

GOD'S ACTIONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. Introduction: We must learn to respond to the hardships of life rather than react to them. When we respond to life's challenges we answer our situation by acknowledging or praising God. James 1:2,3; Ps 107:8,21
1. To respond rather than react to the trials of life you must be able to accurately answer two questions: Why is this happening? What is God doing?
 - a. When people don't have accurate answers to these two questions they tend to blame God for their troubles and react to their difficulties with complaints, anger, and bitterness against God.
 1. Why are troubles here? They are part of life in a sin cursed earth, an earth that has been adversely effected by sin, beginning with Adam's sin in the garden (Rom 5:12; Gen 3:17-19; Matt 6:19; etc.). God is never the source or cause of the hardships of life.
 2. What is God doing? Although God does not cause the challenges of life He is able to use them and cause them to serve His purposes. He can bring genuine good out of genuine evil. He will get you through until He gets you out. Rom 8:28; Gen 37-50
 - b. We aren't trying to learn the "three steps you can take" to fix all your troubles. That's not possible in a sin cursed earth. We are trying to change our picture of reality so that we can see things the way they really are and respond accordingly. Reality is everything as God sees it.
 - c. Then, when circumstances you don't understand arise, you'll be able to answer them with:
 1. Even though I don't understand what is happening or why, I know my Father doesn't do things like this. He is not behind these troubles.
 2. And, I know how my Father works. I may not have the specific details of what He is going to do, but I know He sees a way to bring good out of this awful situation and cause it to serve His purposes. So, I will praise and acknowledge Him for His plan and His help before I see it.
 2. In this lesson we want to talk about how we reconcile what we are saying about God not doing bad to people with what we see in the Old Testament where God seems to do a lot of bad to a lot of people.
- B. We must first understand how to read the Bible. The Bible is not a collection of independent verses. It is a book with a point and a purpose and every part must be understood in relation to the rest of the parts.
1. Imagine trying to understand a car -- its purpose, function, appearance -- if you had never seen a whole car, only a room that contained twenty pieces from a car. That is how many of us approach the Bible.
 - a. The Bible has a main theme and every verse in the Bible is somehow related to that theme. The theme of the Bible is God's desire for a family and the lengths to which He went to obtain that family through Jesus Christ. Eph 1:4,5; Gal 4:1-7
 - b. The Bible is progressive revelation. God has gradually revealed Himself and His plan to men through the scriptures. Any study of the Bible must begin with Jesus because He is the full revelation of God in human flesh and the One through whom God redeemed His family.
 1. Heb 1:3--Jesus is the express image or exact representation of the Father. Jesus Himself said, "If you've seen me, You've seen the Father because I speak His words and do His works by His power in me." John 14:9,10; 5:19; 8:28; 10:32; Matt 7:9-11
 2. In the Old Testament we do not have the complete picture of God and how He works that is given to us in Jesus. To know how God works and how He treats men we must look at Jesus.
 - c. Once we have a clear picture of God as He is revealed in Jesus in the New Testament, we then filter the Old testament through that picture. That means:
 1. If you have ten verses from the New Testament that clearly say one thing and one verse from the Old Testament that seems to contradict those ten, you don't throw out the ten verses.
 2. The Bible does not contradict itself. God is not "different" in the Old Testament. If we see God do something that Jesus did not, would not, do, it means we do not yet have full understanding of that Old Testament verse. Put the verse that seems to contradict "on the

shelf” until a later time when you have more understanding of it.

