

Solution to Sorrow and Suffering

*"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" --
Psalm 147:3.*

PERSONAL or national tragedies: the incidence of famine, war, violence and evil, cause some to question the existence of God. If God is all-powerful, they reason, why does He permit these things to happen? They expect God to relieve the world of suffering, to deliver men from evil, even though mankind blasphemes and will not submit to His laws. They fail to recognize that mankind brings much of this suffering upon themselves, and in turning from God, they deny themselves the help that He can render them in times of difficulty and of tragedy. They demand the right to liberty, or license, of action, whilst expecting God to rescue them from the results of their own folly.

Above all else, they completely fail to understand the purpose of God; to realize, or recognize, that God has a purpose with this earth and that ultimately He will send His son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to establish such conditions thereon as to reflect to His glory in every way (Num. 14:21), Then, when the world has "learned righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9), the petition of the Lord's prayer will find its fulfillment: "Thy kingdom come, that Thy will may be done in earth as it is in heaven".

Faith Is Needed

Some time back, I received a letter that spelled tragedy. My correspondent wrote, claiming that she once had been an avid student of the Bible and keen worker in Church and Sunday School, but had lost faith. Suffering and death had cruelly struck at her home, so she had come to doubt the existence of God.

"If He is a God of love, why does He permit such things to happen?" she lamented.

She could find no answer to her problem, and retreated into agnosticism. She refused to concede that her understanding of God might be at fault, and sought relief by denying His existence.

Yet her pain remained.

She found no help in prevailing theology. In fact, she was discouraged thereby. She made reference to some who, claiming to be "Christian", boldly and blasphemously claimed that God is dead.

Further investigation revealed that she had not been the keen student of the Bible that she imagined herself to have been; whilst her work in Church and Sunday School had been motivated by a desire for social activity rather than that of serving God in truth.

She provided a pathetic example of a lack of that faith which comes from understanding (Rom. 10:17), and without which it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

Unfortunately, she was not unique in her attitude. Many take a similar stand. They claim that they find the incidence of evil an insurmountable barrier to their acceptance of God and the Bible. Brought face to face with the stark tragedy of some lives, the indiscriminate violence and bloodshed of war, the agony and horror of pain and suffering, and the burden of misery under which much of the world groans, they echo the complaint of my correspondent above.

But it does not alleviate the pain, nor relieve the suffering. All it does is to cut such complainers off from the Source of strength that can enable them to bear tragedy or trouble, and to rise above it.

But often, their rejection of God is made to justify a refusal to submit to the limitations of morality demanded of Him.

God is not unmindful of the problem of suffering. The Bible describes creation as "groaning and travailing in pain", but at the

same time it reminds those who so suffer, that God "has subjected the same in hope" (Romans 8:19-22). That hope is in the coming of Christ, and the alleviation of earthly evils that his presence, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, will bring.

Destroy hope in such, and you destroy all real help.

I knew a person who had been limited to a wheelchair all her life. She was completely dependent upon others to perform everything for her. One would conclude that she would have plenty to complain about; but, instead, she was always cheerful.

Why? Because she had faith. Destroy that and she had nothing. Nor was her faith mere credulity. She could point to Bible prophecy, currently being fulfilled, which makes a reality of her hope. Her's was an active faith, that enabled her to see beyond her present sufferings to a glorious future.

Another person I knew, an ardent worker for God, suffered a severe spinal injury, that not only made her bedridden, but brought periods of extreme pain, from which she could obtain no relief.

Did God live for her?

"He is all I have to live for!" was her comment. "Take Him away from my life, and all that remains is pain and sickness. But with Him there, I can bear it. Moreover, with the Bible open before me, I realize that life will not always be like this: the return of Christ, and the setting up of God's Kingdom on earth will change it!"

She refused to allow her suffering to overwhelm her in an orgy of self-pity; she did not rant against God, nor question whether He lives!

Why? Because she possessed a key that opened the meaning of the Bible to her, and this provided her with faith and hope, as she looked to the coming of Christ, and the vast changes then to be inaugurated on earth.

To her, God was very much alive!

Suffering Is Often Self-imposed

It is not God's will that men should suffer; often this is self-imposed. However, God in His wisdom knows what is best for man, and sometimes it is necessary to allow things to take their course in order to teach important lessons. We recognize this in normal relationships; why not with God?

For example, consider the child who defies its parents when warned not to place its hand on the hot stove. Pain and suffering results, and whilst the parent will do its best to alleviate this, it will also appreciate that experience is the best teacher: "That will teach you to be obedient! Next time take heed of what I say!"

