked to anxiety since the latter is created in response to forces within the personality rather than to specific external threats.¹²² But other forms of fear are as a result of direct consequences of unpleasant experiences. “Fear” and its synonyms occur several hundred times in the Bible (Gen. 3:10; Exod. 1:17, 21; 34:30; Deut. 10:18-20; 31:11-12; Ps. 27:1; 56:3-4; 86:11).

In biblical Hebrew, the most common term for fear is *yare* which is translated as “reverence” and *pahad*,

translated as “dread”, “terror” or “fear”¹²³ (Jonah 1:10). In the Septuagint, the translators usually rendered the Hebrew for “fear” as *yare* which in English is designated as “respect” or “piety”, although sometimes it is substituted for, and simply rendered “fear” (Isa. 11:2; Prov. 1:7).

In the New Testament, the common translations like “to be afraid,” or “to be seized with fear” are common. Also common are its OT derivatives such as “reverence,” “respect” or “godliness.” While the concept of fear in the NT does not occupy a central place, the use of the word and its synonyms offers a remarkable parallel to that in the OT. There are indications that the concept of fear in the Bible in general is related to two main ideas. Both are quite mentally and emotionally related. It is a similar kind of worldly fear; timidity, cowardice, dread of demons, enemies, death, etc., which is in the mind of the NT writers when they extol the fruit of the new life.

Holy/godly fear: The first idea is the perception of the Holy One, God Almighty in a meaningful way by reason of reflections of current or past experiences. This fear of the Lord is called “holy fear” or “reverence.” It demonstrates a respect of the inferior for the superior. It is in relation to a person’s revelation and apprehension of the divine nature of God that drives him/her to surrender in worship. Here, there is a mystery of divine holiness

which produces a mixture of terror and reverence. It usually accompanies the perception of God's glory and may generate an emotion of exaltation and joy at the discovery of God's thoughtfulness and love for a person.

Apparently, "holy fear" is the result not only of knowledge that Yahweh is a Holy God, but also of the apprehension of His saving grace. It is not the result of God's destructive wrath or condemning judgment. It rather arises from the perception of His very love, unmerited favor, which send people to surrender in a sudden burst of praise and worship typical of the psalmist (Ps. 2:11; 22:23). Although the new person in Christ is delivered from worldly fears, yet a form of fear, i.e., godly fear or reverence for God should still remain. While the spirit of slavery would allow a person to fall back into fear, the spirit of sonship makes the believer cry out, "Abba! Father! (Rom. 8:15).

The Bible writers constantly maintain that God delivers any believer from any ungodly fear. The NT expression "those who fear God" is rather employed to describe the "faithful" (Luke 1:50; cf. 18:2, 4). Some of the NT writers constantly reminded believers not only to take advantage of God's love but also to worship Him with reverence. Passages such as "...Serve one another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21), "...Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12), "...Let us serve God with reverence and godly fear..." (Heb. 12:28),

“...Fear God, honor the king” (1 Pet. 1:17), “...Fear God and give glory to Him” (Rev. 14:7), are typical examples of the use of fear in the NT.

Ungodly fear: The second idea of fear is the conception, anticipation, or dread caused by an impending disaster. There are various forms of this second type of fear encountered in life. Some of these include the following:

- **The fear of people:** This type of fear, called the “fear of people,” has to do with respect. It is the situation where people of honor produce fear in other people (Exod. 34:30; cf. Josh. 4:14). On one hand, it is like a “reverential awe” that befalls people when they are overwhelmed with a presence. For example, regard for people who are endowed with God’s glory or presence, people in higher authority, etc. Slaves have such fear for their masters, business secretaries often have such fear for their bosses, traditional elders have it for their kings, etc.

On the other hand, there are cases where the fear of men can lead to timidity. Such fear can create situations in people where torments are experienced at the instance of others. This usually happens when fear is accompanied by some elements of inferiority complex or lack of self esteem.

- **Fear of retribution:** This type of fear usually used in the OT has to do with sin or rebellion. This fear corresponds more or less to the expectation of a destructive or chastisement (or retribution). This type is associated with some torment that comes upon a person as a consequence of sin(s) committed. Thus, Adam was afraid in the garden after his act of disobedience (Gen. 3:10). Sometimes this type of fear coalesces with the sense of a person's iniquity, with death as a result. Jacob feared that Esau would kill him so he ran away to Haran (Gen. 27: 41-46). This is "slavish fear" and is always accompanied by torments.
- **Fear of failure and/or the unknown:** In this last type of fear, a person becomes afraid whenever a threat arises against his/her plans, ambitions, security, expectations, or his/her life in general (Gen. 4:14; Num. 14:9). Such fear has to do with overly concern for success or achievements in this present life. It is borne by pains that defy explanation that there was a coming calamity, disaster, evil, premature death, or something negative.
 Fear of failure and/or the unknown is also the fear that a person experiences at the thought of attacks of Satan or demonic powers. It is the anticipation of attack from the forces of evil in a person's life.

“Fear” in the book of Job

Occasionally, people who are suffering are terrified because they find in God or a deity the author of their misery and yet they are unwilling or unable to explain the hostility of this deity against them. This is the situation that Job finds himself. “Fear” occurs as many as 19 times in the book of Job alone (it depends on the version of Bible though). The use of “fear” in most of the cases was in relation to “dread” or “terror,” that is, being terrified of a situation and not that of reverence of a deity. Despite overwhelming indication of reverence for God, yet there is clear evidence in the book to show that Job was tortured by fear.

The tempter managed to put fear into Job to admit that he was not safe all along. Job’s type was the fear of failure (or of the unknown). It was such a physical and mental torment or pains of a coming catastrophe, calamity, disaster, etc. This can be seen in the following expressions of Job himself, “God has made my heart faint, the Almighty has terrified me” (23:16), “when I think about what is happening, I am terrified” (21:6; 23:15), “let not terror of God frighten me” (9:34), etc. Job’s “dread” of God and not reverence manifested clearly in his expression: “If only there were someone to arbitrate between us...then I would speak without fear of Him” (Job 9:33-35).

It is apparent that the torture of the body coupled with fear of what might happen next to him had had a great toll on Job's body as a whole. Before Job's three friends arrived, his disease had already altered his physical features and form so much that they lifted up their eyes and could not even recognize him. Consequently, they wept, tore their robes to show sorrow, and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with Job for seven full days. Job's narrow application of fear was later broadened by Elihu who drew Job's attention to the fact that 'the Almighty is beyond man and exalted in power...therefore men revere Him...' (37:24). The use of "reverence" by him instead of "terror" or "dread" brings in the needed dimension of "fear" which was more often missing in Job's understanding.

The kind of fear that Job had, as discussed in this chapter, had torment but that which Elihu discussed was that of submission to God because of who He is and what He does for humanity. For the believer, lack of assurance of God's control over his/her life can lead to experiences of fear of failure. Thus people who put their trust in God's security and abiding presence in every situation are able to overcome such a fear. It is likely that the whole of Psalm 27 was written to dispel this kind of fear. The next chapter would be dedicated to one important tool that Job used to overcome his plight.

CHAPTER 8

JOB'S PRESCRIPTION FOR SUFFERING: PRAISE THE LORD!

When a person declares faith in God the one enters into a covenant relationship by which he/she becomes a treasured possession of Him. By such a covenant also, Satan (or the devil) becomes the person's arch enemy (Ezek. 28:11-19; Isa. 14:12-15; Rev. 12:7-12). He works hard with his myriads of demon (also fallen angels) to keep the believer from obeying God's word and becoming a faithful child of God. Satan continually fights the person by inflicting losses, causing suffering and pains, and bringing hardships. He, as the accuser, always tries to oppose people, especially believers, and frustrates all their efforts to a progressive life in God. But through the trials and afflictions he brings, God proves the believer's faith.

Readers of the book of Job wrestle not just with *what* to think and ask and do in the face of unforeseen, abrupt and senseless suffering, but also with *how* to act

when disaster is clearly foreseeable...¹²⁴ All in all, there should be proper attitude and reactions during periods of loss, pain, and perils. To the believer, such situations must be understood as part of God's ways of proving Satan wrong. Chapters 2 and 3 of the book are where the main character of the book breaks his silence after the shock of the loss of all his property, his children and servants, and the attack on his records of righteousness. The grace of God is unlimitedly seen in trial moments of every person, even though many, if not all, do not realize it.

The attitude and laments of Job in the chapters of his book bear testimony to a mixture of piety and ignorance. Overall, his testimony and prescription for suffering can be summed in one statement: "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21). His life has a lot to teach believers of all generations what God expects of them during periods of extreme challenges. Some of the lessons that might be derived from him are discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Exercise maximum self-control

For most people, the immediate reactions to an unfortunate event or news are exclamations of surprise or expressions of disappointment: "Oh my God!" "This is unbelievable!" "What are you telling me?" "How do you

mean?” “Are you sure?” “Why me?” and so on. Without any argument, what a person says in times of trials and hardship is an indication of who he or she is on the inside. Scripture says that we should not let any unwholesome talk come out of our mouth (Eph. 4:29). That is, ‘if anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check’ (James 3:2). This is because, ‘the tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire and is itself set on fire by hell’ (James 3:6). Thus, ‘if anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless’ (James 1:26).

As a mature believer of God, Job demonstrated maximum restraint and self-control at the news of all the losses. In the case of Job, he never spoke first. His immediate reaction was to demonstrate grief by tearing his robe and shaving his head; the next move was to bow down in worship of God. The tearing of his robes, apparently symbolized his inner turmoil and shocks, and was an indication of his human nature.

Accept that God is still in charge

One of the common attitudes of people during times of suffering and pain is to appeal for pity. In most cases, such expectation is directed at people that come

to sympathize with the sufferer. Such attitude is likely to illicit some kind of response from the sympathizers; a move to console or encourage the victim. While there is absolutely nothing wrong with such action and reactions, the question is; to what extent should the sufferer demonstrate his/her belief in God during such challenging situations?

• **Acknowledgment of God's will:** A person's will is what usually controls him/her, especially when the one is carnally minded (i.e., a believer who is controlled by the flesh), or is an unbeliever. Scriptures clearly reveal that a person's will does not lead to a guaranteed end (Matt. 26:42; Luke 22:42; Mark 14:32-36). On the contrary, God's will is very perfect because His ways are perfect (Ps. 18:30; Heb.10:5-10), and God's will always leads to a blissful end (Jer. 29:10, 11). We know the will of God through God's word, or godly counseling from believers of God, or prayer, or sometimes through true visions, dreams, etc. Believers allow the will of God to prevail by accepting and submitting to Him as we trust His Spirit to lead us. In a lot of cases, one would know God well, understand Him and walk with Him only by the quality of the person's relationship with Him through His word.

Job understood what happened to him and accepted it as something that God allowed before it could happen.

This made him to surrender to His will. This is seen in 1:20-21, which reads:

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD (NAB).

Thus, his action of shaving his hair to signify a loss of human glory and most importantly a kneeling on the ground in worship of God is to show his total submission and surrender to God's will.¹²⁵

Job acknowledged that whatever had happened had come from God. Thus, 'having lost not just his well-being, family and resources, but also his ability to manage his religious, ethical and social experience, Job did what is quite natural to many persons in that state of utter vulnerability: he 'bow[ed] down'.¹²⁶ As believers, we should let our utterances be based upon the scriptures (Job1:22; 23:3-6).

• **Appreciation to God for whatever happens:** Not only is the believer expected to acknowledge God's will for whatever happens in life, but to also express thanks to Him. Thanksgiving is a demonstration of appreciation of what the person has done. It is very usual for people

to express appreciation only when they are happy or satisfied with what has been done. For example, for gifts, favors, and something positive that happens to them. Job demonstrated a completely opposite gesture to the event. He expressed thanks to God in Chapter 1:20-21 for something very heart-breaking and disappointing that had happened.

In his First epistle to the Thessalonians, Apostle Paul reechoed the importance of appreciation and admonished all Christians on the issue. But the Apostle was led by the Holy Spirit to let believers understand the situations under which we should give thanks. He wrote: "...Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (5:16). What this means is that God deserves thanks from His children in all situations; whether good or bad. This is also a clear expression of humility and surrendering to God in times of disaster, evil, or bad news.

- **Acknowledgment of God as the supplier:** When Job at a certain point could endure the suffering no longer, he gave vent to the most distressed sighs and groans. His immediate utterance was an acceptance of God's authority over all that he possesses, and to acknowledge that whatever he had, in the first place, had come from the Creator and Supplier. Besides, he acknowledged that God is right in bringing trouble after

he has brought good! He thus places the loss at the doorstep of the Lord, that is, God alone has the power to take back what He had given.

Demonstrate your faith in God

Why faith? Faith is essential in spiritual warfare such as Job faced (Eph. 6:13-16) and in overcoming the world. Believers of God move in faith by relying on the promises of His Word. The main aim of Satan and the host of demons, for which they bring suffering and pain to mankind, include the following:

- To destroy the work of God in man (1 Thess. 2:18).
- To deceive others into disobeying God (Gen. 3:13).
- To bring man into destruction (John 10:10).
- To win glory and worship for himself (Luke 4:6-7).
- To finally bring man into his fate (Matt. 25:36).
- To let the righteous lose their position in God by creating false position for them (Gen. 3:4, 5; Ps. 8:5).

There are major questions that should be considered at this point by believers as part of the attempts to counter and overcome the enemy and the hardship he brings. First, what is the believer's weapon to overcome temptations and trials that the devil stages against people? (Luke 13:16; Acts 10:38) Second, what benefit do believers derive from trials and what guarantee

is there that a believer of God could endure any trial or temptation? (James 1:2-4; 1 Cor. 10:13)

As if Job had always tried to review questions such as asked above, he was well prepared for them. Thus, contrary to Satan's expectation that through the suffering and pain which he had inflicted on Job would cause him to curse God, it did not happen. His wild and almost passionate complaints against the providence which crushed him were intermingled with expressions of strong confidence in God. Indeed, Job maintained his integrity as a righteous man who fears God not because of what God had blessed him with. In the end, the wild tumults in the soul of Job, which Satan caused, are the very factors that paved the way for the final solution and his vindication by God.

It is very easy for one to demonstrate a lack of faith in challenging situations like that of Job. But there are a lot of scriptures to help. Note what scripture says in Isaiah 41:10, "...Fear not, be not dismayed, for I am thy God, I'll strengthen you and uphold you..." Philippians 4:6 also says, "The Lord is at hand, have no anxiety..." While Psalm 48:14 says, "For this God is our God forever and will be our guide into death." Job held strongly to his faith in the Lord, something that his sole life partner says was useless in the circumstances (2:9). He demonstrated his disagreement by rebuking his wife for such a foolish

suggestion. The testimony about Job is that he did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing or in what he said.

Patiently endure the situation

One of the common expressions of people when they experience loss is anger. It is the emotions, thought, and physical tenseness we experience when we believe that something or someone is treating us or someone else unfairly.¹²⁷ In the NT Greek, anger is *Thumos*, a state of emotional agitation...rage, outburst of anger.¹²⁸ While expressions such as anger can be understood as spontaneous reaction it must be controlled; it is usually countered by patience. Ordinarily, patience might be considered as the ability to exercise self control and wait calmly without complaint during situations of adversity, or in the face of provocation or opposition. The basic understanding from the Greek NT indicates that patience is the translation of the word *Makrothumia*. One of its synonyms is *Hupomone*, which means 'endurance,' especially in times of troubles.

Patience and/or endurance are virtues that a person needs if the one is to overcome any loss, forebear pains, and survive the hardships of life. This is what the scripture says:

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of

the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and the late rains. You too, be patient, strengthen your hearts, and wait for the coming of the Lord is near (James 5:7-9).

In times of loss, suffering, or pains, scriptures encourage believers to develop total patience and endurance, and not to let our patience run out (James 1:2-4).

Trials are part of God's design for believers, but we should always pray that God keeps and strengthens us to go through them. Believers should not haste to do anything as King Saul did (1 Sam. 13:7-14) or as Israel did (1 Sam. 14:40-45). We are rather advised to "let patience have her perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:4). In fact, we are exhorted by Hebrews 12:2 to 'fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame...' What the Lord did on the cross of Calvary was to suffer on our behalf, i.e., bear our pains, replace our lost privileges and prestige, and give us hope of His presence in times of difficulty.

Sometimes, you have to obey the rule which says, "Silence is golden," and remain quiet. This is exactly what prophet Isaiah testified of the Lord: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her

shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isa. 53:7). Therefore, the initial response of the believer to trial should be patient endurance of the calamities. The scripture clearly reveals that throughout this challenging situation Job did not sin nor did he blame God. Even with the most irresponsible expressions which Satan used Job’s wife to speak against Job, the man remained steadfast in the Lord.

