

Job 3:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul;

Analysis

Job asks, 'Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul?' 'Light' symbolizes life itself (Psalm 56:13); Job questions God's purpose in giving life to those whose experience is only suffering. The 'bitter in soul' (Hebrew 'mar nephesh') describes those whose inner being is filled with bitterness. This is theology's hardest question: Why does God sustain life that is only pain? Job doesn't receive a direct answer, but the book ultimately shows that God's purposes transcend our understanding.

Historical Context

Questions about divine justice and the purpose of suffering pervade ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. Job's version is notable for directly addressing God rather than merely philosophical musing.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How do you wrestle with the question of why God sustains life that seems only to bring suffering?
2. What provisional answers has God given you when you've asked Job's question?

Interlinear Text

לְפָנָי | לְפָנָי | אֵלֶיךָ | וְלֹא |
given to him that is in misery Wherefore is light and life
H4100 H5414 H6001 H216 H2416

לְמִצְרַיִם | נֶפֶשׁ | לְמִצְרַיִם |
unto the bitter in soul
H4751 H5315

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 20:18 (Parallel theme): Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?

Proverbs 31:6 (Parallel theme): Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.

1 Samuel 1:10 (Parallel theme): And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.