But what if the child, in petulant temper, blamed the parent for the stove being hot, and stamping out of the house, refused to acknowledge the love of the one who had warned it!

The old-fashioned remedy (and more effective than modern psychology) would be to increase the pain: this time on the seat of the pants!

The attitude of the child would be quite unreasonable, yet it is the attitude adopted by many who want to avoid their responsibilities towards God.

It is true that the parent of the child might have prevented the accident! It could have tied the child up, thus restricting its activity; but then it would never learn the virtues of obedience, and would be bitterly unhappy at its lack of freedom. The parent could have kept the stove turned off; but then the pleasure of a well-cooked meal would be denied the whole family.

In other words, the exercise of freewill (the precious heritage of the human race), brings personal responsibility and the possibility of

danger; but the development of God's purpose in the earth absolutely demands it. In our illustration above, the child learned three facts:

1. There are unknown dangers to be avoided;
2. There is a wisdom greater than our own;
3. There is kindness in instruction and discipline.

Mankind is very much like the child, defying God, yet complaining when it suffers. If men persist in breaking God's laws, they are bound to reap the fruit of such actions, And because man is interdependent upon his fellowman, the effect of evil extends beyond those directly involved.

There are moral laws which man breaks at his peril. For example, if we engage in libidinous excess, we invite sorrow, perhaps disease, as a result. Others will suffer who were not directly involved in the sin.

Is God to be blamed?

Sometimes, in times of crisis, such as at the Flood, or the overthrow of Sodom, immorality reached such a point of depravity as to demand the direct intervention of God. Yet even in the outpouring of such judgment, perfect justice has been maintained (Gen. 18:25-33). Critics of the Bible have written to me, questioning the justice of the instructions given to Joshua when God commanded that he was to destroy all the Canaanites, including the children.

Was such necessary?

Well, God, Who knows best, decreed it was. He knew the character of the children, and realized that the sins of the parents had become so ingrained in the children that they would grow up to repeat what they had been taught.

And the Canaanites were evil; their civilization was corrupt and vile to the extreme. The whole land was given over to such a

degree of immorality and wickedness as has shocked those archaeologists who have unearthed the evidence. Prostitution and sodomy were with the prevailing religious worship, and infant sacrifice was common.

The whole land was a veritable Sodom and Gomorrah on a large scale, and ruthless judgment and suppression were required to replace it with decency and truth.

How much better it is that the vile and wicked be removed than that they should remain to pollute those who are as yet innocent of such crimes and perversions. As it was, the remnant of the Canaanites that were allowed to remain, ultimately polluted the Israelites. If the occupation of the land had been conducted on more peaceful lines, Israel soon would have lost its distinctive character, and the precious heritage that has come to us through them would have been lost. In his bitter war of extermination with the Canaanites, Joshua actually fought for posterity: his sword waged a work of mercy for all mankind.

The history of humanity is a record of defiance against God's law. It is summed up in the words of Paul:

"When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools . . . and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator . . . And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not fitting; but filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, etc. . ." (Romans 1:21-32).

This resulted in suffering. As restraints were thrown off, and men became more corrupt in belief and morals, they developed frightful habits of depravity, bringing shame and pain upon both themselves and others.

It is foolish to blame God for the resultant evil: it is inevitable. What does the law do when men defy it, and steal or murder? It takes punitive action against them, even though this might bring shame and suffering to their families. Is the law condemned as being unjust because of such action? Is it blamed as being the cause of suffering? By no means; it is recognized that the punishment is justified.

In like manner, much of present-day suffering is due to man's defiance of God's laws. Where chastity is not practiced, suffering results; where love does not rule, violence, bloodshed and war ultimately take over.

Who is to blame? Man or God? The answer is obvious.

Is God Omnipotent?

Some claim that God should exercise His omnipotence to prevent suffering. The Bible teaches that shortly God will do so by sending back His Son to the earth (Acts 1:11) to establish therein His righteous rule (Isaiah 2:2-4). It is the hope of this that sustains true Bible students in spite of apparent anomalies that exist, and of difficulties which in our limited knowledge, we find hard to explain.

Meanwhile, God has given man freewill in order to test his loyalty and faith. This means, however, that man can defy God. It is the misuse of freewill that is the cause of much trouble in the world. For God's laws and requirements are designed for the good of the race, both now and in the future (see 1 Timothy 4:8).

Some reason, that seeing it is God's purpose to one day intervene through the Lord Jesus Christ, why does He not do so now?