Rather he cursed the day he was born and wished that his day of birth be blotted from existence, “Oh, that he had never been born! That when born he had perished, neglected and uncared for, and thus might never have come to know the wretchedness of living! If he had but found in early infancy a grave...that he might die.”¹²⁹ In fact, Job bemoans his dismal fate with the lament of one who has more lain upon him than he can bear. His lament represents the bitterness of irrepressible woe. But he was still careful not to speak against God.

Beware of dishonest sympathizers!

One of the excellent marks during difficult times is one’s ability to deal with dishonest people. In a lot of instances, some people who draw close and pretend to offer help might pose ambiguous questions and try to offer solution that rather tend to be provocative and hurtful. Acting without any sense of shame they even try to show gestures of love and concern, while at the same

time harboring hidden agenda; to find fault in order to plot a person's downfall and destruction. At the least opportunity, such double-tongue people turn round and conspire with others to destroy unsuspecting genuine people who are already in difficult situations.

But sensitive sufferers are not usually unmindful of the cunning and scheming people among any groups of sympathizers. This is why at a point in time Job rebuked his friends and called them miserable comforters (Job 16:1-5). He realized that instead of words of comfort, the friends have rather become accusers who have seized the occasion to lash at him. The Bible is replete of such examples. David, before ascending the throne as King of Israel, learned how to deal with difficult people such as his own brothers (1 Sam. 17:17-30); King Saul (1 Sam. 18-30); and a certain rich man called Nabal (1 Sam. 25).

Surprisingly, one of the traitors was Abiathar, the priest, who was David's closest aide during his fugitive days in the wilderness of Judah, when King Saul was chasing to destroy him (1 Sam. 22: 20-23; cf. 1 Kings 1:24-25), Joab and Shimei (1 Kings 2:5-9). Even the Lord Jesus Christ himself had to deal with difficult people like the Pharisees, Sadducees, the Scribes, etc. People who are facing difficult times should not forget that such situations call for a lot of wisdom, tact, and patience in dealing with the many sympathizers, some of whom might not be genuine.

Resist mischievous advisors!

It is important to note that the presence of close aides around a person who has suffered loss, or is in pain or any difficult circumstances does not necessarily mean genuine support for the one. It is complete naivety and very dishonest to expect that all the people that surround you in times of difficulty fully empathize with you. There is overwhelming inner drive during such period to give hearing to people in order to be consoled. Nevertheless, under the same circumstances, one should never be cowed into subjection and try to satisfy people by following their suggestions or advices.

People in difficult circumstances should therefore be rather careful when people begin to offer all sorts of advice. They should not be deceived by people's expression of emotions. It is easy to enjoy the advice of people calculated to lift you up and rather forget the real motive behind such moves. There will be occasions that those from whom support is expected turn rather to be the main traitors. Some people will advise you not because you genuinely deserve it but because it benefits them directly or indirectly. That is, if their advice makes you continue to do something to their advantage or benefit, it will continue unceasingly.

Such people might be looking for a window to cut you to size. This is why in Job 13:1-12, the sufferer questioned the wisdom of his friends and asked that they

rather keep silent for they have not counseled rightly as worthy physicians who speak right concerning God. It does not matter if they begin to sing your praise today; they are likely to be the same who will turn tomorrow and plan your crucifixion. Sometimes, while consoling you they are happy at your downfall. Out of the same tongue of praises will gush out curses to bring you down to destruction. There is no doubt that some of the crowd that shouted, "Hosanna...blessed are you..." are most likely the same that later turned to shout "Crucify him...away with this person" (Matt. 21:9-11; cf. 27:20-22).

During such difficult circumstances, though you reserve the right to be silent over your predicaments, God might one day ask why you kept quiet or failed to act in order to silence mischievous advisors. It should never be surprising that you might have to oppose some decisions, issues, proposals, etc., apparently, to silence some people. Close aides and opportunists like Ahitophel who was close to David before the usurpation by his own son, Absalom, is an example of one whose intention was to hand the king over to his son in defeat.

But when God decides to lift you up no one can bring you down. King David was very sensitive to this mischievous man's plot and was able to handle such a mischievous advisor well. First, he prayed that the advice of this opportunist to Absalom becomes nonsense. Then when the king was handing over to Solomon, his son

and heir to the throne, King David had to warn his inexperienced son and heir against traitors like Ahitophel. Consequently, the traitor paid for his mischievous act at the hands of the new king.

Therefore, it pays to be determined to satisfy the will of God in order to enjoy heavenly blessings than trying to please mischievous 'praise singers.' In reality then, challenging situations are the times where the true leadership qualities of a person are better tested. There is always the temptation to tow the line of the majority. However, the majority is not always right. Sometimes, faithful persons have to stand as lone rangers and insist on what is right even at the peril of their lives. One day, their testimonies would be vindicated by God as happened to Joshua and Caleb when they stood against the majority in pursuing the unfailing promises of God.

Hold on to a life of righteousness

Maintaining a life of integrity and righteousness is both a commandment and requirement that make a person acceptable to God, or brings him/her closer to Him. Such a life keeps the devil/Satan or the enemy away from touching us. It is important that Christ might present to himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle but holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:27). Thus, the believer's calling is unto holiness (1 Thess. 4:7).

The visit of Job's friends, especially the surprises and shock at Job's predicament; caused a bubble in his soul which finally burst out in much lament. During this period, the arguments and counter-arguments that ensued between him and his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (chap. 4 to 31), raise a number of interesting issues that might be helpful in this discussion, particularly, the important issue of how people should conduct themselves during periods of trials or tests. In the debate, while the friends, in a mistaken attempt to defend God, insisted that Job is suffering as a result of his sins, Job asserted his righteousness and innocence before God.

The debates and arguments among Job and his friends is irrespective of the position of Elihu, a young listener of what transpired between Job and his friends. In the young man's arguments, he raised some issues to make a case for God, and to prove that Job was wrong in his assertion of self-righteousness (chap. 32-37). All in all, scriptures reveal how resolute Job was in terms of holding to the belief that he was a righteous man. This is a clear case of a person holding on to his integrity.

Consider your affliction as a “thorn” to humble you

One of the greatest benefits of hardship is the experience that one gains in the course of the bitter journey. In the end, such experience becomes a well

from which other people and posterity must drink. One's testimony can become the driving force for others to sail through similar difficult situation. In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Apostle Paul said: "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given to me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me." Whatever this thorn was, it brought to the Apostle an appreciable pain and difficulty during his ministry.

The question to be addressed here is "what was this "thorn" in the flesh (of Paul) and what lesson can believers draw from it? To answer the question above, the views of a lot of Bible scholars have been considered vis-à-vis the real definition and its context. While the details of the arguments concerning Paul's "thorn in the flesh" might not be so important, the lessons that the believer can draw cannot be overemphasized. It is therefore important to dedicate some space to consider the issue of Paul's thorn and how it comes into our picture.

The translation for "thorn," from the Greek background is the same as "stake" and denotes "a pointed structure often used to inflict pain in somebody punishable." One commentator writes that Apostle Paul had such an exalted experience that could easily tempt one who is less dedicated to Christ to distort its meaning, and lead others to praise him rather than the Lord."¹³⁰

According to him this thorn in the flesh is likely to be a body deformation or handicap which will always make Paul appear inferior. Although this argument has strong basis its weakness is in the fact that Paul never mentioned any bodily deformation on him anywhere in the scripture. It is also a common speculation among some interpreters that the thorn in Paul's flesh was a spiritual temptation. But the arguments against this explanation are too clear to avoid because every believer faces some form of temptations, whether he/she is greatly gifted with supernatural powers like Paul or not.

Some people might also interpret the thorn to be something completely different from a physical issue, i.e., in the sense of ordinary thorn. Such people might relate Paul's thorn to the Canaanites that God left in the land as thorn in Israel side to test Israel's faithfulness to God (Num. 33:55; Jud. 2:3; cf. Jos. 23:13; Ezek. 28:24). Clearly, Paul's mention of "thorn" came directly after his vision of glory (vs. 6), and this means that the thorn could simply be taken as a check on the apostle's life. This argument continues to gain more support by the fact that Paul himself admitted the thorn was a check to his life. This means that the enemies that surrounded Paul were somehow a check on his life and ministry.

There might also be the speculation that the thorn in Paul's flesh was some kind of torturing pain from epilepsy or malaria, by which the apostle was frequently

attacked. Accordingly, such a torturing pain probably produced temporary and consistence embarrassment of some kind, and so made Paul less acceptable as a preacher of the gospel. This might be the reason for Paul's close association with Luke the physician. The convincing fact of the argument is that such a "thorn" was not something that could not be brought under control. The argument here is once Paul on three occasions asked God to remove it but God did not because of the sufficiency of His grace, Paul's sickness should be something curable or suppressible.

Yet still, it is possible to consider the thorn in Paul's flesh as an eye defect. This might be supported by the fact that although Paul wrote his own letters (which means that he could see), he apologizes for the large letters used (Gal. 6:11). This might be taken to mean that Paul's eyes were not defect-less, and because of this, the Galatians wanted to pluck out their own eyes and give to him (Gal. 4:13-15), and that when Paul was before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, he claimed that he could not recognize the high priest (Acts 23:5). One scholar summarized the discussions on the 'thorn' this way:

In some sense, it was an instrument Satan used to afflict Paul. He specifically states that the thorn tormented him. The verb used here...can refer to

striking someone with the hand, and in Matt 26:67 and Mark 14:65, it is used of the blows Jesus received from the soldiers who guarded him. Here it is used in a figurative sense to refer to painful attacks of some kind that Paul experienced. Whatever the nature of the affliction, it was distressful to Paul...¹³¹

Besides whatever tormenting effects Paul suffered, the 'thorn in the flesh' like any difficult situation that a person faces in life humbled him. Although there are differing views on this thorn in the flesh, the moral lesson here is almost the same. The "thorn," no doubt, was something God allowed to produce humility in the apostle. According to the passage, God used it to keep the apostle on track so that his exceedingly great power that was upon the latter could be used for the former's glory alone.

Job's life is enough to strengthen Bible believers who are at the receiving end of the buffetings of the enemy. What is more challenging is how the whole drama of suffering and pain produced in this patriarch; he ate humble pie. That is, he was humbled through the loss, pain, and difficult time he endured. His spirit of self-righteousness and confidence in the knowledge he had gave way to admission of human frailty and ignorance. Though he did not have the benefit of any written word by then, yet as a believer of God, he had the word of God

printed on the tablets of his heart by the Holy Spirit and was therefore able to make the testimony of God's word stand firm. In chapter 42:1-6, he confessed: "...Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know...Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Probably, all believers may have some form of "thorns" in their flesh. Yours might not be a thorn but a period of difficulty that might come your way, a health challenge that you or a relation might face, an unfortunate situation, and so on. Whatever it might be, we might not be able to fully understand why such unexpected situations arise at the onset. Nevertheless, if we do not give up but persist in prayers, it is likely He will make everything clear to us in His own time (Deut. 3:23-26; 1 Cor. 12:7-9).

Most importantly, the humility which is produced by the check of such a "thorn" might work an excellent thing in your life in order to possess a lowly spirit. This will cause God to fully use you just like Paul and be fully glorified in your life. People with "thorns" should be thankful for everything including such weaknesses in their flesh, for His grace is sufficient to keep any negative effects under control. What believers need to do is not to be overcome by whatever 'spiritual/physical thorn' that may be tormenting us but to let the thorn humble us in the Lord. Let your "thorn" humble you in the Lord.

Make effort to praise God for His perfect plans

Every righteous sufferer in the Lord should accept that life in general is a school; its different circumstances teach not only the things one needs to know and experience but also help to transform the person. Certainly, not only the devotees of God are transformed by the troubles encountered every moment of life but humanity in general. Nevertheless, the God who controls the events of life chooses to shape that of His devotees through specific adversities. It is expected that when one accepts the Lord Jesus as Christ and Messiah, the person is called out of insignificance into significance; from a non-entity to an identity; and from nobody to somebody. That is in fact part of God's perfect plan, not the whole.

The other part of God's plan is that if He did not spare His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, but made Him to go through all the circumstances and challenges of life in order to set the Savior as example, then devotees of Christ shall not escape them. Consequently, God allows problems to come upon the righteous but at the same time filters such troubles to ensure that only the ones tailored for specific people come upon them. This is an indication that all the troubles and suffering that are heaped upon the righteous are God-filtered and divinely approved. Of course, as a Father of all, He knows each person's strength. This is

typified in the case of Job where God filtered the kind of calamity Satan could devise for him. In fact, He placed limits to the extent to which Satan could go when He said: "...He is in your hands; but you must spare his life" (Job 2:6). But even in the mist of the bombardments from the camp of Satan, God does not abandon the righteous sufferer. He still remains the ever present help to those who acknowledge Him at all times.

In response, therefore, the righteous sufferer is expected to shift focus from the problem to the purposes and plans of the Most High. When such is done, the righteous sufferer will be able to understand every problem as a character-building opportunity. Overcoming life's set-backs usually builds the sufferer up so that the person will be able to overcome greater or more difficult situations when they arise. On top of that, any strong character so built in a challenging moment remains with the sufferer even after such a situation is over. The person may be poorly clad, without a penny in the world, and yet carry himself/herself truly as a royal priest, by defusing around him/her the fragrance of the riches of Christ through his holy life.¹³² This is why Job affirmed his faith in the Lord by praising Him in spite of the loss.

The Christian's greatness, therefore, lies in the fact that God has chosen him/her to be His praise-singer even in times of suffering and pains, or when surrounded

by enemies (Ps. 27:6). The nature of the believer's daily sacrifice to God as a holy Priesthood is first of all to praise Him continually. A holy priest should rejoice in the Lord always, ever ready to praise Him at all times irrespective of the situation. Even in times of trouble, the believer's prayer of praise is holy and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, as written in Hebrews 13:15; "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his Name."

The believer is the channel through which the grace and the mercies of God reach other people. Through daily praise and worship, the believer offers his/her life as an offering to God in reciprocation of God's love. In the end, it is realized that indeed all things work together for the good of the righteous in the Lord. We can therefore identify with Job in agreeing that the best testimony and prescription for suffering is one statement: "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21).

Let us offer more praises and worship to God in times of hardship, loss, suffering and pains, as have been discussed in this chapter. Besides, it would be appropriate to also devise some strategies to combat the devastating schemes of the enemies. Some of these would be considered in the next few chapters.

CHAPTER 9

EXTRA PRINCIPLES TO OVERCOME DIFFICULT TIMES

The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry...The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles...A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all...The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him (Ps. 34:15-22).

From the discussions so far, some facts of life have been established; perilous situations exist in life but there are ways to deal with them. No condition on this earth is permanent. Such knowledge will help anybody who faces hardships and challenging issues to consider them as temporal set-backs. This means that victims of life's unfortunate circumstances should brace themselves up to overcome these challenges. Indeed, there is a key to deal with every issue that becomes a door of problem or difficulty in life. To overcome setback in life and

open any doors of restoration the righteous sufferer must possess the appropriate keys. Some of the keys are briefly discussed below.

Hold unto God's promises

The message of Psalm 34:15-22 gives few of the promises of God that are spread out in the scriptures. Victory over all circumstances of life is guaranteed only in such promises of God through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 16:33). As believers, we should be of good cheer because He has overcome the world, and nothing can separate us from the love of God through Christ. Consider all calamities as temporal set-backs that cannot prevent the believer from fulfilling his/her destiny. If God freely gave Jesus Christ to mankind He will certainly freely give us all things through Him, and bring us to the expected end (Rom. 8:32, 38-39; Jer. 29:11-12). Whatever the experiences have been, if one has put his/her trust in the LORD, it is worthy to continue to hold on to Him for He is always faithful.

An experience on the campus of the University of Science and Technology, (UST, currently Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, KNUST) during my days as an undergrad is enough reminder of God's faithfulness. I still remember that it was in the middle of the first week of February, 1987, around 1:30am of that night, I had an overwhelming encounter

with the Lord. I was a member of the prayer team of the then Inter-Hall Christian Fellowship (IHCF, now Ghana Fellowship of Evangelical Students, GHAFES) that had volunteered to embark on a revival outreach program at the satellite campus at Mampong, in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. As part of the preparation towards the program, it became necessary for me to embark on adequate spiritual exercise to get myself in shape.

