

## **BIBLICAL RESPONSES TO HUMAN SUFFERING**

**Prof D. Olson**

A. There is a view that the seeds of suffering (Douglas John Hall) are built into Creation. Paradise wasn't Hawaii.

1. The instruction to work: Have dominion, name till, keep
2. Seeds of Loneliness
3. Limits of experience & freedom. They needed the tree of life. They didn't know everything and so the serpent could deceive them. Even in Gen.1 God is setting boundaries.
4. Temptation: The possibility of being tempted – Serpent simply asks the leading questions that tempt her to transcend her boundaries. Her susceptibility to temptation is the seed of suffering, disappointment and unfulfilled dreams.
5. Anxiety and Suspicion is already present in Eve which is the seed that the serpent waters.
6. John Levenson points out that Gen.1 is God pushing back chaos. This helps him understand holocaust as an example of chaos returning.

B. Gen.3 – Is the watering and growth of the seeds of suffering in Creation – The Serpent was created by God, but the seeds were not meant for our destruction.

- Work = about satisfaction
- Loneliness = joy of union
- Limits = point to God Authentic Humanity
- Temptation = freedom
- Anxiety = open new responses
- Chaos = Creativity and Push back evil

Two main categories:

- Intellectual responses: Why ?
- Practical: How do I go on – get comfort?

### **1. INTELLECTUAL**

- i) It is my own fault. Dig a pit & fall in it. This is true in the DtrH & Proverbs. eg. 1Kings:14. Why did N fall to Assyria? Idolatry. Acts.5, Deut. 28. This law of Retribution became more difficult to apply consistently. - Hence Apocalypse – this will be sorted out in the future.
- ii) Good will come out of suffering: Does not exclude Retribution view of (i) Isaiah 40 – twice for her sins means that Israel becomes a light to the nations. Joseph in Gen.49 “you meant evil, God meant it for good”.
- iii) Suffering comes from evil forces. This only becomes clear toward the end of the OT. But humans are still responsible. David census. Daniel – Michael and Angels fight.
- iv) Suffering is a mystery. There are some things we cannot know. See Job. Job's friends: How not to be a pastoral counsellor. The best thing they did was to sit with him in silence for seven days. Job is affirmed for his expression of doubt and pain.

**2. PRACTICAL** Responses that are non-intellectual that help the sufferer to endure.

- i) Pain can and should be expressed. It is reasonable to lament. Eg Ps 137. Don't repress but express and confess our doubts.
- ii) Wait in the assurance that relief is coming. God will sort things out. Lament psalms end on notes of hope. But when can we bring this hope? If we come too soon we seem insensitive.
- iii) God hears and cares: They begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel. It is possible to lose faith. Faith is an elusive thing. We feed faith, we encourage it, but they may still not take it.

All that we have is to be a community of faith that believes yet doubts, overcomes yet survives, knows and yet does not see it all.