2. You must understand some things about the original language of the Old Testament (Hebrew).
 - a. When the Old Testament makes statements such as “God brought sickness among the people” or “the Lord killed them” it did not mean to the original readers what it means to us today.
 1. It was a common Hebrew idiom to use a causative verb when a permissive sense was intended. God was said to do (causative) what He in fact only allowed (permissive).
 2. The text literally says “God sent sickness among the people” but the original readers would have understood it to mean “God allowed sickness among the people”. (Remember what we’ve already said about the phrase “God allows”.)
 - b. How can we, who do not know the Hebrew language, tell whether an Old Testament verse means “God did” or “God allowed”? Consider these points.
 1. Sometimes it is obvious from the passage itself. I Chron 10:14 says the Lord killed Saul. But if we read the entire chapter we find that Saul asked his armor bearer to kill him. When the man refused, Saul fell on his own sword and killed himself. The Lord did not kill Saul. The Lord allowed Saul to kill himself.
 2. In Ex 15:26 God told Israel that if they obeyed Him He would not put the diseases of Egypt upon them because He is Jehovah Rapha which means “the Lord your physician”. God does not make people sick only to turn around and heal them. That’s a house divided (Matt 12:24-26). In this verse God is saying “I will not allow the diseases of Egypt to come on you”.
 3. When we can’t tell from the passage if God “did” or “allowed”, we must assess the verse in terms of what Jesus shows us about God. If what the verse says God “did” is contrary to the revelation of God given to us by Jesus then we know the verse means that God “allowed”.
3. To properly understand the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, you must learn to read in context. Everything in the Bible was written by someone to someone about something. You must determine those three things in order to accurately interpret a verse.
 - a. The Old Testament is primarily the history of Israel, the people through whom God determined to bring the Redeemer of mankind, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 1. Israel repeatedly abandoned God to worship the idols and false gods of the people who lived around them in Canaan, adopting the immoral lifestyles associated with idol worship.
 2. At various times in their history the Hebrew people committed many gross sins. They placed idols in God’s temple at Jerusalem and worshipped them (Ezek 8). They sacrificed their babies to idols by burning them alive (Ps 106:37,38). They made idols of wood and stone and worshipped them as their Creator instead of God (Jer 2:27).
 - c. When God brought Israel into the Promised Land He warned them that if they worshipped the gods of the people around them He would allow their enemies to over run them. Deut 4:25-28
 1. Over several hundred years God sent numerous prophets to warn Israel that destruction at the hands of their enemies was coming if they did not turn from their idol worship back to God.
 2. Israel rejected God’s many warnings, and, as a result, experienced the consequences of their horrific sins. They were overrun by their enemies and taken away as captives. That is the context of many of the “disturbing” verses in the Old Testament.
 - d. Because people don’t understand context they misapply verses written to Israel when they abandoned God to worship idols and try to apply them to Joe Christians who’s doing his best to serve the Lord but falls short from time to time.
4. One of God’s primary purposes in the Old Testament was to reveal Himself to Israel and the nations around Israel as God Almighty, the Only All-Powerful God.
 - a. When God set the Hebrew people apart as the ones through whom He would bring the Messiah, Jesus, into the world, the entire world was polytheistic (worshipped many gods). Only Israel worshipped one God (was monotheistic), and they struggled with it.
 1. Many of the Hebrew people went into idol worship in Egypt. Ezek 20:6-10; Ex 32:1-6

2. When Israel finally entered the land of Canaan they repeatedly fell back to worshipping idols.
- b. Old Testament writers connected many destructive events with God, not because God was the cause of them, but to help Israel and the nations see that there is no other god, no other power.
 1. God wanted men to see that calamity came, not because the fire god was angry or the harvest god needed to be appeased, but because they were out of right relationship with Him due to their idol worship.
 2. If God had clearly revealed Himself as a loving Father to a world with “many” gods, Israel and the surrounding nations may have concluded that God is the “love god”, just one more god among many gods. There is very little mention of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) or Satan in the Old Testament for the same reason.
5. Let’s look at some examples where knowing how to read in context helps us understand “scary” verses.
 - a. Isa 45:7 seems to say that God creates evil. In this passage God is speaking to Cyrus, king of Persia, an empire that ruled over Israel at one point in its history. The Persians believed in a god of good (the god of light) and a god of evil (the god of darkness).
 1. By His statement, God was making it clear to King Cyrus: “I am in complete control of everything (light, dark, good, evil, you) because I am God Almighty. There is no other god.” Continued reading of the passage makes that clear. Isa 45:21,22
 2. When the Old Testament records God saying things like, “I create evil or I make deaf ears and blind eyes”, God is not saying that He does bad to people or makes people sick. God is declaring His omnipotence. He is the only power. There is no other god.
 - b. Ex 20:5 is another verse used to prove that God does bad to people. God made this statement as part of the Ten Commandments given to Israel through Moses on their way to the Promised Land. He had just told Israel that they were not to have any other gods but Him.
 1. Israel did not obey God. Once in the land of Canaan, they repeatedly worshipped false gods. Eventually, as God had warned them through His prophets, the Israelites were overrun and scattered by their enemies -- first Assyria and then Babylon.
 2. In 586 B.C. the Babylonians took Israel into captivity where they remained for seventy years. As a result, their children were born in bondage in Babylon, down to the time of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren -- down to the third and fourth generations,
 3. In Ex 20:5 God was not declaring His plans to punish His people down to the fourth generation. He was warning Israel of the consequences if they worshipped idols in Canaan.
- C. In the past several lessons we have referred to the apostle Paul. We noted that he suffered greatly from the time he became a Christian until he was martyred for his faith in Christ. Yet, when we read his writings we do not see any hint of: Why are you doing this God? What is wrong? How could you let this happen!
 1. Paul was raised as a Pharisee (Acts 22:3; 26:5,6; Phil 3:5). That means he would have been thoroughly schooled in the Old Testament. How did he view the Old Testament; what did he get from reading it?
 - a. Paul wrote in Rom 15:4--Whatever was written in the Scriptures in days gone by was written for our instruction, so that, through patient endurance, and through the encouragement drawn from the Scriptures, we might hold fast to our hope. (20th Cent)
 - b. Hope is expectation of coming good. If that is not what we get from reading the Old Testament then we are not reading it correctly. We are not reading it as a Hebrew man would have read it.
 2. Let’s consider for a moment the picture of reality that Paul would have gotten from the Old Testament.
 - a. He would have known that, immediately following Adam’s sin in the garden, God promised the Redeemer who would undo the damage done by Adam’s sin. Gen 3:15
 1. He would have known that, although there is a curse in the earth because of Adam’s sin, the curse would be reversed by the coming of the Redeemer. Gen 3:17-19; Isa 55:13; etc.
 2. Paul would have known that the dead will be raised and that the earth will be made new and