Then that night, as I sat behind the Bible reading and studying portions of scripture, something unusual happened. I had opened to the Gospel of Luke chapter 5 and was meditating on verses 1-5, trying to understand what the Lord meant when He instructed Peter to “Put out into deep water, and let down for a catch.” As I kept meditating on the passage, as if I dozed off momentarily, suddenly I heard a very deep voice that said: “**Lamentation 23!**”

Then I came to my senses and turned round and rushed out to see who might have shouted at me while I dozed off. There was nobody around; in the room, veranda, or balcony. In fact, the whole environment was dead silent. Quickly, I returned to the study table and tried to follow the lead to see what was in that text. Concluding that the text was Lamentation chapter 23, I turned to the scriptures to locate it but surprisingly, there was no such chapter; only 5 chapters. In my

disappointment, I closed the Bible, set it aside, and prepared for a prayer session.

Just then, I had a deep impression to reconsider the text, but this time to check it as a verse, i.e., to look for Lamentation verse 23. To my surprise, 1, 2, 4, and 5 have only up to verse 22; only chapter 3 has up to 66 verses. From my masterpiece of deductive reasoning, I concluded that the text of the 'strange but powerful voice' gave was Lamentation 3:23. Honestly, I became overwhelmed at what I saw there: "...They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

Apparently, the message of Lamentation 3:23 is not new to Christendom; in fact, the words pass easily as a song that have been composed and sung in different forms over the years. Therefore, somehow, it will not be a strange passage to many Christians, but to me it was. It was indeed my first time of opening to the book of Lamentation. As I sat behind the scriptures in continued meditation of this passage, I began to understand the import of the revelation; it was God's way of assuring me that no matter what I pass through in life, He will show Himself faithful.

To link the encounter to the text that I was reading (i.e., Luke 5:1-5), I understood the 'voice' as assuring me of success in life if I am prepared to 'launch out into the deep.' What that assurance was demanding of me is a demonstration of faith in God at all times. Faith is a

strong weapon to tackle and overcome all life failures and challenges. Armed with such a conviction, I have learned and still continue to build up faith in the Lord, always trusting Him in very challenging situations in spite of all my short-comings. Indeed, He has never let me down.”

On the premises of this testimony I have never ceased to encourage every person that associates with me to hold on to God’s faithfulness no matter the situation. This is exactly what scripture re-echoes in 1 Corinthians 1:9: “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.” And in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, it adds: “The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” Indeed, if you are very sure of your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, stick to God’s word and remain in the family of believers. The Bible is filled with many wonderful promises of God. As you read the Bible daily, mark these promises, meditate on them, and trust that God will bring a restoration to your life.

Desire and hope for a positive change

As long as there is the breath of life change is possible because no condition is permanent. Scripture says that all things work together for the good of those who love God (Rom. 8:28). Even so, the book of Job says that “there is hope for a tree which is cut down. Its hope is that one day the presence of water will bring to it

the expected change, the change for a new and better life” (Job 14:7-9). Therefore, having a desire and a hope for breakthrough that will bring positive change is very important for success in life.

Hope makes the believer to accept that the present suffering cannot be compared with the glory that will be revealed either presently and/or in the future. While failures dampen a person’s spirit, hope always lights up a fire of glorious expectation in the spirit of a person. Failures and disappointments are crashed when met with hope. Job’s hope for a glorious change was his greatest testimony: “For I know that my Redeemer lives and if presently my body is destroyed yet in my flesh I will see God” (Job 19:25-27). All who demonstrate hope in God will receive answers and experience restoration, some in the present life and an eternal fulfillment.

Determine to endure and be willing to win

Resolution is a pledge that a person makes to himself/herself in order to pursue an agenda. It is a vow that one makes when faced with a great challenge. Determination is where a person refuses to give up but presses on being mindful that there is victory in the end. These two words can sometimes be used interchangeably, especially in overcoming failures of life. When a person is armed with resolution and/or

determination, no number of failures can quench the thirst for success.

Resolution and/or determination should always be buttressed by courage: the inner firmness of faith, virtue, and reason. A familiar saying goes: "Where there is a will there is a way." The will of a person is one of the most vital weapons not only for survival in every life situation but to also win. A person's will should succumb and surrender only to that of God because He controls all things and should be in charge. It is God's absolute will that humanity wins the battle against failure, loss, pains, and overcome all challenges to victorious living presently.

Some of the Patriarchs like Jacob, Joseph, and King David are testimonies of how resolution combined with determination is needed to meet and overcome life's challenges. When on the journey from Beersheba to Haran Jacob had a dream (or night vision) of what the Almighty God wants to make out of his life, Jacob vowed to walk with God throughout the journey. In other words, he resolved and determined to hold unto God in order to receive His promises. When Naomi tried to make Ruth understand that there was no hope and breakthrough for the former by following the latter to her country and people, it was determination that became Ruth's greatest weapon to overcome the persistent appeal from Naomi (Ruth 1:8-18).

Job also was not prepared to give up but was determined to wait until his time of change would come (Job 14:14), "...It is not escape from suffering that distinguished the noble religious Job. Rather, it was Job's ability to endure suffering, and this ability was referred to as 'blessed.'"¹³³ Similarly, our ability to endure or survive difficult times is one of the greatest marks of maturity in our walk with God. This is in line with what the book of Proverbs says: "If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength" (24:10).

Let your testimony challenge other people

Only God knows why misfortunes happen to people who are role models by all standards. One such unfortunate experience happened to a couple who no doubt are a testimony of Christian leadership in Ghana. Theirs is an experience that to me has become a great testimony before the Lord, and I am privileged to dedicate some pages of this book to their monumental testimony.

Both the man and wife are ministers of the gospel. Indeed, their lives have been a great inspiration to me since I met them at the early stages of my Christian journey. I will not disclose their names for personal reasons although every level informed Christian in Ghana may know them. In fact, what happened to them is no news to the Christian community in Ghana and some

places the world over. I became acquainted with them at UST (currently KNUST) when all of us were students, i.e., well before they joined themselves in marriage.

The man, a well known Evangelist, studied Pharmacy and was the President of the then Inter-Hall Christian Fellowship (IHCF). The wife was the President of the branch of the fellowship at Africa Hall, and also happened to be a course mate because we were all studying Biological Sciences. But both were three years ahead of me, and much respected figures on the university campus, especially among the Christian community. Apart from regular meetings at IHCF weekly programs, I used to see the woman only casually, though she was fond of one of my classmates, Rosina Debrah, who has since married and is domiciled in the USA with the family. I used to meet the man more often because we also met at “Power-house” programs. It was a prayer group of IHCF on campus. He was also fond of another classmate of mine, Gladys Laryea, also presently married and working in Ghana.

I cannot remember the exact circumstances that connected me directly to the man but I am sure I was driven to him because of the challenge his Christian life posed to me on campus; very uncompromising, direct to the point, honest, bold, and above all intelligent student. He was no doubt an orator and was coherent in his presentations especially of the word of God. Honestly, his

messages were so delightful to hear whenever he held the Bible and was ministering the Word of God. Soon I became like a junior brother to him and enjoyed a lot of his visits to Queen Elizabeth Hall (i.e., Queens). It might be hard to believe that he spent an appreciable time with me even on the day of University's congregation of which he himself was a congregant.

Our relationship grew stronger and healthier to the extent that 'my senior brother' could take me along to some of his pulpit engagements outside of the university campus. I considered myself blessed whenever I was in his company because he always had some words of encouragement to share. Once, while moving to Africa Hall with him for a 'Power-House' prayer meeting he gave me a piece of advice that I still consider worthy. He said, "James, do not shun criticisms; always see them as some of the means to straighten and to keep you on track in life."

Since leaving campus however, we have met on just few occasions. The last time we spoke face-to-face was when we met at the American Embassy. Thence, I travelled abroad, and have not reconnected since I returned. (I am sure he will forgive me for this 'rebellion') Nevertheless, I have tried to keep track of the great progress and impact that he and the wife are making in God's Kingdom, especially since I returned from my studies in the USA. The church which this senior brother

of mine began during his undergraduate days with other colleagues has now completed its metamorphosis into a well established body with many branches all over Ghana and abroad.

One of the challenging standards that this brother has set leaders is that in our world where many founders of independent Christian denominations, especially the Charismatic and Faith-healing churches, do everything possible to hold on to their seats as heads of their churches sometime till the time of death, he decided to hand over his position as Head-pastor to his immediate assistant when he was not more than fifty years. Although his reason for that noble step is not precisely and publicly known I think the idea and move is very commendable and worthy of emulation.

Just when some of us were celebrating his bold handing over, the unexpected happened. One 'unholy day,' I opened the Ghanaian Daily Graphic newspaper and found one of the news items that chilled and saddened me and the spirit of many Christians especially those in the Charismatic circles in the country and beyond who know this 'firebrand preacher' and his wife. They have lost their two daughters in a car accident on their way to the National Convention of their church.¹³⁴ (May their souls rest in perfect peace, Amen.) Only God understands why this happened.

Though the souls of these precious daughters of the Lord and those that were with them went to rest in the arms of our Heavenly Father, there was no news as shocking to many in the 'Charismatic cycle' as the demise of these lovely souls. To me, it was a devastating blow calculated to shake the spiritual foundation of this committed couple and put them through one of the hardest tests in the life of every believing family. I began to wonder how these spiritual inspirers of many were going to survive such a calamity. But to the glory of God and shame of the devil, they have not only endured such a disastrous situation, they have lived beyond the event, and have become toughened by it. And they have borne testimonies to this fact many times.

Listening to my senior brother as he responded to Television interviews two years after the event,¹³⁵ he gave one of the strongest interpretations of his understanding to the sudden loss of his daughters. I was surprised that he did not apportion any blame nor assigned the misfortune to the orchestration of any enemies in the family or somewhere as some immature preachers often do. Though these might not be ruled out in any person's life, the renowned international preacher proved his maturity through proper choice of words in his presentation. He accepted that whatever happened might be God's perfect design, or might be Satan's attack (which really he doubted), or might be as a result

of something else. However, only God knows the true answer, so he and his wife had submitted to the perfect will of God.

Throughout the television interview, he was very composed and appeared strengthened in his resolve to serve God, especially in championing the “Love Revolution.” God’s ultimate desire is for believers of all generations to emulate the examples of people who have demonstrated that in all circumstances and no matter what happen to them they will still hold on to God. Such people are “living heroes/heroines of faith.” It is one of the reasons why I am so touched and challenged by the testimony. Contemporary Christians should be able to consider the experiences of many great people who have walked with God and faced such trials but overcame. Such are the heroes/heroines of faith whose tall but not exhaustive list appears in the book of Hebrew chapter 11.

If we were in the biblical period, there could not be any doubt that people who have stood their grounds for God in very trying moments would qualify to be entered into God’s heroes/heroines of fame. Whenever I hear such testimonies I begin to ask myself whether I could have survived such a storm if it happened to me. May the Name of God be praised for leaders like them. Some of us certainly owe it as a duty to pray for our leaders as often as we will have the opportunity. Indeed, they have set the pace for many young believers to follow when

faced with challenging situations in life. I salute them for allowing their testimony to be a lesson for weaker ones like me.

I would like to end this chapter with one of the passages that my senior brother and mentor used to quote often at IHCF fellowship programs:

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:31).

Armed by the power of scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the outlined principles above, let all believers continue in the Lord. Our resolve should be that no matter what happens; comfort or suffering, sweet or sour, joy or tears, in life or faced with death, we will still remain faithful to the end of our journeys on this terrestrial ball.

CHAPTER 10

OVERLOOK THE SUFFERING; FOCUS ON THE JOY

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation and this hope will not lead to disappointment (Rom. 5:3-4, NLT).

The above quote re-echoes the title of this chapter and to a greater extent, the title of this book, and sets the tone for a clearer understanding of both. Surely, for every person, God has a purpose and a definite plan. The link here is that no matter the extent of dark clouds that one faces in life, let the person continue to hope that the sun will appear in the sky again; even in the night hours, stars will brighten up. With this in mind, there is no way one should fold up amidst challenging situations.

Facing the realities of life is sometimes like holding the bull by the horn; very tough. But one of the surest

ways to overcome the losses, pains, challenging times, and unfortunate situations of life is to learn from others who have suffered similar fate and have built up testimonies as a result. Apart from Job's story, the Bible is replete of examples of characters whose testimonies can be clear pathways to overcoming life's challenges: Joseph, Ruth, David, Daniel, and Mordecai, to mention a few. Theirs are typical examples of how the LORD can turn circumstances around for victims of affliction to become the victors. The testimonies of such heroes/heroines confirm that God can raise people from grass to grace, ashes to glory, and the pit to the palace, in accordance with His word in Psalm 113:5-9.

Alongside the cloud of biblical testimonies are those that are still fresh and continue to stare us in the face wherever we are. Sometimes, the experiences of such people can stir others up to persist in challenging circumstances. In the next two chapters, you will be fascinated by some of such true testimonies that are narrated in the pages. The objective is to strengthen other people who might be facing similar challenges to continue pressing on till they arrive on the shores of victory.

Typical family challenges

This testimony is about someone I know so well. He has granted me permission to reveal his real name,

Asonaba Fosu,¹³⁶ though his preferred name for this testimony is Kobby. He is somebody I know too well. Besides sharing the same date of birth which brought us together, we grew together and had many things in common. We are more than twins, and have become quite inseparable. During one reflection section, he shared some of his unfortunate life experiences with me. But I was overwhelmed by some particular sections of his testimony which are produced here for the benefit of those who might encounter similar challenges.

When he began to share some details of his story with me, Kobby said, "To begin my life from the beginning might never be an easy task. But some of the records are hard to erase." He was born to Ghanaian parents who come from one of the suburbs of Kumasi, the capital city of Ashanti Region, Ghana. According to him, he had experienced some challenging moments in life: loss, pains, and difficult situations, but through them God has built up strength in him and brought him out victoriously.

Pain from paternal irresponsibility: I am sure a lot of people also share this great pain suffered by Kobby in the early stages of life. Yours, like his, might be the irresponsibility of one parent, or maybe, both parents. In his case, it is the biological father whom he learned separated from the mother when he was just three months in the womb. And he finally divorced the mother

six months after he was born. Thus, a great vacuum was created in his life right from childhood, and growing in the hands of an illiterate single mother who was already carrying a daughter from the same man was apparently very challenging.

Consequently, then, life for Kobby from his early years was characterized by emotional pains intermittently dotted by sad moods and countenances precipitated by regular memories of the loss. Great efforts to make up for any lack in terms of guidance and resources were made by his uncles and grandparents. But the reality was that life for him had begun on a wrong footing. Yet it was never going to be the end as such. Whatever caused the father to treat them with such cruelty could be taken as one of the temporal set-backs in life.

Kobby passed through elementary, secondary, and university education through the support of the extended family, and generous individuals. According to Kobby, “the financial challenges that he faced as a student compelled him to characterize those days in school as ‘years of hard labor.’” As a result of the numerous challenges that he faced, Kobby confessed to me that he became very bitter against his father. The bitterness was not only because of his irresponsibility towards the mother, but especially, to him and his elder sister. The father’s name became very sour on his lips such that the

mere mention of it by him or anyone never went without a word or thought of insult.

But one day, Kobby had to confront his intense hatred towards his unknown father. During the days of his first undergraduate program, his attention was drawn to the spiritual harm that he was courting upon his life. He made the following admission:

A very sensitive Christian friend was led to convince me to forgive my father even if he had failed me as a parent. He made me to understand that my father's actions and inactions were issues that are for God to deal with, because he is accountable to God for his irresponsibility towards his family. It was unhealthy and indeed sinful for me, before God, to bear any grudge and harbor bitterness against my father. Mine was to make sure I overcome the spiritual cancers in my life, pray for forgiveness from God for whatever negative thoughts and expressions made against my father, and wish him well, that is, if he was still alive.

During the interaction, the Christian friend directed Kobby's focus to God's word concerning the child-father relationship, and all the blessings or otherwise that go with it from the point of scripture. One of such messages is found in Ephesians 6:1-3. It exhorts children to obey their parents (i.e., fathers and mothers) in the Lord, and to honor their parents so that it may be well with them

and that they may enjoy long life on this earth. Kobby had always understood and interpreted 'children' in the passage as the little ones, probably those below the period of youth. But, according to him, "the matured and concerned Christian friend delved a little deeper into the text to reveal more than what he knew."

The meaning of "children" (Greek: *Teknon*) indeed has many applications. One source has provided some of the meanings including the following:¹³⁷

- Biological son or daughter.
- Adopted son or daughter.
- Spiritual son/daughter a disciple, or any person under somebody's spiritual care.
- Slaves/servant/maid-servants.

The foregoing meanings indicate that a father or mother can be a person's natural/biological parents, foster or divine/spiritual leaders, especially with regards to fathers (1 Sam. 13:1ff). The text reveals that God's blessings rest on people who obey and honor their fathers (biological/foster/spiritual). In that case, the reverse no doubt also holds true, i.e., God's curse is on people who disobey and dishonor their fathers.

