

Why Do Bad Things Happen To Christians?

by Staff

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Most of us who have been in God's church for any length of time have heard the oft-repeated question, "Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?" expounded on before, perhaps several times. However, have we ever examined it from the perspective of the *Christian* who has bad things happen to him or her?

We know, or we should know, that the word "good" in this context is only a relative term. The scriptures tell us that "no one is good," not even one of us (Mark 10:18; Romans 3:10). We also know that we "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Still, as God's children, regenerated by His Spirit, we expect a certain amount of protection and also certain blessings from Him. After all, do the Scriptures not say through the apostle John that He wishes above all things that we may prosper and be in health (III John 2)? Does not the hymn based on Psalm 1 say, "Blest and happy is the man who does never walk astray"?

Blameless and Upright

Many centuries ago, a godly man felt the same way we do about this subject. He expected God to bless him. Maybe he did more than expect blessing; perhaps he took it for granted that God would bless and protect him as long as he did what God required of him. That man's name, of course, was Job.

We do not need to wonder if Job was righteous. We are told so in the first few words of the book bearing his name: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1). Seven verses later, God says the same thing to Satan in their well-known conversation about Job. There is no question this man was one of God's people and a righteous man at that.

Part of the problem is that Job felt that Job was righteous too. It is all summed up in Job 32:1 during his lengthy discourse with his three friends: "So these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes." Job had been in his comfort zone—self-righteous. Something had to be done about it, and God was the one to do it.

In Job 16:12, Job himself tells us all about it: "I was at ease, but He has shattered me; He has also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces; He has set me up for His target." His complaining shows that Job badly needed an attitude adjustment; he needed to move—or be moved—out of his comfort zone. Who knows whether God had tried to get this message through to Job in other ways and at other times? We can assume that He probably had—and it had not worked.

Could many of us today also have this attitude? We are survivors. We made it through the apostasy. We are the tough ones—the ones Satan could not fool. We feel pretty good about ourselves, right?

Satan, however, never gives up. The apostle Peter warns us, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8). John

tells us that he is "the accuser of the brethren, who accuse[s] them before our God day and night" (Revelation 12:10).

One of the worst problems in members of the church today, as in Job, is the problem of complacency. Perhaps it has been born out of our troubles these last few years, in which we feel we have won. Now that the apostasy appears to be behind us, we may feel we no longer need to be as vigilant as Peter warns. We seem to be oblivious to the fact that, as the famous New York Yankee, Yogi Berra, was fond of saying, "It ain't over till it's over."

We are warned in Proverbs 6:10-11, repeated similarly in Proverbs 24:33: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep [*rest*]*—so shall your poverty come on you like a robber [proowler], and your need [want] like an armed man.*" While these verses refer primarily to economic poverty, they apply just as well to *spiritual* want. We can find ourselves in a spiritual crisis as a result of living with a self-satisfied attitude.

Comfortable Enclaves

Some in God's church have built for themselves comfortable enclaves, little fortresses, consisting of close-knit local groups and/or biological families that are defensively hunkered down, doing nothing to prepare to do a work for God. I personally had to give up my biological family some thirty years ago when it became clear that they would not coexist with my new beliefs. Many others had to do the same.

Christ tells us in Matthew 10:37: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." There is no reason to understand this as metaphor. We should consider it literally.

Upon close examination, much of so-called family closeness is an illusion. I am an attorney, and I have probated and seen probated wills in which money has been involved. It has been shocking to see what appeared to be kind, loving families almost literally devour each other when the parent or parents are gone, along with their stabilizing influence—or, more likely, iron grip. What ripped the families apart was money or other property. Family love and loyalty dissolved in an appallingly short time.

While God certainly expects us to love and provide for our biological families (I Timothy 5:8), He makes it clear that we have another Family that will be with us through eternity, one we must now love and cherish too. In Luke 8:19-21, we pick up the story:

Then His mother and brothers came to Him, and could not approach Him because of the crowd. And it was told Him by some, who said, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You." But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

These are things some people do not like to read, but our Savior Himself spoke them. Some in the church have found their comfort zones, not necessarily in Christ and the truth He brought, but in the reassuring closeness and familiarity of likeminded friends and relatives. Instead of being convicted of the doctrine, they simply follow their crowd.

God, however, is not into "group think"; He is interested in each individual's life and decisions, apart from others. He says through Ezekiel, "Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness" (Ezekiel 14:14). In the New Testament, Paul writes:

Now if anyone builds on this foundation [Jesus Christ] with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest, because it will be revealed by fire [*trials*, see I Peter 1:6-7]; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. (I Corinthians 3:12-13)

Those God has called, He does not want to lose; He is "not willing that any should perish" (II Peter 3:9). His goal of having us all in His Family is so important that He corrects and tests us individually to keep us "on track" (Hebrews 12:6; Proverbs 3:12). If we are among those who have been leaning on a group or our family, we should not be surprised when He puts us in a spot where we are forced to stand on our own and lean on Him.

Hebrews 12:11 explains that "no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous." "Grievous" does not seem to indicate God's chastening will always be a light slap on the wrist! Our trials, designed to keep us headed for the Kingdom of God, can be traumatic, depending on how far off the path we have gone.

The Product of Correction

What does such "grievous" correction produce? The rest of the verse tells us: "Nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." In other words, the benefits of this correction far outweigh the suffering we endure during them.

Lest we think we have been tested beyond what we deserve or we can handle, Peter tells us otherwise, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try [test, prove] you, as though some strange thing happened to you" (I Peter 4:12). Trials happen to us all and for good reason. He goes on to say, "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (I Peter 5:10).

Paul echoes his fellow apostle in Hebrews 12:4: "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin." If so many Christians in the past have suffered martyrdom for the truth, we have nothing to complain about regarding our trials. He also writes encouragingly in I Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

Now, here is a man who knows whereof he speaks! In II Corinthians 11:23-28, he chronicles his trials, and they should make us—with our so-called past suffering—feel quite blessed!

Are they ministers of Christ?— I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen,

in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

Sad to say, the apostle Paul did not always have the support of the churches when he needed it from them, but he survived all this to say that a crown was laid up for him (II Timothy 4:7-8). His race was run and won. As Christians, we need to look beyond our current trials and travails to the goal ahead of us, just as Paul did. By doing so, we will stop looking behind at the pain and disillusionment a previous organization may have inflicted on us.

Why do bad things happen to "good" people, specifically those in the church? We are promised that, in God's plan, *all things* work together for good for those who are the called and who love God (Romans 8:28). This "all things" includes correction, sometimes even harsh correction. God will do whatever it takes—even the lengths He took with Job—to bring His chosen people to salvation. Through it all, God promises He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). That is a promise we can depend on!