God will establish His kingdom on this earth. Isa 26:19; 65:17-15; Dan 2:44; 7:27 etc.

3. He would have known that God would one day give men new hearts to serve Him. Ezek 11:19
 4. He would have known that one day God would remove men's sins from them as far as the east is from the west and remember them no more. Ps 103:12; Jer 31:34
 - b. Paul would have known that God chose his nation, the Israelites, to be the people through whom the Redeemer would come -- because He loved them. Deut 7:6-8
 1. He would have known that when one of God's people (like Joseph) got into difficulty at the hands of evil men, God would deliver him and bring great good out of great evil. Gen 37-50
 2. Paul would have known that when God's people were persecuted for worshipping Him only, God would be with them in the fire and deliver them. Dan 3
 3. He would have known that when Israel was in bondage in Egypt God mightily delivered them, guided them, and provided for them as He brought them back to their land (Ex 14-Num 13). God cared for them as a Father and as an eagle over her young (Deut 1:31; 32:10,11).
 4. He would have known that even when Israel rebelled, refused to enter the Promised Land, and wandered in the wilderness forty years God continued His care of them. Josh 5:12; Neh 9:9-21
 - c. Paul would have known that when Israel finally entered Canaan and settled it, they repeatedly abandoned God to worship idols. Yet God did not abandon them.
 - a. Paul would have been familiar with the prophet Hosea and his marriage to the unfaithful Gomer, a beautiful picture of God's faithfulness and love for His unfaithful people. Hosea 1-3
 - b. Paul would have known that when Israel went into captivity in Babylon God told them: If the sun, moon, and stars stop shining, you'll know I have abandoned you. Jer 31:35-37; 33:20,21
 3. No wonder Paul that knew God loved him. No wonder Paul knew his trials didn't come from God. No wonder Paul knew nothing could separate him from the love of God. No wonder Paul believed God was at work in his many trials, causing them all to serve His purposes. No wonder Paul knew that God would get him through until he got him out!
- D. Conclusion: Paul was able to respond rather than react to the hardships he faced because he had the right answers to the "Why" and "What" questions. Why is this happening? That's life in a sin cursed earth! What is God doing? He is working to bring good out of bad and He'll get me through until He gets me out!
1. Paul had these answers even before he received the full revelation given to him in and by Jesus Christ (Acts 26:16; Gal 1:11,12; II Cor 12:1-4; etc.). Why is that? Because the God of the New Testament is the God of the Old Testament.
 - a. God's goodness, mercy, and love are found throughout the Old Testament. The word "love" appears 322 times in the King James Bible, and almost half of those times are in the Old Testament. We just have to look a little closer because the Bible is progressive revelation.
 - b. If you know from the New Testament that God loves you and He is not behind your troubles, you won't be shaken when you run across a "disturbing verse". You'll realize you do not yet have full understanding of that one verse and "put it on the shelf".
 2. We can respond rather than react because God is good and good means good, Old and New Testament!