

## **The Trauma of Job**

The Bible is the last place some people would look to help them when suffering from trauma, but the Book of Job provides us with an interesting case study. The book highlights the feelings of a person suffering severe trauma and shows that it is impossible to predict the future, only God knows what that is. People presume that because they are trying to lead a good life, they won't have any problems or difficulties, but that is simply not the case. We can all suffer stressful problems and when we have health problems become depressed.

Job was a wealthy person, who was free from worry and sought to be obedient to God. Then catastrophe strikes, Job has to face up to human suffering and the severe trauma it caused. The first chapter is a prologue explaining to the readers why Job is being tested, but Job has no idea why it is happening to him. Job was a good man who suddenly lost everything, which to him seemed to be unjust and unfair. Having lost family, his possessions and suffering skin problems, his friends do not really help. His friends have ready-made answers which were incorrect assumptions.

People are different and each person needs to be treated as an individual and helped to overcome their problems on an individual basis. Often after a traumatic event the person's initial reaction can be one of shock followed by a feeling of relief, thanking God that they are alive. However as they try to get to grips with their pain and injuries they can suffer depression, and feel angry. Even if someone has not suffered any physical injury they will have suffered emotional damage. An experience such as a terrorist attack can leave the person suffering severe trauma. They can have nightmares and find it simply difficult to think of anything else. While the question why, cannot normally be answered, the Book of Job can assist our thinking on how these events affect people.

Job is at first patient in adversity, not showing his deep emotional pain, but then as time goes by he begins to question what has happened to him. Job appears to share the view of his friends that if a person leads a good life God will bless them. In the depths of suffering, people may say appalling things about God, but if there is an attempt to correct their theology it can only increase their sense of isolation, as Job's friends did. There is a need to beware that bringing biblical texts to bear on the situation, as they did, may be totally irrelevant.

Job shows us that victims of severe trauma need not only to be able to express their feelings of pain, hurt and injustice, they need help in looking at the world around them, look beyond their own self-centred feelings. God having listened to Job's expression of his feelings helps him in chapter 38 –42 to overcome his difficulties and to rebuild his life.

The example of Job's friends serves as a warning to those who offer advice without knowing all the facts. Although Job's friend's views may have been erroneous, they cared about him. They let him know that even though he was going through a traumatic experience he had caring and supportive friends.

It is easy to believe that all suffering is deserved and it only happens to wicked people or those who sin. Job's situation challenges the view that suffering only happens to sinners, it illustrates that all people can go through times of suffering. Job's cries enable us to know that we are able to let our grief, anger and impatience be directed towards God.

Job was a person who trusted God. He continued to do this even when all went wrong. When there is nothing that can be done by human effort then the only thing to do is to trust God alone, then faith really does become true faith. God's response enables Job to glimpse beyond his human plight into an immense world of power and beauty with awesome warring forces. The world God is in charge of presents the human being with an array of contradictions that cannot be fully understood.

Job went through a very traumatic experience. He did not find out why it happened, but God helped him to build his life. For the victims of trauma the Book of Job can play an important part in helping them to overcome their suffering. The author's use of poetry and Job's friends' enables people to realise that suffering can affect all. Although the Book was written in a biblical setting, the feelings expressed and the attitudes it challenges are still relevant today.

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