

FIVE MEN WHO SAW LIGHT AT THE END OF A TUNNEL... or the five J's
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(ROMANS 8:28)

It is impossible to understand the greatness of this text without an appreciation of the man who wrote it. The apostle Paul overcame tremendous problems. It would have been easy to say "all things" worked together for his personal good had he lived constantly on the mountain top of success. Paul endured more for his faith than any other person. He wrote: ". . . in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:23-28). After enduring unprecedented anguish, the indomitable missionary wrote: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." The apostle did not say some things "all things work together for good." That conclusion was almost incomprehensible. Paul never complained. He looked at the unpleasant experiences of his career and thanked God they were vehicles through which the Almighty sent His greatest benedictions. Blessed is the man who rejoices in tribulation. The Bible supplies excellent examples of men who could see in the dark!

Jacob. . . From Poverty to Peace (Gen. 28:16-17)

"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place: and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Jacob was running away from his family and God, but he could not outrun the

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Lord. Unfortunately, his sleep had been mined by a vivid dream. Maybe his stony pillow contributed to his discomfort, for he saw angels ascending and descending on a ladder which reached to Heaven. He had not enjoyed the experience; he had a very guilty conscience. He realized that God could have killed him, but the fact Jacob was still alive indicated the Lord cared for him. He took his stony pillow and set it up as if it were an altar. Perhaps even the angels listened when he exclaimed: "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God" (Gen. 28:20-21). Ultimately, Jacob became a prince with God, but the beginning of his transformation came when he knelt at his first altar. He discovered the Lord could take mistakes and weave them into a fabric which would last eternally.

Joseph. . . From the Pit to the Palace (Psalm 105:17-22)

"He sent a man before them, even Joseph who was sold for a servant: whose feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in iron; Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance."

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When Joseph was placed in the pit and later sold to strangers, he probably believed he had been forsaken by everybody; even his brethren had betrayed him. That idea was drastically changed when he, ultimately, said to his brothers: "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither for God did send me before you to preserve life. God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:5, 6-8).

It was significant that Joseph did not enumerate the times of adversity through which he had passed; he never complained about the wife of Pharaoh, nor his imprisonment on false charges. He saw that all his clouds had silver linings, and would have

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endorsed Paul's idea that all things worked together for good to those who loved God.

Job... Problems to Prosperity (Job 23:8-10)

"Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him. On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on his right hand, that I cannot see him. But he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Job was a traveler lost in the darkness; a frustrated man, apparently mystified and despondent. It mattered not what he did, or where he went, he encountered increasing problems. When he looked in all directions, poor Job saw everything was bad. Yet, when he looked up, his view was clear. He knew that when his ordeal ended, he would be wonderfully compensated. He said: "I shall come forth as gold." "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).

Even in his darkest moments Job saw a beckoning light at the end of his tunnel. Probably, his terrible sufferings exceeded anything known among men. His friends misunderstood the reasons for his plight; his wife urged him to commit suicide, and for a long time, even God appeared to be indifferent. Yet, Job's faith never wavered. When he emerged triumphantly from his ordeal, he would have agreed with Paul's statement that even unpleasant things could be the messengers of God's infinite care.

Jonah... From Pouting to Preaching (Jonah 2:7-9)

Jonah was probably the only evangelist who did not desire converts! The prospect of leading a city to repentance was unattractive, for he feared future repercussions would devastate Israel. When, in spite of everything, the people of Nineveh were forgiven, the prophet complained and said: ".... O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country. Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD,

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take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live" (see Jonah 4:2). Jonah's flight could have been disastrous for according to the laws of God, a watchman who refused to warn a city of impending danger would be held accountable for the death of the citizens (Ezek. 33:6).

The prophet's disobedience and subsequent flight to Tarsh-

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ish were overruled to supply additional evidence that the Lord
could make all things work together for good to God's children.
When Jonah eventually went to Nineveh he said: "Yet forty
days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." He never preached a
sermon; he held no organized evangelistic meetings, but the
people of "an exceeding great city proclaimed a fast, and put on
sackcloth from the greatest of them even to the least of them"
(Jonah 3:4-5). Actually this was a more astounding miracle
than was seen on the day of Pentecost. The Ninevites wor-
shipped the fish-god, and Jonah's body provided evidence of his
strange incarceration. The people believed he had come back
from the dead, and his physical appearance supported that con-
clusion. It is extremely doubtful if the prophet's limited minis-
try would have been successful had he not carried upon his
person the evidence of his being swallowed by the great fish.
(See the author's book Bible Gems, pages 75-76, published by
Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan.) It is wonderful
to know that even when our stupidity gets us into trouble, the
Lord is still able to make those misfortunes work together for
our good.

John... From Prison to Praise (Revelation 1:9)

"I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribu-
lation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in
the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the
testimony of Jesus Christ" When the apostle was banished to
the island, many of his friends concluded his ministry had ter-
minated; he would never be seen again. They could not have
known that God was opening a door to wider areas of service.
Paul, the evangelist, traveled thousands of miles, but the book
John was commissioned to write was destined to go around the
world.

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I have been inside the small cave in which, so it is claimed,
John wrote his famous book, but it seemed impossible that
from so secluded a pulpit, his message could be heard by all
nations. Confined within his prison, the apostle looked into the
heavens and saw the four and twenty elders seated around the
throne, and the glorious day when the Savior would re-enter the
world to be acclaimed King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Had
John been permitted to continue his ministry among the church-
es, he may never have found time to write anything! It was
obvious that God never closed one door without opening another.
Every cloud has a silver lining, and out of the darkest one
comes the greatest shower of blessing.

Enough, this covers all my wants;
And so I rest;
For what I cannot, He can see,
And in His care I safe shall be
For ever blest!

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