As a matter of emphasis, it would be necessary to look at some examples from scripture. Reuben, the first son of Jacob, did not honor his biological father and consequently failed to receive a double portion of his

blessing in accordance with the stipulations of the Law (Gen 49:3-4; cf. Gen 49:22-26). Joseph, on the other hand, received the desired blessing obviously because of the honor he brought to both his foster father and master, Potiphar, an official of the Pharaoh of Egypt, and his biological father, Jacob. He honored his foster father when he did not succumb to the seductions of his wife to sleep with her. He also honored his biological father with his God-fearing life that made him to enjoy God's favor and that of man which brought him to the position of second only to Pharaoh in Egypt.

It was such a favor before Pharaoh that opened the door for the salvation of Joseph's father and his family from a worldwide famine at the time. Not only Joseph received his biological father's favor, his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim were adopted by Jacob and were also blessed (Gen 48:1). Another example is that while Elisha honored his spiritual father Elijah and he received a double portion of his blessing (2 Kings 2:1), King Saul did not honor the spiritual father, Prophet Samuel, and his kingdom was torn from him.

It can thus be deduced from the discussion that, unfortunately and/or unconsciously, people, including many believers who have already offended their parents (in this case, natural/biological/ spiritual fathers, mothers and leaders), as a result of bitterness they have against the latter for some wrong-doing might already be reaping

the results of their actions and inactions. But many of such people might not know how to address their predicaments.

At this juncture, Kobby confessed, “Fear gripped me as a result of the insight received. As a young Christian, I did not want to incur the wrath of God that will have negative consequences for me either now or in future.” He realized how he needed to pray for God’s forgiveness for any unruly attitude against him or any father. According to him, he repented of his bitterness and began to seek God concerning his father. From this point, he also began to make some efforts to find him and reconcile their relationship. Till date, however, all his attempts have proved futile; only God understands.

I saw tears running down the cheeks of Kobby. He could hardly lift his head and had to be consoled and strengthened. Later, he admitted:

God has stood by me through all these periods. Hard though some of the times have been, His assuring presence has kept me pressing on. He has indeed strengthened me to overcome the loss and filled the vacuum with so many ‘earthly fathers in Christ’ such that sometimes I am not able to reach all with messages of appreciation during the yearly “Father’s Day” celebrations world-wide.

On this note, my words of encouragement is that the same God can do for anyone who is embittered by such irresponsible treatment at the hands of any relations more than what He has done for Kobby. The onus is on any such person to make the right moves in order that any grievances, bitterness, separation, and so forth, are truly addressed. Wholehearted reconciliation is a major key for divine restoration.

Pain from a sibling's misfortune: There was another painful experience which Kobby tearfully but vividly recounted to me. According to him, the year before his admission into the University, he had accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, but without any deep roots in spiritual issues. Within the first semester of entry, when he was still swimming in the joy of a university education, he suffered a grievous loss. His elder sister, the only one from same parents, experienced a mental breakdown within the last quarter of the year, "it was unbearable for me at that age," he admitted.

Kobby testified that the sister, named Tomoro, was one of the loveliest children in his family: cute, fair looking, adorable, and very promising. She appeared quite focused and was quite intelligent even at teenage. As he was growing, he saw the sister as an obvious source of hope for his future, and somehow felt that with her as a senior sibling there would be help whenever

the need arose. At age twenty-three, she was already an Administrative Assistant at one of the secondary schools in Kumasi, having successfully completed a Higher National Diploma course at Kumasi Polytechnic. And there were indications that she was still prospecting for education to the highest level. Within that period, she got married to a very handsome young man at a brief but glorious family gathering. The pair was very admirable to encounter. From that moment, everything was pointing to a purposeful future and life was looking very bright for her.

Contrary to the unfolding events, tragedy struck and the unfortunate happened. Abena, as he prefers to call her because she was born on Tuesday, snapped after few days of clear indication of stress. Initially the whole family thought she had encountered a snag due to the absence of her husband who had travelled to Nigeria, so there was high hope of her quick recovery. It was after the husband returned and she still couldn't pull herself together that reality dawned on my family that there might be something more to her situation. Efforts to get her on track became a huge financial drain on the family. It dawned on Kobby's family that much effort was needed to go into getting the care and right medication for her. But "we stood firm and never gave up on her" he said.

There is no recognized psychiatric hospital in Ghana that the family of Kobby did not send Abena:

Accra Central Psychiatric hospital, Pantang Psychiatric hospital, just to mention the common ones. Just when everything seemed to be pointing to her recovery, other unfortunate developments raised their ugly heads. The husband who had returned from Nigeria, upon realizing her situation lost interest in the marriage and separated from her for another woman. To aggravate matters, the man died after few months into his new marriage. To Kobby, it was the late events in the husband's life that became the straw which broke the camel's back.

Somehow, through somebody's unbridled tongue, Abena got wind of all the unfortunate developments, and from that point she refused to take her medication. Her condition began to deteriorate at a very fast rate. From this period, her admission at psychiatric hospitals and discharge from such places became a routine for the family; everyone was involved at one stage or the other. At a point in time, hope of recovery from orthodox medicine was lost and there was virtually nothing that could be done apart from prayer. All kinds of prayer programs and faith cards have been engaged till now, yet she has not recovered.

Without doubt, Abena's misfortune has always been one of the greatest challenges of Kobby's Christian life. He confessed:

Memories of how such a bright star suddenly turned dim are always a drain on my brain. Regular thoughts of how such a gem has wasted away have been very devastating and hard to live with. Sometimes, I wish I am overwhelmed with activities that will take my mind off her. But it has never been possible that way. My spirit continues to groan for her every moment of time, and I have never ceased sharing tears for her.

Kobby's testimony, though unfortunate, cannot be swept under any carpet so easily. It is a fact of life that people face mental challenges and we all have to brace ourselves up to face such realities. According to him, he has tried to remain strong in his faith in God's ability to turn situations around. Until perfect restoration comes to her, his greatest source of consolation and joy is the remaining siblings and the great family of Christian sisters that abound in the earthly family of God. Nevertheless, if it pleases God not to restore Abena to normalcy, praise will still be given Him. However hard it is for Kobby to understand and deal with both the father and Abena's situations, the message to everyone is clear and simple; only God understands why such misfortunes come the way of the innocent. It might be hard for him to see where he erred to encounter those 'heavy blows.' But he has learned how to survive suffering in life.

Count your test/trial/suffering as joy in the Lord

Like others who have experienced even worse situations, the more a victim of perils of life sees that he/she is not alone in the struggle, the better the person is placed to press on till positive change is achieved. The righteous sufferer can also look beyond and derive further strength from Job's experience. Most of our painful encounters, including the experiences shared in this chapter never come closer to the ones Job suffered. He lost all physical possession including family, status, and glory but held to his integrity as a true worshipper of God.

While the testimonies of people like Job who have passed on are heartwarming, it is even more refreshing when contemporary experienced brethren offer words of encouragement to victims of suffering. Of course, we should be energized by the testimonies of such a cloud of witnesses who also encountered tragedies, lost heavily, and suffered severe pains but managed to overcome what the devil sought to achieve through such situations with great joy in the Lord and did not give up. In some cases, such people can use their own experiences to strengthen others to press on till they overcome life's setbacks. And we should consider such righteous sufferers so that we can console ourselves as we all await the brighter side of life which will surely come.

Oftentimes, people consider life to be quite unfair and many issues of it continue to remain a mystery. Nevertheless, mankind cannot find solutions to all the challenges that are experienced daily. Therefore, bitter experiences of life become joyful testimonies when we openly and genuinely admit that 'only God understands whatever happens and so to Him alone be the glory.' Mortals are very limited with respect to understanding the nitty-gritty of life, but God is not. It is advisable then to commit every life situation to God and trust Him to deal with them according to His will. He knows what is best for everyone, His will alone be done.

Facing life with understanding that God is in charge is better than to remain under the umbrella of ignorance. The link here is that no matter the extent of dark clouds that one faces in life, let the person continue to hope that the sun will appear in the sky one day; but even in the night hours, stars will brighten up the path to peace. With this in mind, there is no way any person should fold up amidst challenging situations.

Thus, irrespective of your situation, the assurance here is that God can comfort you, bring the needed spiritual and emotional healing, and then open a door of restoration that will be testimonial to you and a glory to His name. This might be one of the outcomes of the message of Elder James when he was addressing the Christians in his book (James 1:2-4). He wrote: "Consider

it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds..." Maybe the challenges of some people are just anthills compared to the great mountains in your life, but the message is that you should still hold on to your resolve to press to on the end. Endeavor to overlook the present suffering and focus on the joy ahead.

CHAPTER 11

BEAR THE CROSS NOW; WEAR THE CROWN IN FUTURE

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders...Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Heb. 12:1-3).

In life, God leads people through experiences in order to build character in them. There is a common saying that 'experience is the best teacher.' So, besides character formation, life experiences are meant to teach lessons, strengthen people, and also bring to them testimonies. While some experiences can be understood as the doors that life opens for people to perform better and achieve results, others are not. The latter can be so challenging that experiencing them is like passing

through fire. Even before the Christian era, the troubles of this life were often compared to a cross.¹³⁸ The meaning has not changed when it comes to Christianity.

When a believer fully understands what the “cross” means, the person will definitely appreciate why he/she goes through unpleasant experiences. According to one scholar, there are three biblical uses of the cross (Latin, *Crux*): it was an instrument for torture; second, it is a symbolic representation of redemption, third, it stands for death.¹³⁹ But the meaning of the cross can be extended to embrace other unpleasant circumstances of life; shame, curse, scorn, bitterness, pain, and the like (Phil. 2:8; Gal. 3:13). For those who are determined to live for the sake of the Lord, scriptures depict the unpleasant experiences of life as crosses that they have to bear (Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:23-26). But such sufferers are still exhorted to endure their situation in the Lord in order to enjoy the crown of life from Him. It is against this backdrop that I want to share some few testimonies here.

Typical challenges of Christian ministry

One of such experiences is the circumstances that led to the closing of a chapter in my life and the opening of another. Three months into my undergraduate studies, through persistent invitation by a course mate, I attended one of the Christian programs dubbed, “Mission 85.” It

was organized by the then UST campus fellowship (IHCF). During the preaching section, I came under the impact of the message entitled, “Jesus Christ, the True Revolutionary.” The exposition of this theme by the preacher, Rev. Dr. Nii Amo-Darko (now a member of Ghana’s Council of State), touched my heart. Being somebody who had accepted the Lord a year earlier, but not being serious with my commitment, the message convicted me to re-dedicate my life to Him. Since then I remained in the Lord and started growing in spiritual matters. I joined the Village Evangelism wing of IHCF that was helping the churches of the communities around the university. I also identified with a church and began to serve the Lord in the church whenever time would allow.

After the four years studies, I did two years National Service at Wenchi Secondary School in the Brong-Ahafo region. During this period, active in some of the students fellowships on campus and was also involved in Scripture Union activities both of which brought me lots of Christian experiences. Later, I relocated to Kumasi, settled down for family life, and accepted teaching appointment at another second cycle institution. This was when I became involved in Church-oriented Christian ministry for nearly twenty years. I was so much involved in the activities of my new church that most of my periods were spent at the church premises. I did my best to serve the Lord in various capacities of

the church not only because I was tasked to do so but in the hope of helping my spiritual growth and maturity. I played my part as a member of the leadership team and worked assiduously to help build the church. But I was soon to face some challenges that would become the fulcrum of my destiny.

- **The challenges of the ‘call into ministry’**

Many ministers of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ have testimonies concerning their call into ministry that have been shared with the world, and a lot more still continue to do so. Compared to theirs, some of us with no names should just shut up. However, sometimes, by God's provision, a window of opportunity is opened so that some of us who are unknown in bigger circles can also share some of our experiences. It is in this light that some of the challenges I have faced are shared in this book. The objective is to strengthen those who might face my circumstances and the larger Christian community in our journey towards the ultimate goal in Christ.

Years before my ordination and commissioning as a minister of the gospel, I had served as a deacon of the church. After few years of dedicated service, I was elected an elder. It did not take me long to realize that God was preparing me for a special ministry in His Kingdom. Soon, I was faced with the challenge of

responding to the 'heavenly voice:' "I have chosen you to prepare souls for my Kingdom." From interaction with elderly and matured ministers of the Gospel, I understood this 'call' as not just to provide a supportive service to the Kingdom business as many people do now. Rather it was a call to totally surrender and be fully involved in Christian ministry as it happened to some people: 'Come, follow me...' (Matt. 5:19-20). But unlike Peter and many others who acted immediately, my response was based on a battle of the mind and heart.

As a fresh graduate then, a positive response to the 'divine invitation' would definitely mean a lot. For example, I had received invitation for an interview to pursue a Master of Philosophy program in Natural Resources at the then UST, and was contemplating whether to honor it or not. Along that line, a renowned Gynecologist whose records were used by me for undergraduate final year research project was also interested that I continued the research at Master's level. And I thought that his offer was also worth exploring. I also had plans to explore some of the many yawning doors that were beckoning me to seek greener pastures abroad, which I was convinced my family would be prepared to sponsor. As a fresh graduate, there were many other ambitious plans in the pipeline. So on what grounds was I going to abandon these attractive opportunities? Definitely, a positive response to

a Christian ministry call could mean I had to sacrifice all the lofty ideas I had conceived.

Apparently, saying yes to the 'divine call' would also mean that I no longer would be in charge of negotiating the terms of any monetary gains. It could only mean a dependence on the largesse that the Christian ministry and the brethren would provide, whether adequate or not. Consequently, people would consider me as not being able to work and generate support for myself let alone cater for a family. In a worse scenario, it would make me a financial parasite in order to make ends meet, since the Christian ministry is not a money making business and could hardly provide what I was aspiring for. All these were definitely going to be heavy blows to my ego and a dent on my self-esteem.

Worst of all, what would my family say, knowing that their expectations of me after investing so much in my education was to secure a fulfilling job that could make me financially independent? On top of that, would it not mean that the family could no longer bank their hope of monetary assistance on me? During this period, series of questions kept on bombarding my brains, and try as I did, I could not arrive at any tangible answers. In the light of the outlined challenges and ragging questions, stepping forward to raise my hands and say 'yes' to God's call was indeed a difficult situation. Understandably, fear of the unknown was peaking at

this stage. I realized that I owed a duty to myself to take a decision that would define my destiny. This was indeed a great challenge to me at the time.

After days of what might be termed 'travailing prayer,' but without conferring with any 'flesh and blood,' I finally succumbed to the divine calling. On my volition then, I was ordained as Assistant Pastor to serve under the General Superintendent of the Church. I switched into full gear to address the issues bordering my jurisdiction; the youth of the church. My immediate vision was to raise a generation that would be responsible, empowered, reproductive, as well as highly motivated and ready to fill the yawning gap being created in the church as a result of age on majority of the leaders.

My immediate mission was to nurture and mentor the youth by inculcating the necessary awareness of 'God's will' in them. I did well to inspire, organize, and challenge them to rise up to their divine and overall earthly responsibilities. I was satisfied with pouring out my life for the youth of the church in order to lay a solid foundation in them in the pursuit of their profession and in the service of the Lord. Since joining the church which had about fifteen assemblies by 1989, I pioneered and championed the cause of very sensitive organs and ministries such as the Youth, Outreach, Music, and incubated the idea of a Students' Union.

In all these areas, the fruits of my tireless sacrifices still existed and I continued the unending process of spiritual propagation in the Kingdom of God. Though my initial fear for accepting a fulltime ministry occasionally raised its ugly head, I did well to remain focused. Admittedly, I struggled in both spiritually and humanly possible ways to fulfill my duties as a Youth Pastor, in spite of my short-comings or mistakes, the limited resources, and many other challenges. Of course, financial difficulties nearly became my next door neighbor, or worse still a bed-fellow. But the faithful God always supplied the needed resources for the work.

On the backdrop of a testimony like the preceding one, some people can evaluate their experiences in the Lord. Whether there have been sacrifices, losses, sufferings in any form, etc, all can be laid at the base of the cross of Christ. For, a Christian without a testimony is like a cloud without rain. The words of a believer's testimony are some of the greatest weapons to overcome the enemy (Rev. 12:11). So, I am confident that the challenges and victories of my periods of fruitful spiritual adventures, and what I continue to face currently will remain as my pivots of joy in the Lord till He returns.

• **The challenge of life's choices and decisions:** 'Life,' it is said, 'is full of choices,' and nobody can escape the consequences of such decisions in one way or the

other. People have been faced with choices regarding academic pursuits, professional careers, marriage partners, religions or denominational affiliations, food, clothing, where to live, and even types of building and vehicles to engage with. Unfortunately, the outcome of human choices cannot be predetermined; it is the end that usually justifies the decisions. For me, two of the most difficult choices of life have had to do with leaving my employment for training in Christian ministry, and which area of the ministry to be devoted to. Both of these brought me great pains and caused me some losses.

