

Journey Into God's Word



Job 1-14 Zephaniah Haggai Jude Revelation 1-3

Dear Friends,

Why do bad things happen to good people? This age-old question is addressed in the book of Job when a man tries to follow God and loses everything. It just doesn't make sense. This issue and others are addressed in the Book of Job. As we continue our journey through the scriptures this week, we also will be examining the Book of Zephaniah, which tries to shake the people out of their complacency. The Book of Haggai challenges the people to complete their job for the Lord will also be examined. Jude shows us the need to persevere and fight for God's truth while Rev.1-3 reveals the full identity of Christ to the churches and gives warning and hope to believers.

His oxen, donkeys and camels were stolen. His sheep burned up and his sons and daughters killed. "At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.' In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." (Job 1:20-22) But that is not all. "Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. His wife said to him, 'Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!' He replied, 'You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble? 'In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.'" (Job 2:7-10) When trouble strikes you how do you react? How do you think a person can sin in what they say in the midst of trouble? It is when we are stricken with trouble and pain that we like Job are driven back to the basics of faith. Will we curse God and give up or will we trust God and draw strength from Him to continue? "As an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy." (James 5:10,11) Why is it so hard believing that? Is it

because we have lost our ability to wait? I know when I'm suffering I want an instant cure. In Job's case what broke his patience was not the suffering, but not knowing why he suffered.

In Job 3:23-26 we see that Job is beginning to lose his perspective. How I can understand Job when he said, "What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."(Job 3:25,26) As I suffer I must admit it is easy to forget that life is not given for my personal happiness and fulfillment, God has given me life to serve and honor Him. Life has meaning not as a result of what I may feel at the moment but the fact that "God is love."(1John 4:16) Just because He loves me does not mean I will not suffer. I must constantly remember Romans 8:38,39 where it says nothing can separate me, "from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

As we continue to read through Job 3-14 we will see Job getting bad advice from well-meaning friends. What is some of this bad advice? Such bad advice can only add to your confusion and frustration in your time of pain. God keeps reminding me that in my pain instead of relying on the advice of other people I must stay in His Word. That does not mean I ignore what others are saying. Instead I have to evaluate their comments in the light of God's Word. Psalm 143 is a fantastic prayer for such evaluation. It is a prayer offered in the midst of hopelessness and depression. I would encourage you to join me in reading this Psalm carefully. In verse 1, I see an appeal to God's faithfulness and righteousness as I cry out for Him to hear my prayer. As "my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed," (verse 4) I am reminded in this Psalm to do the following. #1. Remember God's faithfulness in the past (verse 5). #2. When I am losing hope I must continue to fervently reach out to Him in prayer (verse 7). #3. Trust Him (verse 8). #4. Seek direction from God (verse 8). #5. Believe God for deliverance as I hide myself in Him (verse 9). #6. Ask God to show me His will and lead me on level emotional ground (verse 10). #7. Cry out to God to preserve my life and in His righteous bring me out of trouble (verse 11). #8. Trust in His unfailing love and believe the opposition will be silenced (verse 12). #9. Rededicate myself to God as His servant who is possible because of the death and resurrection of Jesus (verse 12).

Prolonged grief, overwhelming distress, and continual hurt cause me to search my heart and mind for some sign of hope. With just a glimmer of hope, that wonderful oxygen for the soul, I cry out "Oh Lord I can make it." The fact is, real hope involves knowing God and resting in His love. Zephaniah 2:3 gives direction

on experiencing that hope, when hopelessness seems so prevalent. “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what He commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord’s anger.”

Zephaniah describes this day of the Lord in Zephaniah 1:2,3 and 1:14, 15. What does he say in these verses this day will involve? As you read the rest of chapter 1,2 and chapter 3:1-7 what additional insights does it give for this day of the Lord? As we read of the destruction of the day of the Lord, hope is also given in Zephaniah 3:8-20. Please read these verses and describe this hope? This hope is grounded in the knowledge of God’s justice and in His love for His people. As I read Zephaniah, I see that God does not take sin lightly. Yes, God punishes sin but we can be encouraged that He is in control and will rescue those who sincerely turn to Him. “Therefore wait for me; declares the Lord.”(Zephaniah 3:8) “Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve Him shoulder to shoulder.”(Zep.3:12) “But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the Lord.”(Zep.3:12) “At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes.”(Zep.3:20)

Along with the message of hope comes the challenge to finish the job God has given us. In the Book of Haggai the people were to finish building the house of the Lord. “ ‘I am with you.’ declares the Lord. So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel... and the spirit of Joshua... and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God.”(Haggai 1:13,14) What promises does God give in Haggai 2?