For the same reason, doubtless, as He delayed judgment in the days of Noah. The Bible teaches that in the days of the Flood "the longsuffering of God waited" (1 Pet. 3:20). The word "waited" is translated from "apekdechomai" which signifies not merely to wait,

but to eagerly wait, reaching out in readiness to receive someone or something. Rotherham translates it: "God was holding forth a welcome."

So at that epoch of great wickedness in the earth, God delayed His judgments, whilst He, in mercy, waited, as it were, with outstretched hands to receive any who might stand aside from the prevailing folly, and seek the shelter that He willingly provided.

Unfortunately, in that period of judgment, only eight sheltered in the God-given ark, though all had the opportunity to do so.

Though God is omnipotent, there are things that His wisdom will not permit Him to do; among which is that of compelling people to seek Him.

Man Turns Freewill Into Selfwill

Most suffering results from the abuse of freewill. Consider our modern environment. It is characterized by man's claim to please himself. He turns liberty into license. He is delinquent, and in his repudiation of divine authority, he is responsible for the widespread juvenile delinquency which is a feature of modern life. In the growing immorality, the morality of true home life is despised. The home is treated merely as a convenient corner in which to eat and sleep, The result is: a growing divorce rate, increasing juvenile delinquency, desperate domestic unhappiness, and widespread frustration.

Who is to blame? Certainly not God!

Consider the curse of modern city life, with its overcrowding, crime, and pollution. It was never the will of God that men should live in that way. On the contrary, God decreed that man should "eat bread by the sweat of his brow" (Gen. 3:19). That was the best thing for him in view of the state of sin and death into which he had fallen. How much more conducive to good health is the

outdoor life of the field, than the stuffy atmosphere of huge cities, with their slums, temptations, and terrible record of crime!

Who created the huge cities, and the heartbreak problems incidental to them? Man in his greed, which has completely commercialized life. We eat the wrong kind of food, live the wrong kind of lives, seek the wrong kind of recreation, and suffer from the same kind of indigestion, neurosis and boredom.

Yet I have heard men call in question the goodness of God because of conditions that man himself has created.

Instead, this should cause people to realize the fallibility of man, and seek the way of God.

Consider the stupidity of the Australian way of life! On the one hand we have vast cement jungles like Sydney scattered around the coastline with millions living in poor conditions, and on the other hand, a near-to-empty hinterland which is a constant temptation to land-hungry Asiatics with their population explosion problems.

Yet, if Australia were suddenly invaded, God would be blamed by many for the suffering that would result.

And what is to be the end of the present arms race between nations? Or the confrontation of Big Powers in the Middle East? The answer is obvious, and the results are seen in places like Vietnam. It has been the testing ground for these weapons, and with a callousness and brutality that chills the spine, they have been tried out on men, women and children.

For nearly thirty years that nation has suffered the bloodshed and violence of war, so that babes have grown to maturity seeing little else than bombing, shooting and destruction; and, in turn, have learned to bomb, shoot and destroy.

Who is responsible for all this?

And don't answer that God should intervene; for He has told us in His word that He will do so when the time is ripe. More, the fulfillment of Bible prophecy in our times indicates that He is about to do so. In fact, the Bible indicates that if He did not, mankind would destroy itself; but He will intervene to "destroy those who would destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:18).

In other words, the Bible has a hope; the materialistic human philosophy of today that explains life in terms that leave out God, has no hope to offer man.

How To Use Freewill

Why did God give man freewill, seeing he has so misused it? Because the benefits of it greatly outweigh the evils of its abuse, even though man has turned the liberty of freewill into the license of selfwill.

In the beginning (see Genesis 2), God created man and provided him with everything needful to make it pleasant and profitable. In addition to the necessary material provisions, he provided for his intellectual needs and spiritual development, setting before him the grand hope of life eternal. In order to qualify for this, He gave man a simple law to keep (Genesis 2:16-17).

Man was warned that disobedience would result in mortality ending in death. Adam and Eve, however, hearkened to the voice of temptation, and disobeyed God. Thus sin and death made their appearance, and man's history of suffering and trial commenced.

It all came about through man abusing the privilege of freewill granted unto him. Was God wrong to punish man? By no means, for otherwise sin would triumph.

Was He wrong in giving man the privilege of freewill? By no means, for otherwise man would be no more than an automata, an animated and rather clever robot!

If man were not granted freewill, how could he demonstrate his loyalty and love to God? In the absence of freewill, and of the introduction of sin, such beautiful words as grace, forgiveness, obedience, faith and so forth would lose their meaning. Man would be but a machine, obeying his Maker without individual volition.