To achieve my goals, and as a step towards knowing the rules of engaging Christian ministry, I decided to quit my employment in order to undergo full-time studies at a ministerial training college. This was not just to acquire another Bachelor's degree (this time in Religious Studies), but was intended to equip me to render effective and fruitful service for Christ. I was gainfully employed as a teacher with the Ghana Education Service (GES) for nearly ten years; then a Superintendent. Unfortunately for me, all attempts to secure a study leave with pay failed because the Ministry of Education did not have any concrete guarantee that I would return to the classroom after the program. More so, though the Bible College I was attending had been accredited by the National Accreditation Board of the Ministry of Education, yet it had an outlook of a Pastoral

institution than a facility for the training of teachers in general.

The consequence was that I had to face a barrage of questions if I still had to go ahead and pursue the training program. How was I expecting to sponsor my education? How would my family; wife and three children be catered for? Who would take care of the bills of my house? These were very genuine mind-boggling questions. Underlying these questions was the fact that I would lose my status with GES. It was a huge sacrifice to make and a traumatizing adventure. Was I indeed prepared for the apparent financial hardship that was staring me in the face? I really thank my church for agreeing to help at that time, but was that sufficient guarantee for my family's survival? Time was running out for me; I had to act fast.

I allowed for sometime of quality prayer but there was no specific spiritual direction concerning God's provision. I made some contacts with some people I could trust with support, but there were no concrete assurances. Finally, I decided to take a step that could be either 'foolish' or faith; bite the bullet and face whatever consequences. Of course, it was not a very 'wise' step, and I still remember some experienced Christians who advised me to rethink the decision. But I was also not ignorant of the saying that, 'some breakthroughs in the life of a Christian might be tied to a leap of faith that

the person is prepared to take.’ Without further hesitation, I ‘stepped into the Jordan River and it parted to create a way to the other side.’ By the unlimited grace of Jehovah *Jireh*, there was enough provision for me to survive the four years journey. The first hurdle on the ‘choice challenge’ was thus cleared.

The circumstances surrounding the second ‘choice challenge’ were more complex than the first. Few weeks into my graduation from Bible College, I received what is best described as ‘divine selection and invitation.’ “Come over to Macedonia and help...” (Acts 16:9ff). The leadership of the College was led of God to recruit me to help in training people for God’s Kingdom business. When this information was relayed to the leadership of my church, they consented. Their objective for the arrangement was that I would eventually take over the mantle from the Pastor at the country’s capital who was due for retirement. So in obedience to the memorandum of understanding between the bosses of the college and the church, (which I was completely oblivious of), I joined my new post. But little did I know that the move would also take me to the next level of challenges.

Sooner than expected, I took charge of the church’s assembly at the Metropolitan city and at the same time engaged in teaching at the Bible College. I was able to combine these heavy duties and manage them to the best of my expertise and strength for

nearly six years. I was able to bring some positive transformations to the assembly and also performed creditably at the College such that I was assigned further responsibilities in the latter. But with progress and promotion came a workload which was heavier and quite laborious. With time, these very stressful duties began to take a toll on my health. Nevertheless, I did not take my Doctor's advice seriously but did my best to continue both services for a while. I considered it as worthy to 'die a little' for the Lord.

At a point, however, the combined weight of my commitments became so heavy that I realized I was not shouldering both responsibilities as effectively as I should. Under certain circumstances, rendering services to more than one major area of Christian ministry is not easy. This usually happens when there are conflicts of time and the schedules cannot be made compatible easily. Proximity or accessibility to places of work can also be a determining factor. When the places of service are far apart, there are bound to be challenges with commuting. In some places such a challenge might not be too difficult to surmount. But in a heavy vehicular traffic city like Accra, it is not easy.

Sometimes, when a person is involved in more than one area of service as above, rendering excellent service at all the areas is easier said than done, especially when the forces involved in the tangle are exerting equal pull.

In such a difficult situation, a person may be guided by the spirit of God to focus on a definite area of service in order to remain focus and enhance performance. That is the circumstance I found himself; a very unpleasant situation. I was compelled from within to decide whether to continue my pastoral roles in the church or engage in Christian ministry at the theological university. The divine bell to concentrate on one area of ministry in order to maximize my potentials kept ringing hard. But the challenge was which of the two areas of engagement was to be divorced. It was a great dilemma. Would such a step amount to 'loyalty and disloyalty:' loyalty to where I would move to and disloyalty to where I would move from? That was definitely a hard question.

But before the Divine One, the answer is simple. No! It would be neither loyalty nor disloyalty. This is especially so, since both areas are meant to fulfill His purposes. The Almighty is the owner of the vineyard; He has many workers and I am the least of them. As a body, we are bound to wait and listen for His voice. Where it pleases Him to send us, we are bound to go. We neither called ourselves nor had a choice of where we should be. It was thus an issue of total obedience to the Lord's direction, and it would be a test to find out who at any point in time controls a person's movement. This finds confirmation in the chorus of a popular Christian song:

*Trust and obey, for there is no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*¹⁴⁰

It is also clear from the ongoing excursion that it is God alone who does the placements according to divine wisdom and plan. Therefore, in my case, where was He going to lead me? Was I to concentrate on the church ministry as Pastor-in-charge of my assembly or attend to the ministry of training workers for the Church in general? One of the two ministries definitely had to be sacrificed, if that was what would please the Lord of the harvest. So He would decide; it was only a matter of time.

• **Making a case for the Theological Educator:** While the pastoral ministry is a general role that I had been involved in over the past, there was a story surrounding the theological training ministry. For me, the latter was in fulfillment of many clear directives that the Lord through His Spirit had given. A concentration on the latter would also confirm 'God's messages' through other trusted believers. Upon much prayer and counseling from matured and objective Christian leaders, I was convinced of concentrating on the area of teaching at the theological institution. Thus, switching to pitch camp at a Bible university was not an impromptu step to join a bandwagon. The decision was not arrived at on a silver platter; it was a herculean ministerial challenge.

Without argument, the work of the theological training minister (at a university, college, or seminary) is of great importance, very relevant, and extremely challenging like any of the other ministers of the gospel. In basic terms of understanding, the task of a genuine theological training educator is to make unadulterated truth available to people who needed skills and knowledge in order to fulfill God's purpose of caring for His 'sheep.' Considering the different views and beliefs that some people hold and their character before they come for theological training, it is the responsibility of the educator to bring such people to the knowledge of the whole truth in order to perform in God's kingdom.

Theological education is the ministry that Prophet Samuel envisioned and begun at Naioth at Rama (1 Sam. 10:5; cf. 19:19), in order to bring sanity to the corrupted Tabernacle ministry he inherited. It was the training ground for those that accepted God's call to be His spokespersons, and the platform for ensuring the continuity of divinity in the affairs of humanity. This is the ministry that spread out to other places like Jericho, Gilgal, Mizpah, Bethel, Samaria, and had connection with Prophets like Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 20:35-37; 2 Kings 2:1-15; 6:1-7). Above all, it is where the Lord has raised champions for the Church the world over and through the centuries.

Formal education in general is believed to have been the child of the religious training centers:

Modern systems of education in Europe trace their roots from the schools of medieval period. Most schools during this era were founded upon religious principles with the sole purpose of training the **clergy**. The word clergy...places emphasis on...skills and learning that are expected of the minister. Most of the renowned universities in Europe and America were initially theological seminaries for example; Cambridge University and Harvard University ...Education therefore is not strange to the field of religion in general and Christianity in particular. The training of the minister shall expose him to a world of knowledge and skill that will enable him to perform his onus efficiently and effectively.¹⁴¹

Ministerial training institutions are the paths that some of the most committed servants in the ministry of the Lord in Ghana have treaded and many more continue to do. This is where many worthy servants of God that have served in the various Christian mission training institutions across Ghana, Africa, and the globe, have invested their lives in order to find joy in the Lord and many continue to find great solace.

• **A slice of the whole:** My confrontation with the choice of where to serve in the eternal field broadened my understanding of integrated ministry. Indeed, all areas of Christian ministries are important and need resourceful and dedicated personnel for fruitful engagements. While stressing that the task of a Theological College educator should be appreciated, it is also necessary to point out the relationship and integration among the entire five-fold ministries. It should be understood that, somehow, each area of the Christian ministry embodies the other: i.e., they are intertwined. This means that what is spelt out in Ephesians 4:11-16 needs to be fully apprehended. In these verses, the Lord established the benchmarks for leadership services in Christianity:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastor and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ...

Based on the quote above, any level headed person should admit that all the ministries are important. Each is just a slice of the whole. But Bible scholars might unequivocally argue (without a shadow of doubt) that there cannot be a greater minister than the one who systematically lays biblical foundation in the believer. Obviously, it is the pastors who are the ministers in charge of churches. They are the main caretakers of the congregation at the grassroots and therefore need to be well equipped in order to affect them positively. If the minister is efficient, it is reflected in the quality of the church; if he or she is deficient, it directly affects the church. If so, then the more qualified ministers of the gospel we have, the better it is for the church.

It is understandable therefore for me to be motivated by a call to teach at a ministerial training organization. I consider it not only as a redirection by God to another office but one of the greatest promotions in life. Such a person is the trainers' trainer; the minister's minister, and the teacher who teaches all others the things of God for them to perpetuate it. This is the major work that the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to do. His ministry on earth epitomizes everything involved in the teaching ministry. Little wonder, His hearers referred to Him as Teacher (or "Rabbi").

I was overwhelmed by the fact that in a world where sin is in different forms, and lies, half truths

and deception is gaining strength by the day, the truth about God and the message of His Kingdom need to be transmitted in a very systematic and dedicated way. Hence those who would go to the field should receive the unadulterated message of scripture in order to impact societies with truth. I was deeply convinced that God had over the years been preparing me for such excellent services. So, the perfect route to such a fulfillment was the window that was opened at the ministerial training institution. And I do not think I will ever regret obeying the divine direction.

- **A painful separation:** Closing one chapter of life in order to pursue another has always come with its challenges. Some people are able to do it without a blink of the eyes; for others it is a difficult step. The conviction that one should completely surrender to a defined ministry area is informed by the desire to remain focused and perform efficiently. I became fully convinced to step-down as a Pastor-in-charge of a local assembly to concentrate on the overwhelming duties of training God's ministers. My understanding was not tainted by any special interest; I was fully convinced the move was the will of God. Separation from the fellowship of any one Christian group does not mean a fall from God's grace; it might only be a call to follow a new direction (Acts 15:36-41).

I considered my move as a means to pave way to any person(s) who could give the needed attention to all the official roles I was playing in the Church. Such a step is considered better than to be a 'jack of all trade and a master of none.' That is, holding on to many areas of services where one could not perform as God expects is not an excellent life principle. This, notwithstanding, let me confess that the move was one of the painful decisions of my life. There was real torrent in my spirit and whirlwind in my soul. Thus, it was expedient that I did the ultimate which was one of the best decisions at that time if I had to experience peace within and enjoy it with everyone else. After days of inner struggle, everything finally pointed to the saying that 'no amount of words can prevent the crossing of the Rubicon when the die is cast.' The inevitable step had to follow; I had to vacate my post.

Genuine resignation from any place for the benefit of other fruitful engagements as intimated already should be done in a peaceful manner. Moreover, peaceful exits within the body of Christ usually ensure its unity and sanctity, and help to maintain its character as 'the salt of the earth.' Unfortunately, society is not oblivious to some of the unhealthy developments that such unexpected departures have precipitated in some institutions, the Church though a spiritual body not being exception. Sometimes, a whole group or some individuals become so embittered or disappointed that they engage in acts

which lead to unexpected consequences. To this end, it is important for one to ensure that such departure becomes different from the unfortunate types that occur at some places. Such a peaceful exit would further demonstrate that the Lord Himself is on top of what He had planned and was doing.

In my circumstance, though not devoid of the usual encumbrances with such exits, I determined to remain focused and planned that the process becomes very amicable. I was not ready to permit my devotion to a theological institution spark unhealthy fire that would erase all the fruits of many years of zealous work in God's vineyard. I penned down a simple resignation letter. I expressed deepest appreciation to the leadership and the church as a whole for the many years of kingdom fellowship and service, and for the immeasurable ways the members contributed to my life and family. I asked for pardon from anyone whom I might have offended by word(s) or deed(s) during those years of fellowship. I wished the Church well and promised that though I was not officially committed to that body, I would endeavor to make its progress part of my prayer.

On that note, I ended my official pastoral duties to my former church. The departure was very peaceful, with only my wife and three children, without raising any unnecessary alarm bells or any chaos. I cannot cease to appreciate God for emboldening me to take such a

decisive step, in spite of the great loss, the pains, and some few unfortunate situations that my exit might have caused.

• **Loss of family and fellowship:** There are some virtues that are important to qualitative life and usually receive honor before God: love, joy, loyalty, moral uprightness, peace, humility, faithfulness, hard-work, honesty, etc. These are the same ingredients humanity also holds dear and look for. When it comes to living as a social unit, then the need for peace becomes very paramount. Apart from experiencing this virtue within one's self, it is also the ability to live amicably with other people.

The joy of a peaceful living is what I remember my previous place of worship for. The extent to which the church members related with one another, compared to some places that I knew, was very healthy. I experienced a great feeling of belongingness in the church during the period that I worshipped there. And especially among the youth, the family-feeling was beyond compare. It was a great family of sociable individuals, one of exception, in spite of the fact that every human organization has its own 'cobwebs.'

Apparently, to 'break fellowship' with such a family that had been built over many years was like severing a part of body from the unit and placing it as far as the

gap between the East and the West. Unfortunately, that was the situation I was confronted with when I opted for the teaching ministry. Honestly, that experience was an apparent painful situation and a traumatizing episode to go through, no matter how temporal it was. But it was a necessary step in order to fulfill God's ultimate will. While on one hand I would have wished to remain a permanent part of such a unit, on the other, such wishes were not realized. Sometimes, I wish I were present at every gathering of such saints, unfortunately I cannot. So, it is like, I am absent in body but present in spirit with them.

Nevertheless, I am peacefully enjoying the service of the Lord and teaching others how they can also overcome similar difficult times in life. I am consoled by having maximum engagement with another major ministry in the spirit of cheerful equanimity. As clay in the hands of the potter, so I would want to be in the hands of God. My hope is to continue in obedience wherever God will direct and do His bidding, despite my shortcomings. Indeed, I have found consolation in Apostle Paul's exhortation in Philippians 3:12-16:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind

and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are matured should take such a view of things.

My greatest desire and prayer is to be a true luminary in the hands of God; somebody who is really inspiring and influencing my generation to rise up and fulfill God's purposes for their lives. No matter how hard life becomes, the good news is that the Lord will always be by my side. Though such a ministry involves many sacrifices and is not immediately financially rewarding, there is hope of some gain in this present life and a greater reward in the life to come. So I will still press on with zeal and zest to reach the zenith of the ministry for which God has called me.

Though I have had a fair share of some of the painful experiences of life, yet I pray that all Christians will appreciate the diversities in our beliefs, worship places, commitments, values, etc. Most especially, we should understand the call of the Lord to separate and engage in other areas of ministry in order to welcome some of the challenges. When it happened to Apostle Paul and Barnabas, the assembly of the First Century Church at Antioch in Syria understood and supported such a move of the Spirit (Acts 13:1-3), and so should we. We ought to accept that all Christians are born by the

same Father, washed by the blood of the same Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and drink from the same source, the Holy Spirit. In fact, we are one. Therefore, we should appreciate our individual commitments and encourage one another to press on in the face of difficulties than fight one another.

Sowing without reaping: a bitter experience

Suffering is associated with many by-products, both positive and negative. On one extreme it can strengthen the faith of the righteous in the Lord; on the other, it can sow bitterness, which is a very destructive seed, within the soul of the victim. One instance of such bitterness is when a person is denied the enjoyment of his/her labor. From human sentiments, sowing in tears just for someone else to enjoy the harvest is painful and a great loss. It is one of the very bitter situations in life. Not only so, but such bitterness is also very hard to heal. Because whenever the person remembers some of the harsh experiences during the period of service, the sore of bitterness is pricked and the person begins to bleed. The 'Preacher' was right when he said:

I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me...he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill...So my heart began to

despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all...to someone who has not worked for it. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors...All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest... (Eccles. 2:17-23).