Encouragement; that is what we need and in Jude verses 1 and 2 we get it. “To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.” But Jude does not only encourage, he also warns. “I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who charge the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”(Jude 3,4) Jude, is the brother of Jesus and James, is saying watch out. So many are using the name of Jesus to support their lives of greed, selfishness, immorality, and indifference to those in need. What they are advocating is totally different from what Jesus taught. Milking the saints they perpetuate their prosperity theologies in order to support their extravagant lifestyles. “Woe to them! They have taken the way of

Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.(Jude 11) What do verses 12-16 of Jude say further about these deceivers? "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires. These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit."(verses 18,19) What do we do in a time of deception, trials, tribulations and trouble in every area? How are we supposed to survive at time like this? In Jude verses 10, 21 we get the direction we need when Jude says, "build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." Did you see those three vital steps that are listed in these two verses? #1. Build yourself up in your faith. #2. Pray in the Spirit. #3. Keep yourself in God's love.

As the Day of the Lord approaches we must remember the promise found in Revelations 1:3. "Blessed is the one who reads the Words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." Yes we must remember that we are blessed. Jesus "loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a Kingdom of priests to serve His God and father."(Rev.1:5,6) Jesus declares, " 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come, the Almighty.'"(Rev.1:8)

The apostle John is an excellent example of one who although patiently enduring in the midst of suffering was in the Spirit. As result on the Lord's day he heard the voice of the Lord. "When I turned I saw seven golden lamp stands, and among the lamp stands was someone 'like a Son of Man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet.... In His right hand, He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."(Rev.1:12-16) What a mighty Savior we serve! We do not need to fear the circumstances of this world. In stead let us fall like John at His feet and let Him place His right hand on us and say, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I Am alive forever and ever! And I hold the Keys of death and Hades." (Rev.1:17,19)

I must remember as I suffer with patient endurance what a victorious Lord. I am serving. Satan may try to attack but I must remember that "the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."(Rev.12:10,11)

Please study what is being said to each of the seven churches described in Revelations 2 and 3. As we see the message to the Church of Ephesus we are challenged to love the Lord with the same fullness that we did when we first received Him. “You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.”(Rev. 2:4,5) The message to the Church of Smyrna reminds us that we, “are not to be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”(Rev.2:10)

The message to the Church in Perganum reminds us of our need to remain steadfast and repent of all that is not of God. (Rev.2:12-17) “I Am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.”(Rev 2:23) This message to the Church of Thyatira is one that challenges us today. Thyatira was commended for its love, faith, service and perseverance. It was also warned to reject the prophetess who was misleading the Lords’ servants into immorality. To the one who remains faithful to Jesus He promises, “To him who overcomes and does My will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.”(Rev.2:26)

The message to the Church of Sardis is a wake up call. “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.”(Rev.3:2,3) The Church of Philadelphia’s message to us is, “Since you have kept My command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I Am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God.”(Rev.3:10-12)

Perhaps the message that speaks the loudest and clearest to the Church in America today is the one spoken to the Church of Laodicea. “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I Am about to spit you out of My mouth.(Rev.3:15,16) Reflecting on those two verses and verses 17-19 what do you believe Jesus is saying to you now. Can you hear Him declaring, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock? If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me.”(Rev.3:20) We must not shut Jesus out. How do you think that this is done? How do you open the door of your life to Jesus?

This next week please join me in reading Job 15-30, Zechariah 1-9, and Revelations 4-14. Remember the promise, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcome and sat down with My Father on His throne.”(Rev.3:21) God is faithful. He will keep us even in the midst of the trials and tribulations. “To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!”

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Larry Rice