What is best: the motions of a machine that unthinkingly obeys the dictates of its creator, or the voluntary deeds of loyalty performed in love towards One Whose actions beget that love?

Obviously the latter; but in order to provide for it, God had to make it possible for man to refuse Him.

Thus freewill confers tremendous responsibility. It means that we contribute to the success or failure of our lives; we can render loving obedience to God as our heavenly Father, or we can obstinately "fear neither God nor man."

The appeal of the Scriptures is to exercise your freewill to obey God, and ensure your personal salvation.

"Save yourselves from this untoward generation," was the appeal of Peter, as he urged the people to repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-40).

"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling," exhorted Paul (Philippians 2:12).

God is the "Giver of every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17), and the greatest gift He has ever given is Jesus Christ, whom He provided for the salvation of all who will come unto Him to be saved (John 3:16). But how have men treated this manifestation of Divine love? Listen to these two statements of Scripture:

"God will have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

"But ye will not come unto me," said Jesus, "that ye might have life" (John 5:40).

Men are wise to use their heritage of individual volition to seek God in truth that they might become acceptable worshippers in His sight (John 4:23). Generally speaking, however, "men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil" (John 3:19). They refuse to open their eyes to the Truth, and prefer to wallow in the ignorance of their mind, thus adding to their suffering. The Bible declares, and experience reveals, that increased suffering follows widespread depravity. Paul wrote:

"Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things (i.e. pornography, unclean lusts, greed, etc., as enumerated in previous verses) cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:3-6).

The evils that Paul lists in that verse are common today, and are committed in flagrant repudiation of God's way. As another Scripture expresses it:

"They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains, and their sores, but they repent not of their deeds" (Revelation 16:11; 9:20-21).

The nation of Israel provides a typical example of this attitude. It was punished by God because it rejected His way. As a result, some among the nation questioned the goodness of God, and received the following answer of the prophet:

"The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save: neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2).

That is the general state of humanity today. Man refuses to avail himself of the help that God will give, and which is adequate to meet every need. Subjected to external pressures of suffering and trial, he lacks any compensating power of resistance within, and so capitulates to the adverse circumstances in which he finds himself.

Purpose Of Suffering

Though suffering and death came upon the human race because of sin in the first instance, it does not necessarily follow that every experience of suffering is the result of some specific sin.

Jesus Christ suffered as no other man, but he never sinned. He suffered at the hands of godless men who hated him because His righteousness was a living rebuke of their wickedness. Nevertheless, his death was according to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). It provided the way whereby man could obtain forgiveness of sins, and live in anticipation of the bestowal of life eternal at the coming of Christ. Out of the sufferings of the Lord, therefore, there has come great benefits for those who would seek God in truth.

Very often the experience of suffering leads to great benefits that are not appreciated at the time. How often has suffering humbled a person, caused him to seek God's help, brought him to recognize the need of salvation, ultimately to accept Christ, and commence a walk that leads to life eternal: to greater blessings than he ever experienced previously.

Therefore, God does not exempt His servants from trials. On the contrary, they are expected to prove themselves under such. Paul taught, it is "through much tribulation" that they will "enter the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Job is an example of this. He was tested by suffering, and by faithful, patient endurance emerged the better for it. It is recorded that the Lord "blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:12), and this is what God undertakes to do for all those who put their trust in Him (cp. James 5:11).

Further, Job's sufferings equipped him to help others who had such need, so that through his experience, he was able to lead his friends to God (Job 42:7-10). That, too, can be the lot of those who put their trust in God.

Consider the example of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7). He was cruelly murdered because of his beliefs. Is that an evidence of God's neglect or indifference? Stephen did not think so, for as death was about to claim him, he committed his future destiny into the hands of the Lord (Acts 7:59). In fact, the faith and endurance of Stephen inspired others to similar acts of heroism, drawing many to embrace the truth. Among the latter was Paul, previously called Saul (Acts 7:58). He condoned, if he did not initiate, the execution of Stephen, but ultimately was converted himself. The influence of Stephen on Paul's life as a Christian was profound, and this, in turn, resulted in many thousands turning to Christ. When Stephen is raised from the dead at the coming of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:23), he doubtless will be amazed to find that his main antagonist was ultimately converted, and that thousands of people have been influenced to a better way of life leading to immortality through his sufferings.

Stephen did not suffer in vain. Instead, he will benefit because he faced his trials in faith. Paul taught: "If we suffer with him we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12). Stephen's time of glory is yet to come through a resurrection unto life eternal.