There are countless instances of situations where people sow but never remain or live to reap from their toil. One pastor shared with me how, by the grace of God, he had been able to endure the whirlwind of separation and temporal earthly isolation. He said: "I have made fresh and very important strides, as well as built up new bridges in ministry, since I left my previous ministry." However, another minister confessed some of the losses of separation. He, Pastor Afrifa Ponko Kodie,¹⁴² whom I encountered at Abeka-Lapaz, at Accra, and later became more than a brother, shared with me how hard it was for him to forget his twenty years of hard work in his former church. His greatest pain was the loss of fruits of his toil. That is, he did not remain to enjoy his labor.

I followed the narration of the second pastor with great interest because it reminded me of a similar experience. As he recounted, it was as if my story had been told him. To some extent, our respective

testimonies are replicas of each other; absolutely the same. Events of those years are still fresh in my memory. I believe those years of concentrated ministry still remain my most active years. I served the Lord with great vim: heart, strength, money, time, in fact, my all in church. I worked so tirelessly and was hopeful that one day I would enjoy the fruit of my sweat in this present life before the next.

This pastor, like me, started with some of the youth when a good number of them were not quite fifteen years of age and in junior stages of education. In my case, I built enough capacity in them through organization of regular retreats; seminars; and local, district, and national conferences. I am quite sure that if numbers are anything to work with, the number of youth alone that God used me to nurture in the church might reach five-hundred. At the time of my unceremonious departure, a good number of these youth had grown to post-graduate levels; some had become medical doctors, engineers, business experts, some occupying higher positions of academia, and the list still continues. That was the time I could begin to pluck some of those ripened fruits to refresh my soul in accordance with scriptures:

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plans a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say

this from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about that oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seeds among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you. If others have the right of support from you, shouldn't...

After my intimation, the outburst from the pastor was as if to repeat and complete the quote above. He said: "Yes, if others have the right of enjoyment from the youth that I so much toiled to build, why shouldn't I?" Then he continued: "I toiled for almost twenty years to raise them up." Honestly, who would be happy to leave a ripened field to cultivate a fresh one? Nobody would be prepared to take such a step. But like the first pastor, I did it, and have now made very important strides, as well as built up new bridges in ministry, since I left my previous ministry.

Somehow, we have had to count the toil of those years as lost. We lost the right to our labor just because we heeded to the Lord's voice to step out of our former boats for another important cause. It is an irony of life. It reveals how painful, bitter, unfair, and unfortunate life can be. I am pretty sure that it is not only my colleague and I,

but there are other people who also keep on wondering whether there is any consolation for such great losses, and healing for the resultant bitterness.

All is not lost

There are lots of things that one can cheer about in life, despite obvious losses. Especially when any such loss is as a result of the cross that one has to bear for the sake of Christ, the cheers can be louder. As a matter of fact, scripture says that, "There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off" (Prov. 23:18). So, even in situations where people did not have the opportunity to enjoy their toil, all cannot be lost. That is, where the events that lead to the loss of enjoyment are part of the overall unfolding plan of God, all such sufferings and losses should be counted as gains.

Therefore, those in the Lord who might have sowed quite appreciably in life and never receive any commensurate return; those who have invested so much in the work of God without anybody recognizing their hard labor; the many subordinates whose right to just payment are trampled upon by their superiors; etc., have a guaranteed consolation in Him.

The fact is that scriptures encourage every faithful sower to continue to abound because "the person's labor in the Lord will never be in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). Indeed, only God understands why He works out such

schemes in every person's life, but we should not forget that "all things work together for good..." (Rom. 8:28). I would like all to be motivated by the heavenly reward that awaits us. But not only in heaven will we receive reward, by all means, our good works will never go waste, even in this present life. We should concentrate on how to make gains in ministry presently and in the future.

As was said in the previous chapter, we should be mindful of the fact that there is a cloud of witnesses who are urging the righteous sufferer in Christ to persist irrespective of the challenges (Heb. 12:1-12). Let us therefore bear the cross now in order that we can wear the glorious crown in the nearest future. If bearing the cross should even mean death, we would be able to understand from the next chapter that death in Christ is victory and gain.

CHAPTER 12

REMEMBER, DEATH IN CHRIST IS VICTORY AND GAIN

The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death (Isa. 57: 1-2).

One of the greatest and most painful losses of humanity happens through death. It is seen as irreplaceable loss as far as the present life is concerned. Indeed, loss through death is the end of a person's earthly life in accordance with the word of God (Heb. 9:27). When, how, where, and obviously, why death happens to mankind are questions which are beyond the control of humanity. As a result, such a loss is received, understood, and handled by humanity in many different ways; shock, grief, tears, pains, etc. People who have lost beloved ones before, especially when such people are young or pass on through misfortunes, understand

the pain they suffer as a result. In one way or the other, therefore, there should be an answer to the challenge that such a loss brings to the life of humanity. The only true and permanent relief for loss through death is the hope of a resurrection to eternity.

The resurrection of the dead whether saints or sinners is an important doctrine and one of the major pivots on which Christianity stands. Evidence from scripture clearly shows that in the mind of some people, particularly unbelievers, the idea of a bodily resurrection was nonsensical and incredible.

The notion of a resurrection seems to violate traditional -perhaps we could even call them orthodox-Israelite or Old Testament conceptions of death...that the dead do not simply pass out of existence-they do not simply *die*; instead, they persist in a miserable, shadowy existence, cut off from their community and from communion with God.¹⁴³

In the Greek world, people initially received messages of the resurrection with much ridicule and even some of the believers doubted the resurrection (Acts 17:16-21; 1 Cor. 15:12). Also, among the Jews, there were teachers of the church and Jews in general, particularly Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Even among the Christians, there were some who doubted the

idea of a physical resurrection. This is what prompted Apostle Paul to engage the subject in greater details.

There is resurrection after death

The teaching that “the soul which at death is separated from the body will be clothed again and inhabit an immortal body to live again” is biblical. Indeed, the OT drops hint of resurrection. For example, it is reflected in Job’s famous statement: “I know my Redeemer lives, and that in the end...after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God...” (19:25-26). Another passage is Daniel 12:2, which reads: “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.” Accordingly, one scholar noted:

It is from the New Testament, and especially from what it says about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that we Christians have learned to be interested in the resurrection...In my view, this learning...is not to be abandoned when we turn to the Old Testament... Whatever it says or does not say *explicitly* about resurrection, the Old Testament contributes to our understanding of the resurrection of the dead...¹⁴⁴

The NT however captures the subject in many lengthy discussions. In the first of his letters to the

Corinthians, Apostle Paul thoroughly answers this thorny issue of the “doctrine of the resurrection” in the whole of chapter 15. His discussion offers points of interest some of which will be raised here. Unger’s Bible Dictionary defines “resurrection” as the miracles of restoration of the physical life, the reunion of the spirit with the body subsequent to death. It continues that the testimony of the scriptures as to the reality of the resurrection is most ample and without a note of discord as to the essential facts itself.¹⁴⁵

The Lord Jesus Christ said that “...a time is coming when all the dead will hear His voice and come out; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of Judgment” (John 5:28-29). Paul also declares generally that “...there shall be the resurrection of the dead...” (1 Cor. 15:13). Both of these agree well with the vision which the Prophet Daniel had so many years earlier concerning the last days about the rising or the resurrection of the dead (Dan. 12:2).

To establish the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, Paul rests his argument on the undisputed fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and affirms that Jesus’ resurrection renders any denial of the resurrection of the dead impossible (1 Cor. 15:1-19). Paul directly tells the Corinthian church and indirectly all believers that the death, burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ are the pivots of the gospel. The scriptural emphasis that Jesus

died and was buried (1 Cor. 15:4) is here specified not only to indicate the reality of death of Jesus but also the reality of His resurrection. Christ did not merely “swoon,” he actually died¹⁴⁶ (Mark 15:22-27, 29-30).

That the Lord was raised on the third day is also specified by Paul (1 Cor. 15:4) as a proof of resurrection. The apostle listed Jesus’ appearances to some of his disciples, most of whom were alive at the time of his writings (1 Cor. 15:6). In his commentary, *The first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, the author writes:

This muster of witness indicates the importance Paul attaches to the resurrection of the Lord. He shows its consequences for Christian faith, and he lays the foundation by showing how well based is a belief in it. Paul does not give a complete list of witnesses; he gave enough to show that the fact is extremely attested to.¹⁴⁷

The Apostle completes the testimony with, ‘Last of all, he appeared to me also,’ which according to one scholar is a reference to his [Paul’s] Damascus road experience, the vividness of which never faded in his memory.¹⁴⁸

In Christ you have glorious resurrection

There is also sufficient evidence like: the empty tomb, the claim of the disciples that Jesus had appeared

to them, the report of the soldiers to Greek leaders, together with the existence of the church in spite of the grave persecution, to buttress their proof of Christ's resurrection.¹⁴⁹ One scholar writes that the established psychological facts of changed lives is a credible reason for believing in the resurrection, and that it is subjective evidence bearing witness to the objective fact that Jesus Christ on the third day arose, for only a risen Christ could have such a transforming power in a person's life.¹⁵⁰ According to a commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:9-13:

The apostles were men doomed to die, they were a spectacle to the world and to angels. They were fools for Christ's sake, they were weak, and they were held by disrepute. They suffered hunger and thirst...all this they suffered because they believed that God raised Christ from the dead, and they looked in hope to the coming of the Lord.¹⁵¹

In the argument of Apostle Paul, the resurrection of Christ and for that matter the resurrection of all the dead should be a substance of the 'good news' to all believers. According to him, the denial of the resurrection would have meant that Christians are still in their sins and that the dead saints have preached without any hope of being raised from the dead. This would have also meant that believers whose hope in the salvation of the body from

corruption and future glorious life are of all men most to be pitied.” If the doctrine of the resurrection is false, then the whole system of the Christian faith is baseless. If the dead did not rise, then “let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor. 15:32).

Scriptures reveal that the resurrection of the dead will occur at the second coming of Christ and will be divinely arranged in the order of Christ, the resurrection of the dead in Christ, then the believers who will be alive at the time of Christ’s second coming. At His coming also, one of the greatest enemies of mankind, also known as the “last enemy,” i.e. death will be overcome and will never have power over mankind again. Therefore when the corrupt nature of the believer puts on the incorruptible resurrected body, then will it be true that death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:26, 54). The new body to be received after the body which is perishable is sown in death is an imperishable one, new nature, honorable, glorious and powerful, over which death has no authority again. Therefore the resurrection of the dead will abolish natural death completely.

Overall, the resurrection of Christ and the hope of the resurrection of the dead in Christ put believers in a position to express sincere thanks to God, who gives the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ and hope to live for Him (1 Cor. 15:57). Let us consider the following concluding admonishing to all believers: “If you have all

that glory to look forward to, then keep yourself steadfast to God's faith and service, for if you do all your effort will not be in vain. The Christian life may be difficult, but the goal is infinitely worth the struggle."¹⁵² Therefore, if the loss that we have suffered is the death of a believer in Christ, then let us encourage each other because those of us who believe that Jesus died and rose again should also hope that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him (1 Thess. 4:13-18). But for the unbeliever in Christ death is a complete loss since such a person is condemned by God unto eternal destruction.

The unbeliever can also have hope of restoration

A Christian is one who has invited Jesus Christ into his or her life and believes that Christ has come as promised. Such a person is determined to live a Bible-patterned Spirit-filled life by the grace of God. To all such persons, I believe there is a sure hope of restoration. However, for the one who did not accept the Lord as Savior before exiting this life, and all those who have not as yet accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, and even those who have any cause to doubt their relationship with the Lord, God's grace through His son cannot reach them, nor is there any guarantee of a blissful resurrection after death.

Thus, if you are an unbeliever, you might be harboring a positive desire and hope similar to that of

Balaam in your heart: "I see a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of the nations.... [God] let me die the death of the righteous, and may my end be like theirs!" (Num. 23:9-10) In such a case, you need to reconcile with God through the Lord Jesus Christ in order to enjoy the blessing of God's grace in times of trouble and benefit from His restorative plan. In fact, the Bible promises God's grace and eternal life to all who receive Jesus Christ by faith.

If you are ready for a fruitful relationship with God now, the basic steps to salvation involve the following:

a. Acknowledge that you are a sinner: Accept that you are a sinner who cannot save him /herself and needs to be saved. If we say we have no sin we are deceiving ourselves and making God a liar. For all have sinned (Rom. 3:11-18, 23; John 1:8, 9-10). We are slaves to sin and need to be set free (Rom. 7:15-25). This is what prophet Isaiah said concerning what the Lord Jesus Christ did for all sinners:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all...for the transgression of my people he was stricken...He was assigned a grave with the wicked...though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth...Yet it was the LORD's will to

crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering...By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities (Isa. 53:6-11).

b. Repent and confess your sins: This means, turn away from your sins. God loves the sinners, but hates sin. He is able and willing to save us from our sins (Rom. 5:8-10; 1 John 4:10). God's love should compel you to turn from sin and surrender to Him.

c. Believe and accept that Jesus Christ died for you: On the cross of Calvary, the Lord died to save you from your sins. Scripture says, "For God so love..." (John 3:16, 18; cf. Rom. 10:9, 11, 13; Acts 16:31). Therefore, believe and accept Jesus as your Lord and personal Savior. Becoming a Christian involves commitment of your whole self to God. According to Deuteronomy 6:4, it specifically involves:

I. The mind. The mind is the seat of a person's will. Therefore, not until a person willfully enthrones Jesus Christ as Lord and Master of his/her life, such a person's conversion is incomplete (John 7:17).

II. The heart. When one gets to know something about a lover, it gives the person great joy and a growing

desire to love the one and be with him or her. Becoming a Christian involves such a desire on your part- to know and feel more of the love and forgiveness of Christ deep within the heart (Eph. 1:7), and the desire to be with Him.

III. The whole being: One becomes a Christian through himself/herself completely by faith to the Lord. Another word for faith is trust. If you know someone sincerely loves you, there will be no hesitation trusting the one and committing your body to the person.

d. Demonstrate your conversion through baptism: Baptism is a process that identifies a person with Christ's death and resurrection into newness of life. All true believers who confess their acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior also publicly demonstrate that they are prepared to live for Him. This occurs through baptism. Baptism makes a person God's agent for reconciling the world to Him. God is looking for men and women who will easily identify themselves Ambassadors of Christ.

e. Be sealed by the Holy Spirit: By accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, a person become sealed and filled with the Holy Spirit, and is ushered into the treasure house of God's blessing. From this period, the person should continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to lead the one

in regular communication with God and to strengthen him/her to overcome sin and Satan's schemes of numerous temptations.

f. Trust the Lord at all times: When a person receives Christ as Savior and Lord, he/she trusts his/her life to Him in order to experience His plan for him/her. The Lord takes care of such a person even in difficult times. He would continue to be with him/her till He brings restoration to the person's life.

Beloved, since it is only death in Christ that guarantees victory over both physical and eternal death and assurance of a glorious resurrection, it is important to surrender to Him. In the next chapter, two keys that would help the believer in times of loss, pains, and difficulties, and would also lead to restoration would be discussed. My desire is that you press on to know God so that you experience His true restoration.

CHAPTER 13

THE WORD OF GOD AND PRAYER: KEYS TO RESTORATION

I sought the LORD, and he answered me; He delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him (Ps. 34:4-8).

The quote above summarizes the discussions of this chapter. Trials and tests clearly are situations which God allows believers to go through as means of proving our faith. It is a means used by him to get knowledge of a person's stand or to find out the quality of his/her faith. Trials and suffering are the believer's moment of writing examination to prove the quality of what has been learned in life. But such periods cannot be endured so easily. There is need to engage God and draw His

attention unto us in difficult times in order to endure (Heb. 4:15-16). From the experience of Bible characters that engaged God, it is obvious that no matter the extent of suffering and pains, God expects that the person comes out victorious in the end and gives glory to Him.

If the word of God is food for the soul then prayer is the drink that quenches its thirst. Both go hand in hand. When the patriarch David mentioned his longing of his soul for God (Ps. 42:1), he was explicitly indicating the importance of prayer to him. He compared the role and urgency for water in his life to that of a deer. The deer obviously had enjoyed a good meal of some sweet herbs and was probably being choked by the regurgitation and chewing. There was urgent need for water to finally wash all the food down the throat, hence, the panting of the deer for it. Similarly, believers need to complete their spiritual meals by engaging quality communication session with God after good studies of scriptures.

On top of all the attitudinal issues discussed already, one of the greatest lessons from the misfortunes is the need to resist the schemes of Satan. Indeed, God is confident that in spite of Satan's attacks on believers, they would be able to resist the attacks and come out clean. The power to overcome comes from God through the agency of prayer. For example, by constantly communicating his ordeal to God, Job was intimating that God would speak some words of comfort and restore

him. Alas, he was vindicated. Victims of difficult situations as Job faced have a lot to learn from his prayer life if they have to overcome the enemy and experience divine restoration in the end. God's word and prayer are very necessary for victory and restoration.

Seek the word of God

Some of the methods for proper nurturing through the word of God include the following:

- Searching the scripture by reading,
- Memorizing and meditating on God's word
- Reading quality literature to buttress the message of scripture and enhance understanding in order to facilitate application of what has been studied.
- Being obedient and believing the word of God.
- Reading supporting resources designed to strengthen the believer in times of suffering, facilitate the proper growth, and make the person serviceable to the Lord.

One scholar is known to have said that the Bible was not given to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives.¹⁵³ Therefore, both the encouragement needed and more importantly the expected change during times of hardship can be effected through scriptures. That is, God can bring the exact words needed for a breakthrough. A summary of important questions for consideration as a

person studies the scriptures is provided here for careful perusal:¹⁵⁴

- “What attitudes do I need to change?
- What discipline do I need to start or stop doing?
- What do I need to believe or stop believing?
- What relationship do I need to work on?
- And what ministry should I be rendering to others?
- How should I practice what the Spirit says?
- What prayers should I say in response to the study?

By careful reading, asking appropriate and applicable questions, providing answers, topping the studies up with prayer, and making efforts to apply such to life, the effectual power of God’s word will set in motion a process of transformation.

Communicate with God in prayer

Generally, every believer grows and matures when the person draws closer to the Lord. But scriptures show that prayer becomes inevitable to many faithful believers especially during challenging periods of their lives. Practicing constant communication with God during times of hardship is testified by devotees such as: Elijah (1 Kings 18:41-44), Hannah (1 Sam. 1:6-7), the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 5:15; 6:12), etc. Therefore, people who are passing through suffering and pains need to pray unceasingly (1 Thess. 5:17).

Christians should realize that the victorious life of the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated publicly was the result of closet prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12). Although Jesus had fasted for 40 days and nights before He began His ministry, He never stopped praying for power from on high to overcome the devil and to do God's will (Matt. 4:1ff; Luke 4:1ff). Thus, persistent prayer is the answer of Christ to the devil. It was the power of prayer that energized Christ to endure the circumstances from Gethsemane through Calvary. We should learn to pray and faint not, i.e., to pray without ceasing like Jesus Christ did (1 Peter 2:20-22). If the weakest Christian can shake the devils foundations when he prays, then "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16).

One of the best ways to deepen our relationship with God during periods of afflictions is communicating regularly with Him, that is, talking to God and allowing Him also to talk back through His Spirit and Word (1 Thess. 5:17). Scripture says that we should seek and we will find (Matt. 7:7). It is therefore important and advisable to seek from God the reason for a person's visitation of negativities. This might happen as we wait for His voice. Oftentimes, when we are experiencing anguish and are still crying to God in prayer, His 'still small voice,' i.e., God's Spirit, whispers into our spirit these words of assurance, "my grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9).

In order to fight and be victorious in the present life, the believer has to engage in a continuous spiritual warfare. Additionally, all believers of God have a duty to fight and resist Satan in order to enter the kingdom of God. The Christian needs to put on the whole armor of God, that is, the five defensive weapons: truth, righteousness, gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and the two offensive weapons: The sword of the Spirit (God's word), and prayer. Most of these weapons operate through prayer. The Christian needs to pray and grow in it because he/she has to fight and overcome him. If we fail to follow this step and live under the spirit of prayer, we are never going to be victorious. But if we pray continuously we would not fail to overcome the devil.

Expect answers from God when you pray

Though God wants His children to call upon Him during difficult times, we should also understand that the response depends upon Him alone. There may be some reasons for answers to prayers which we do not know. It is not clear how God answers prayers. The answer might be 'no,' 'wait,' 'yes,' combinations of some of these, etc. As to which of these cards God chooses to play, the decision is His to make. But it is good for us to understand the reason.

• **God may say, no!** In most cases, prayers which receive a 'no' answer may never be understood; though a 'no' answer can also be a response from God. When God answers 'no' to a prayer, it may be that the request is completely contrary to God's will (James 4:1-3), as was experienced by Balaam when the Moabite delegation called on him to come and curse the Israelites. When God came to Balaam and asked "who are these men with you," Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: 'A people that has come out of Egypt covers the face of the land. Now come and put a curse on them for me. Perhaps then I will be able to fight them and drive them away.'" But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed" (Num. 22: 9-12). This is a clear example of the way God attends to people's request in the form of prayers.

In a subsequent instance that Balaam asked Balak to be besides his offering while he went to meet God, he was once again expecting a favorable answer from God. This is why he said, "Perhaps the LORD will come to meet with me. Whatever he reveals to me I will tell you (Num. 23:3). Once again, the LORD came to him and answered no! In Balaam's own confession he said: "Balak brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains. 'Come,' he said, 'curse Jacob for me; come, denounce Israel.' How can I curse those whom

God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the LORD has not denounced?” (Num. 23:8)

An important lesson that the believer can learn from the story of Balaam is that God does not compromise on His position. Here is Balaam’s testimony concerning the Almighty, “...God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Num. 23:19) This is because God always does everything according to His will (1 John 5:14). No one knows the mind and will of God, except those who have His spirit, and are under His divine control. Sometimes a ‘no’ answer may be an indication that granting the request may bring problems; it may even lead to the fall of the person. There may also be an unrecognized sin which can prevent a positive answer from God (Jos. 7:1; Isa. 59:1, 2).

- **God may say, wait!** When an ordinary person says wait, it may mean so many reasons including evil. But when God says wait, He means good to the person. There are times when a believer may demonstrate a right relationship with God (Ps. 68), may make right choices (1 John 5:4), and demonstrate faith, right attitude (James 1:6), and all the appropriate spiritual ingredients. Sometimes the person’s request may be in the will of God (Matt. 12:1; 1 John 5:14). Yet God might want the

one to wait for some period of time irrespective of being in pains, experiencing difficulty, or not.

One fact that needs to be known is that God has a timetable for all matters of time as revealed by the Preacher (Eccl. 3:1ff). Thus He is not compelled by people's demand for quick answers and solutions. Prophet Habakkuk is one of many Bible characters to receive the 'wait' answer from God when he presented a long list of questions to Him in the chapter one of his book.

In a reply that is presented in chapter 2:1-3, God gave the prophet a certain revelation and added the following instructions to it: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay." This answer to the prophet's prayer shows clearly that God works out everything including answers to the believer's needs according to a specific time frame.

One reason for God's 'wait' answer might be that He is not only keeping the believer in suspense but for Him to raise his/her level of testimony and blessings as happened to the Patriarch Abraham. Another reason may be to enable the person develop more trust in Him (Heb.11:6; James 1:2-3). Believers should learn how to wait patiently on God in times of difficulties because here

are lots of blessing in waiting for God in times of need (Eccl. 3:10-11; Ps. 27:13-14; 45; Lam. 3:25-26; John 2:1-5). Prophet Habakkuk understood the importance of waiting on God for answers to prayer (Hab. 2:1), and Prophet Isaiah also prophesied: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (40:31).

Waiting on the Lord during difficult times also offers the person a period to gain experience, to become well prepared for action, to be proved worthy and equal to a deeper walk with God, and to launch out to fulfill a divine assignment at the opportune time (Lam. 3:25-26). In times of hardship, believers need to use the period to renew their strength and ask God to give them clearer visions of what to do. Because God may have something better than what we even think of, there is need to wait for it. Scripture says that "In His own time He makes all things beautiful" (Eccl. 3:10-11).

- **God may say, yes!** One striking answer is where God says 'yes' with a condition. How? His answer might be based upon our accepting His will and being prepared to acknowledge Him. Such answers affirm the nature and character of God as Supreme. Praying and waiting on God in time of hardship can bring God's will to pass in our lives (2 Chron. 7:14; 1 John 5:14; Deut. 30:1-10). The fact is that it is God's nature of love, faithfulness, mercies, and compassion that makes Him the One we

can trust. It also affirms our faith in His covenant with us to be our God, and Father.

Additionally, God's answer to the prayers of a person enables the one to ensure that any broken relationship with God is restored (Deut. 30:1-10), and helps the person to utilize the privilege that God has given him/her to fellowship with Him. It is a responsibility for believers to desire that the hidden things of God are revealed to us. Thus God's 'yes' answer may be brought about when a person seeks God in a spirit of humility, repentance, holiness, and all the good virtues. God gives unconditional answers to prayers because of His favor on the one who is asking, not because of special position that the person occupies, or any long prayer and fasting. Sometimes when we show favor, God returns it to us (1 Sam. 2:30). Blessed indeed are the merciful because they shall surely obtain mercy (Matt. 5:7).

Furthermore, the mercies of God, His compassion, faithfulness to His promises (Lam. 3:22-23), His love and favor (Exod. 33:12-19), all move Him to answer mankind's calls in times of loss, suffering, and pains. Sometimes, God answers a person's prayer as a result of some very good reasons (1 Kings 18:37). In John 11:41-42, the Lord Jesus prayed that God should answer Him so that people may know that He was His Son. In the same way God may answer our prayers because, He wants to glorify Himself in our lives (John 9:1-3). God

does answer us just to glorify His name, not because of our position, goodness, or anything. God's answer to our prayers after faithfully waiting on Him is the surest way to restoration. Believers need to wait with patience, courage and in hope.

Prayer can bring restoration in the present life

Since it is the will of God for believers to prosper in all things and be in health just as the soul does (3 John 2), we should not faint during difficult times. One great assurance that any sufferer has from God is that He will never abandon those who wait on Him for restoration. What the scripture says to the believer in such a situation is shown by Romans 8:33-39:

Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one, for God himself has given us right standing with himself...Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love?...I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from...the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord (NLT).

Proverbs 3:5-6 says: "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths." One of the important issues that bring relief during periods of loss is how the lost can be found. For most

material things, hope of restoration is embedded in the blessings of a revival.

One of the surest remedies for pains suffered in any form is to meditate on the testimony Isaiah gave of the Lord, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:4-5). It might be deduced from this revelation the kinds of blessings the suffering of the Lord brings; emotional deliverance by enjoying peace, and restoration of health through healing of wounds. The loss of human life is looked at differently. First, there is replacement in the present life through further birth(s) where possible. That is, God has a way of replacing the lost life to the parent in order to restore joy.

Job trusted God and waited patiently for the day that his change would come as he rightly confessed in chapter 14 of his book. In chapter 19:25 also, he made a very positive admission that his Redeemer lives, and that He is going to vindicate him in the end. Consequently, after many cycles of debate and rounds of speeches the climax came when God stepped into the scene. He speaks from within a whirlwind, and asks Job a number of questions for which Job could not answer thus revealing his ignorance. God was not angry with Job for daring to speak with Him for that would have defeated

His open invitation to all men to bring their case before Him for redress (Isa. 1:18-20).

Every believer should realize that the Lord is present to save. He has always shown concern about the manner in which people will appear before him during times of need. It is not as those who are righteous and stand justified by their own righteousness but as people who acknowledge their frailty and sinfulness, and thus need forgiveness and acceptance. This is exactly what God wanted Job to know; to admit that he (Job) did not know everything, including the cause of his trial and that only God knows all things.

Job also proved that in spite of his weaknesses he was not prepared to let anything separate him from the love of God. No wonder, in the epilogue of his book, Job was restored to his former estate and was commended by God. The friends, however, were rebuked for their unsatisfactory consolation of a suffering man (42:7-17). God instructed them to make some offerings to Job who would in turn pray for them to prevent God's wrath from falling on them for making unguarded utterances. Job's final years were glorious and even greater than before.

The lesson this chapter has offered is quite simple: God can restore anybody who exercises trust in His word and prays appropriately during hard times. Your challenge may be lost of a job, a need for relevant qualification or documents to enable you pursue a

venture or enjoy appropriate placement or a need for a life partner or the fruit of the womb or a repair of broken marital relationship or a recovery from a loss through accident or business relationship or a need for divine grace for effective Christian ministry or a recovery of lost honor and glory in society or whatever. The real solution is in the hands of the Almighty God, the "One who opens and no one can shut," the "One who says yes and no one says no," the only True God who works through the Lord Jesus Christ. We should continue to hold to Him because the time of restoration is just at the door.

CHAPTER 14

LESSONS FROM THE CHIEF SUFFERER

The experience of Job no doubt makes him one of the prototypes of all-time believers of God. Just as his story begins with a person whose perfect state of life came under the attack of Satan and suffered loss until God restored him, so also has the perfect state of the Believer that was lost in Adam received restoration in Christ. On top of this, how Job was completely reduced to ashes but raised again to abundance typifies the 100% restoration that God through Christ has brought to all believers.

To be blessed by the experience of Job requires an appropriation of his qualities of faith, endurance, and resilience, in the midst of pain and hardship. Clearly then, to read Job's story is 'to participate in the ethical uncertainties of the divine council...It is also to read beyond and even against the theoretical assumptions and formulations that lead to disaster...¹⁵⁵ At the same time, however, it is also to agree that evil can happen to

anybody including the righteous and that there is a way to meet such challenges of life. Therefore, there are some lessons that can be learnt from Job's experience in his book by every believer. Some of these have been mentioned below.

Job teaches that only God can vindicate a person

A righteous person must know that the purpose of human suffering is not always evident to the sufferer, or even to those who look on. It is therefore unadvisable to rush in assigning reasons for causes of misfortunes in life. Until the Lord Himself permits the enemy to attack any believer, he can do nothing for scripture assures anyone who trusts God in (Num. 23:18-24):

No misfortune is seen in the person, and no misery observed in his/her life. The LORD is with such a person; the shout of the Kings is in his/her dwellings. There is no sorcery or divination against such a person, and it will now be said of him/her, 'See what God has done!' Such a one will rise like a lioness and will not rest till he/she devours any prey, in accordance with the word of the Lord.

In some sense, suffering may benefit the sufferer since it may refine his character and learning in his personality. In enduring suffering and leaving the

complex nature of how God responds to individual suffering Job became a more humble person. He became less sure of his answers to life's difficult questions and more trusting of God even in the midst of life's horror stories that escape explanation and this is a lesson for all. Additionally, the suffering of the believers (or the righteous) proves the sustaining grace of God since "His grace is sufficient and His strength is made perfect in (the believer's) weakness" (2 Cor. 12:8-9).

Job's restoration is a proof of God's sustenance of believers in the period of suffering. That is, what God did for Job in the OT dispensation can be experienced by the believer in Christ in a better way because grace abounds much more to the believer of God, "who has come to Mount Zion where the blood of the new covenant speaks better words than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12: 18-24).

Job foreshadows the priesthood of all believers

In the New Testament, Peter described believers as a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9-10). But it is important for us to understand how believers in Christ gain the position of royal priesthood, and what role they play as priests. Christians are described as a "royal priesthood" by virtue of Christ's position as "the Priest after the order of Melchizedek." Believers are made holy priests by spiritual birth. This fact is also supported by the Lord Jesus Christ being the only mediator between God and

man in the new covenant (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). Without Christ one could not work himself into the position of holy priest if one were to live a thousand years twice over and spend all that time working. By Christ's supreme sacrifice, all material sacrifice and even the role of the ordained priest of the Law had been finally abrogated.

Christ's role as a priest comes into the picture as a complete change from that of the OT dispensation. Since the OT covenant with its regulations needed to be set aside because it was weak and useless, it needed to be replaced by a better covenant (Heb. 7:18). Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ who descended not from the priestly line of Aaron (but from the tribe of Judah) was ordained into the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek. He was thus able to serve faithfully as the High Priest of the new covenant. Since Job also performed sacrifices for his family but was not from the Aaronic line, it follows that his priestly and sacrificial functions vividly underline the position of priesthood of all believers.

Job helps believers to focus on God

Another lesson one can learn from Job is how the righteous sufferer should not direct his anguish and complaints to nature but God. It is not uneasy for any reader of the book to realize that because Job directed his course to God, in the end He praised him (Job 42:7).

In Job 2:8-10, one reads of the reaction of Job after Satan had struck, this time, against his health. Here too, Job sat in ashes to show how the attack has brought grief to his soul, but without a single utterance or rash word against God or anybody. Truly, “silence,” according to a popular saying, “is golden.”

Thus, sometimes, it is prudent for the righteous sufferer not to open his mouth at all than to utter words which he does not understand and bring trouble and rebuke upon himself (Job 42:3). Again, since humans can neither blame suffering on God nor demand action or explanation from Him, what the sufferer must do is to trust Him. Such a one should continue to demonstrate strong faith that God will act when and how best meets His eternal plan of salvation. Once a believer accepts that the one in charge of his/her life is the controller of the universe, the one can be sure that He understands whatever He does. Such a person can then trust that his/her life will be directed and led towards the expected end (Jer. 29:11).