The great Apostle Paul also experienced sufferings such as he had imposed on others before his conversion. But he was able to see beyond them to that which God has reserved for those who trust Him. Paul wrote:

"Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus and shall present us with you . . . For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our fight affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory . . ." (2 Cor. 4:14-17).

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

"I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

That "crown of righteousness" constitutes the "gift of eternal life" (Rom. 6:23), at the coming of Christ (Rom. 2:7,16). With the hope of the resurrection ever before him (see Acts 23:6; 24:15; 26:6-8), Paul was able to see the purpose of trial, and beyond it to the triumph of life eternal.

Therefore, he wrote concerning the Lord Jesus, that "he learned obedience by the things that he suffered" (Heb. 5:8). The bitter hatred, fierce opposition, and cruel death that Christ endured, equipped him to act as a merciful and sympathetic High priest between God and man, on the behalf of those who suffer. Because he was subjected to temptation he can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and so can "reasonably bear with those who fall."

"Let us, therefore," exhorted the Apostle, "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16).

We can also share the experience of Christ, and "fellowship his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). For that purpose, for their ultimate good, God permits His servants to suffer, though He deeply feels for them as any father would for his children. Concerning the trials of the children of Israel, it is recorded:

"In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed

them, and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled . . ."

Even in punishing them, God recorded His feelings on their behalf:

"After seventy years be accomplished (in captivity at Babylon, I will visit you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to make your latter end an object of hope" (Jeremiah 29:10-11 - Hebrew text).

God permits His people to be tried that they may develop a sympathetic feeling for those similarly placed, and that they may be equipped for a wonderful work that He has in store for them when Christ returns to reign on the earth. Christ's followers will then be appointed as "kings and priests and to reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10; 20:4). As such, it will be required of them that they show "compassion on the ignorant and erring" (Heb. 5:4). In this Christ has shown the way. As "he learned obedience through the things that he suffered" (Heb. 5:8), so do they; and as he became equipped to aid others by this means, so will they.

In this we can obtain help from the Father and the Son. Christ issued an invitation:

"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

When we look closely into the mirror of God's Word, we see shining therefrom the glorious light of His love, and so we learn to reflect back that same love. It tells us, that in spite of all suffering and trial:

" God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Though acceptance of Christ will not exempt us from trials, it will equip us with the strength to meet them and to triumph over them. We will learn that the truth in Christ, "has promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:8). It anticipates the time when present conditions will be removed, and Christ will reign on earth to the glory of God and the wellbeing of humanity; when there will be "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill towards men." To that time, Christ's true followers are exhorted to look, and thus emulate the attitude of their Lord:

"Look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM endured the cross, and despised the shame" (Heb. 12:2).

Are Prayers Answered?

My correspondent complained that prayer is useless. She said that the things for which she asked were never granted.

But was not that an answer in itself?

Do parents fulfil every request made by a child? Do they not rather, in their superior wisdom, discriminate as to what they will grant those in their care?

Certainly we must acknowledge that God has greater wisdom than us. Paul makes the point that a true parent will discipline its child in love, and that any chastening we receive from our heavenly Father is "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness" (Heb. 12:5-11). He therefore suggests that God's servants should keep on praying (v. 12; Luke 18:1), recognizing that God in His

wisdom will grant or refuse their requests. If we respect the greater wisdom of God we will bow to His decision.

We sometimes pray for things that it is not wise for us to receive. We can pray for the life of a loved one, though God, in his omniscience knows that death is best, releasing a sufferer from further pain. Before the last war, many prayers ascended to heaven that it might be averted. But what was the alternative? At the time, millions of Jews were dying in the Concentration Camps of Germany, whilst a diabolic despotism and a pagan ideology were being imposed upon millions of people. This had been brought about by men turning from God, idolizing a man and his philosophy, and glorying in flesh. The time was not ripe for God to intervene as He will one day through His Son, and therefore, the world, in its folly, had to wade through blood and destruction to learn a lesson.

The pity of it is that it did not learn the lesson!

If God's way had been universally heeded, if His word had been applied, war would have been averted.

If God answered all prayers as they ascend from all over the earth, complete confusion would result, for the requests conflict. In time of war, prayers ascend from both nations for victory: whose will God grant?

Actually, the basis for true acceptable prayer is that it be offered through the Lord Jesus (John 14:13), which means that one must first embrace him in truth through baptism. Apart from that, prayers are lost in the surrounding void for they have no advocate in heaven to present them (cp. 1 John 2:1).