The lesson here is for the righteous to develop an unflinching trust in God’s ability to do and undo according to his unlimited power and perfect will for every situation.

Job teaches the realities of divine encounter

Suffering is designed for the good of the righteous and for God’s glorification. Accordingly, the problem of

suffering is insoluble within the limits of this human or natural life. It must therefore be considered in the light of the rewards and adjustments from a divine source.¹⁵⁶ Thus, whether as a guardian or as a stimulus of spiritual growth all suffering in the life of the righteous must be understood in relation to the plan of God. The believer who disobeys the mandates of God flees the visitation of God to advance and bless him. This means the believer must learn because 'the one who understands and properly uses the problem-solving devices available to him in the palace of the divine sphere fulfils his destiny in the plan of God.'¹⁵⁷

Job did not know much about God's dealings with humanity and this cost him a lot of rebuke. In the end he had to admit his ignorance and "repent in ashes" (Job 42:6). This, notwithstanding, the whole process drew him closer to God as he spent most of his time looking for an opportunity to present his case before the Almighty and also hear from Him. Thus when God finally appeared to him he was sure that in spite of his frailty and words of defense spoken out of ignorance, God's mercy will prevail over His justice.

Job teaches behavior of false relations/companions

Job's experience is a proof that no person can be trusted to the fullest. When he was tempted by his wife to denounce God he stood his grounds and did not obey

such seductive words of a possible beauty queen of his life. Since Satan's utmost objective was to force Job to curse God, he (Satan) plotted to use every possible or available means thus using Job's supposedly closest comforter, his own wife. But Job's resilience shows how determined he was to maintain his integrity before God. Job's reply shows a great sense of the man's acknowledgement of Yahweh as the '*Jehovah Jireh*' indeed (Gen. 22:14).

One should also realize that not even the presence and the arguments of Job's friends could make him yield to any beliefs and surrender his focus from God to himself for them. It is good that the righteous sufferer does not focus his or her expectation on man, the creature, since those who do so will find failure at the time success is expected, rather those who make Yahweh their confidence have help in the time of need (Heb. 4:16). Matthew Henry mentions that it is good for the righteous that are passing through a period of suffering to put all their confidence in the "Rock of ages not in the broken reeds in the fountain of life," not in the broken cistern.¹⁵⁸

Job reveals the works of Satan and fallen angels

Temptations not only make a believer aware of Satan's attack (1 Pet. 5:8), or his devices because the believer is not ignorant of them (2 Cor. 2:11). Fact is the

life of a believer is of constant battle against seen and unseen enemies whose main aim is to prevent us from God's perfect plan for one's life. The battle was started by God, and we have been called into it with him (Eph. 6:10-12; Luke 10:18-20). If Satan, the enemy of the believer's soul, cannot bring the believer to doubt his or her salvation, he will often concentrate on some area of weakness in life that will serve as a burden on the person (1 Cor. 10:13).

It therefore becomes important for the believer to remember that no one can live victoriously in his/her own strength. Trusting God every moment cannot be compromised. Thus Galatians 2:20 says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me: and of life which I now live: in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who lived in me and gave himself for me." Without doubt, situations of satanic attack and hardship should drive believers of God to take refuge in Him rather than separate from Him.

One major lesson from the book of Job is that, "while God does eventually allow the Satan to attack Job's flesh and bone, Job's survival in the most important sense reflects God's steadfast refusal to allow the Satan to strike 'his bone and his flesh.'"¹⁵⁹ This irony is solved by Job's continuous submission to God. Such situations answer the important purpose of a believer's engagement in Christian warfare and the person's

continuous declaration of faith. If properly understood, life experiences such as Job had may facilitate self-evaluation for anyone to know his/her strength and weakness in the Lord. The temptations of Satan afford the occasion for grace to develop in a believer in forms which otherwise could never be assumed.

Job weans believers and develops maturity in life

Job's life presents to believers a lot of lessons of how to behave in times of trouble and hardship. Mathew Henry, a very good commentator of the Bible, believes that the book of Job, also appropriately called the book of suffering, is a testimony of scriptures to teach believers that God directs the affairs of the world. According to him, it is good for the righteous not to complain if God takes any part from him, since such discontent and complaints are likely to charge God with folly.¹⁶⁰ What this means is that whatever burden of affliction in life God is pleased to allow on the righteous, the person has to submit and behave appropriately as long as God wishes.

The temptation to respond and blurt out anything that comes to mind is usually the first spontaneous reaction to every unpleasant and unexpected attack on every person. Additionally, the 'cloud of witnesses' around the believer see faith, endurance, maturity, and all the excellent virtues at their peak during challenging times. Generally, trials and temptations may

be designed to accomplish the work of weaning the heart from the love of this present world and trust in those around us. It could even be the trust in a person's closest partner in life. Thus, as one scholar puts it:

...Those who allow their suffering to form the way they think about the world will surely become more sensitive to the truth of the human situation...our maturing does not take place apart from physical and mental pain. It is when our lives are touched by tragic suffering that we lose our childhood innocence.¹⁶¹

It is very apparent that the future glory shall be heightened by the temptations of this present time which creates awareness of the corruption of this world and the beauty of the future promises. Indeed, victory over temptations leads to the glory of divine grace. That is, in temptations, God's divine grace abounds to strengthen the believer who is prepared to endure. It also develops patience (Rom. 12:12). There is also the awareness that hardships or trials are not as a result of sin but that the glory of God will be revealed (John 9:1-3).

Whether test which brings suffering and pains, or temptation with the aim of making the believer fall from the faith in the Lord, Christians are strengthened, purified and undergo maturity in their walk with God. Thus, both issues prove our faith and commitment to

God (Gen. 22:1-12), purify or refine the believer, give him/her experience (Dan. 12:10; Job 23:10), and make the person totally determined to overcome challenges in life (Acts 20:24). Both test and temptation make us mature and complete (James 1:2-4), and make us win praise, honor and glory for God (1 Peter 1:7; 5:10). Both bring to us the final reward which is God's vindication of the righteous person and a revelation of His glory in the end. Job experienced this when God made his latter life more blessed than the former.

Job sets example for the NT Believer

The affliction of Job is not limited to only the Old Testament; it has a lot of New Testament connections. For example, the endurance that Job experienced is one of the key exhortations of scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 4:12; 2 Timothy 2:3, 10, 12; and 1 Peter 2:20. In addition, there are cases such as the following connections between Job chapter three and the NT. Examples include attacks by Satan with sickness such as blindness (John 9:1-3), leprosy (Matt. 8:2), paralyses (Matt. 9:1), etc. But there are situations where the situation of Job that compelled him to lament can be seen in the NT too. For example, Job's experience of betrayal and abandonment by his wife is reflected in the Lord's experience when his disciples deserted him (Mark 14:50); or that of Apostle Paul (2 Tim. 4:16).

At some points in a person's life, it may happen that God must teach and the one must learn lessons through suffering. Sometimes, the righteous may face very difficult times in life which may bring every progress to a complete halt, profit to loss, glory and blessing to shame, and peace of mind to anxiety and trouble. In such a situation, many options seem available to a person or a sufferer. But a major lesson in life is that divine discipline is calculated to help the person that is being punished.

It is apparent that any sufferer who can genuinely identify with Job, the 'Chief sufferer,' and not ignoring the realities of suffering by escaping into the past nor being so pre-occupied with the present grief as to forget past blessings is fortunate indeed. This is simply because many sufferers do not come to such acceptance so easily; they are rather a blend of Job the patient and Job the impatient.¹⁶² The lesson here is that the sooner a believer realizes where he/she is limited and aligns with God, the better. While there might not be a clear case of sin against Job, his claim of innocence prolonged his submission to God and also led him to utter words that he could not defend before God.

There is also a great lesson that one can receive from Job's hope of resurrection. Job 19:25-27 provides the affirmation of the faith that "the Redeemer lives," even when the sufferer is not experiencing God's deliverance. Job, who could find no help from God in

this life, looked for a personal meeting with God after he was dead, and this affirmed the hope of resurrection for anyone who suffers to the point of death. If the righteous suffers according to Yahweh's will, in the end Yahweh will glorify him.

Ultimately, remaining faithful and enduring periods of trials, as have been discussed in this chapter, will bring the victory not only for the present life, more so, a crown of life to the believer (James 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:7-8). Such is what the life of Job teaches all believers at all times. The last chapter would consider how a believer who becomes a victim of perilous times becomes a victor.

CHAPTER 15

FROM VICTIM TO VICTOR: IT WILL BE WELL WITH YOU

At this point, there is very little doubt that Job is a historical figure; and this rises from the data which are available here, in spite of the fact that the actual book of Job is not very generous with information. It should be clear now that Job's ignorance of who is controlling life's cycle of events, and the restoration power of the Divine One are enough drama to teach a lot of life-lessons to the reader. The story of Job is indeed a true testimony worth knowing. The experiences which drove Job to make his laments can be looked at and used to apply to a lot of life situations for the general behavior of believers of God in periods of trials and testing.

Did Job suffer for nothing?

The whole discussion on Job re-echoes and reaffirms one of the popular sayings in life: **"Suffer to gain."** Through suffering, this Patriarch gained many

things that no doubt transcend book description. Among these was experience and understanding of the dealings of God, and a lasting testimony before God and mankind. Even in times of trouble, the righteous sufferer knew God as the “One who could alter circumstances” in order to bring change to his life. So he never gave up but continued in his search for vindication and restoration.

Accordingly, when he testified, “I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end...after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God...” (Job 19:25-27), he was still acknowledging God as a miracle worker who could restore him. His confession compares with the Lord’s statement in John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life...” The Lord came to save humanity from the jaws of Satan, and to bring restoration to the saved. As a matter of fact all the confessions of Job were full of hope of restoration for, “he knew that his Redeemer lives...” His testimony continues to be one of the strongest confessions of faith in the whole of the OT. One scholar summarized Job’s hope by these words:

Buried deep within Job's consciousness is the hope for something more...This hope is real, and it beckons him onward. There is a redeemer, and Job can be certain that in the end the declaration about life will be more than what the present allows him to say.¹⁶³

This is in line with some of the comments of one OT scholar who has made great notes on the book of Job. His concluding remarks on Job are very appropriate. He writes:

Job understands that wisdom, and thereby remedy, is not found in discovering the 'why' of suffering, but in the possession and recovery of faith. Job realizes through his suffering that the one thing that will alleviate it is a communion with God, and it is this joy in God's presence that is not only the remedy for Job's suffering, but the true message of the book as a whole.¹⁶⁴

As a result, Job never gave up but pressed on to the end. When finally God gave him an opportunity of an encounter, Job admitted the frailty of humanity and submitted to the supremacy of the Holy One. His confession that summarizes his admission of the divine authority over his life and opened the door of his restoration is, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted...Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes (42:1-6).

With such words, all the dust in Job's life finally settled. The prose epilogue shows how the 'innocent' Patriarch experienced the expected miracle in the end. He was not only restored but his latter part of life was

greater and better than the former. God blessed him with new children and doubled his material wealth. God also made his colleagues who doubted his integrity to acknowledge his worth and even submit to his 'priestly' office as they were commanded to offer sacrifices to him so he could offer intercessory prayers for them.

There is light at the end of the tunnel

The challenge of Job and the landmark set by him are some of the greatest issues that all humanity is faced with. Believers should learn to take their eyes off their own weakness and put their trust in Jesus Christ who is able to help those who trust in Him. He writes, Job's acceptance of God's presence as the remedy for all his questions and suffering, presents the reader with the true message of the book of Job.¹⁶⁵ With the experience of Job fresh in mind, every righteous sufferer has to accept his situation, despise the dignity and pride of human glory, and rather submit to God in worship for what has happened. Trials and sufferings, according to James 1: 2-4, are meant to build the faith of the righteous and produce enduring joy to the praise of God. For, "it is only when man realizes that he is not the center of the universe, (rather God is), that his problems begin to shrink."¹⁶⁶

It must also be pointed out that "fear" as occurred in the scriptures and in the book of Job in particular,

has a long range of meaning depending upon one's application. Although the book of Job might have used fear in most cases in light of "dread" and "terror" at God, he nevertheless came to appreciate God through his suffering, and thereby applied it as a means of reverence for Yahweh. It should be in the exacting and inclusive sense of an absolute love, reverence and hatred for evil that the fear of the Lord becomes a principle of human behavior and the beginning of wisdom.

Expect your miracle

At this juncture, let me reiterate the running message that only God knows why misfortunes happen to people who, without doubt, are righteous by human standards. From my masterpiece of deductive reasoning, the conclusion to all the testimonies here is obvious. Though some of humanity's negative experiences bring nothing but pain and bitterness, yet they are part of the realities of life. We should be able to see suffering as temporary set-backs in life so they can overcome them.

In God, there is hope of restoration. Throughout the centuries of life, He has restored people through His unlimited grace. Whatever the righteous sufferer might count as lost; father, sister, fellowship, friends, privileges, material benefits, dignity, and so on, the Almighty can open not just windows but 'doors of Heaven' for people to receive in abundance. But the bigger picture must

be more inspiring and motivational: 'the product of true suffering for a godly cause is a crown of glory from God.'

In applying all the experiences discussed to personal circumstances, it might be possible that as a reader you have encountered something more grievous and painful. But the concluding message to you is simple: never allow any circumstances of life to keep you from enjoying God's blessings of peace, joy, and the hope of a coming Lord who will reward all good works. Moreover, we should not be divided by our denominations. In this life diversities might exist but the most important thing is what we do with the grace He granted us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

I wish that any person who might have had bitter experiences or presently going through such challenges will be able to accept the losses, pains, or difficulties involved as part of the issues whose answers rest only in the domain of God. In all cases therefore, His will only should prevail on earth as it is in Heaven. As a faithful believer, do your best to see life's challenges as opportunities to explore in order to reach your goal in life. Be mindful that when one door is locked in a specific direction, many might have been opened in another. Therefore, just 'keep on pressing on' and never give up. Surely, there will be light at the end of the tunnel.

While God reserves the right to allow humanity to suffer, He oftentimes intervenes and does miracles that

turn situations around for good. This is because the Sovereign God is not only the Creator but also Author and Worker of miracles. The Bible is replete with miracles that God did and continues to do presently. Miracles, which no doubt are extra-ordinary events in life, do happen in everyday situations of people.

Nevertheless, believers of God should not always see miracles in order to conclude that He is at work in their lives. Fact is, God usually works within the spiritual and physical laws He has put in place to govern the world. Occasionally, however, He unusually alters these natural laws to fulfill His mission and will. When this happens it becomes a miracle. True miracles do not happen because any person wishes and prays for it. God does miracles for the sake of His glory and to reinforce His will for mankind. The good news is He is willing to perform miracles in the life of those who trust Him in challenging periods. Therefore, your restoration will come not as a miracle from any person but as part of the overall plan of God for your life.

It will be well with you

As part of the righteous community, be rest assured because all will be well. In the day of your visitation and restoration, the Lord will send you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully, never again will He make you an object of scorn to the

nations...the threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil. He will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten...You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you, in accordance with the message of the Lord through the prophet Joel (2:19-26).

This brings to conclusion the admonishing that the believer has to study and learn a lot from the book of Job because of all the benefits it brings to his/her spiritual growth, the comfort and assurance it provides during periods of loss, pain, and difficulty, and the hope it brings for the future. The knowledge from Job's life should not only fill the mind but also fuel the heart to press on till victory is achieved completely. Every believer should be encouraged that after enduring suffering in life there will be gain; whether in the present life or the one to come or both, only God knows.

I agree with scriptures that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). No matter how long it takes, I would like you to confidently say to yourself, **"it will be well with me in the end."** You will be revisited and restored by the Lord God Almighty, and no longer be the victim but the victor. May God's name be exalted forever as you continue to swim in the ever-flowing waters of His

perfect power which is able to transform lives for the sake of His purposes and glory. Praise God!

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- **Can You Be God's Transformational Leader? Yes You Can!**
- ***Amazing Grace: A Guide To Spiritual Formation And Disciplines***
- ***Pacesetters of Divine Ministry: Let us learn from them***
- ***Always Ready: Over 150 Messages To Help You Study, Teach, Preach, & Live The Bible Systematically***
- ***A Model for Hebrew - English Translation and Application: The Biblical Hebrew Student's Companion***

All the books of James are practicable and very appropriate and will be helpful to any person that reads and applies the principles laid down in them. I pray that this book inspires you in your life's journey, Amen.

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- ¹⁵⁹ David Shepherd. "Strike his bone and his flesh: Reading Job from the Beginning." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* vol 33.1 (2008): 81-97. **David Shepherd. 81-97**.
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CHAPTER 14

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- ¹⁶⁶ Purkiser, p. 248.