Moreover, God will never give through prayer that which we can obtain by our own efforts; though He may bless those efforts, if we approach Him in faith. We must follow Ezra's example who "prepared his heart to seek, do and teach" God's word (Ezra 7:10).

Jesus invited his followers to prayer "in his name," which limits requests he will grant to those he is prepared to endorse (see 1 John 3:22; 5:14).

God's Future Intention

The prophet Habakkuk describes the agony of humanity in its striving against God, and then concludes:

"Is it not of the Lord that the people labor in the very fire, and weary themselves for very vanity (for naught)?" (Ch. 2:13).

Earth's population groans under the burdens of modern civilization. The people labor "in the fire," and weary themselves "for naught," in that they become scorched by the fire of war, and all their labor in time of peace is of no real permanent value; for it is so temporary.

Consider all the labor of the moment, to build up the resources of mankind, and make even larger the mighty cities that he has erected to the glory of the flesh.

What is to be the end of all this? Nations are stockpiling nuclear weapons of destruction which could wipe out civilization in a moment of time. It is obviously of temporary value. War could end it all. Man's glory is very limited!

In the quotation from the Bible cited above, the prophet declares that the labor of man is largely wasted, it is for naught. Why did he so teach? Because as he continued in the next verse, it is God's purpose that will prevail:

"For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14).

This is God's ultimate purpose, and it will bring to an end the sorrow and suffering, and the limited benefits of the largely futile labor of today.

But before that, the purging fires of Armageddon will humble flesh, and force men to turn to God. It will do this because men refuse to learn the lessons of life, and turn to God whilst there is time. Refusing His mercy they will suffer His judgments. They will bring upon themselves the results of their own folly. They cry to God in time of suffering, but refuse to acknowledge His authority when the crisis is past.

"Lord," declared the prophet Isaiah (Ch. 26:16), "in trouble have they visited Thee, they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them!"

Humanity calls for days of prayer in times of crisis, and wonder why they do not produce the results for which they hope. The prophet supplied the reason:

"Let favor be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord" (Lsa. 26:10).

God could only show favor to the wicked by condoning sin. He will never do that. So man suffers, and will continue to do so, until the Lord Jesus returns to "judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31). Thus, as Isaiah declared: "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants will learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9).

Suffering To Cease

Meanwhile, God invites "whosoever will" (Rev. 22:17) to enter into covenant relationship with Him through Christ, in the hope of attaining unto life eternal at his coming. In the Lord there is found the answer to problems that may beset us as individuals, whilst providing us with hope for the future. The Bible declares:

"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds; He telleth the number of the stars" (Psa. 147:3-4).

God's ability to heal the brokenhearted is exhibited by His power in the heavens. It is impossible for man to "tell the number of the stars," but what man cannot do, God can accomplish. Man cannot "heal the brokenhearted" or solve with perfect justice, equity and satisfaction the problems that beset humanity; but this is not beyond the ability of God.

The invitation is extended to all to learn of the Gospel message, accept Christ through baptism, and build into their lives divine attributes by obedience to God's laws (Mark 16:16). In consequence unending life and glory shall be given them at Christ's coming.

For what is Christ coming? He is coming to reward his followers, and to so change the present order of things on earth, that all creation will reflect to the glory of its Creator. Consider the following references:

"Truly I live," God told Moses, "and all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Num. 14:21).

"The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (Isaiah 61:11).

"The God of heaven will set up a kingdom, that shall never be destroyed" (Dan. 2:44).

"The Lord shall be king over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:9).

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

All these references speak of vast changes in this present sorrowing, sinning world as the result of Divine intervention. The earth will reflect the glory of the Lord when men and women are moved by His teachings. The Bible speaks of a time when men will voluntarily turn to God due to His disciplinary action in the earth, and as a result of submitting to His righteous laws, universal peace and prosperity will be established (Isaiah 2:2-4). Christ's reign on

earth will cause all human "rule, authority and power" to be put down. Paul declares:

"For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:25).

Then shall the words of Revelation 21:4 be fulfilled:

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

In anticipation of this, God invites all to make their peace with Him through Jesus Christ, and discover for themselves the great strength and benefit that can be derived by taking hold of the strong, infallible hand of God, outstretched to save.

The appeal of one who experienced this is: "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed are all those who trust in Him" (Psalm 34:8). I leave this thought with my correspondent and all like her, directing all such to the Word that is adequate to help in any circumstance of life (Proverbs 6:22-23).