

When a Heart is in Anguish

“My heart is in anguish (“sore pained” KJV) within me. The terrors of death assail me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. I said, ‘Oh, that I had the wings of a dove. I would fly away and be at rest...I would flee far away.’” Psalms 55:4

The very word, “anguish” or “sore pained,” that David used here is from a very significant Hebrew word **chuwI** (pronounced “cool”).

A Different Kind of Waiting

It was during my examination of synonyms for the word “wait” that I remembered the Hebrew word **chuwI** (pronounced “cool”), which has, in some references, been translated “to wait patiently.” In the above passage, however, David used the same word to say that his heart was in anguish! This realization stopped me in my tracks. This relationship between “anguish” and “waiting” was further amplified in Psalms 39:2: *“But when I was silent and still, (a form of waiting) not even saying anything good, my anguish (**chuwI**) increased.”*

Let me mention now that sometimes the word **chuwI** was written **chiyl** (pronounced “kheel”); but in this study, we will refer to the word as **chuwI**. In its early form, **chuwI** meant, “to twist and twirl in a spiral motion.” A formal list of meanings would be as follows: “to twist or whirl (in a circular or spiral manner), i.e. (specifically) to dance, to writhe in pain or fear; figuratively, to wait, to bear upon, (make to) bring forth, (make to) dance, drive away, fall grievously (with pain), fear, greatly grieve, (be) grievous, be in pain, be much (sore) pained, rest, shake, be sorrowful, stay, tarry, travail (with pain), tremble, wait carefully (patiently), be wounded.” It began with a simple definition of “to twist and twirl in a spiral motion,” however, it came to mean, for many, “a dance;” simply dancing and twirling around.

In the Hebrew tradition, women would dance when the fighting men came back from battle, and it was used as an expression of joy at the victory celebrations. These movements became more sophisticated and developed a dramatic flair and eventually,

became interpretive as they “acted out” battle scenes. These battle scenes would incorporate motions and gyrations symbolizing the enemy writhing in pain as they were lunged through with a sword or a spear. This dancing or twirling came to mean “an action of pain and suffering”—a very somber, very awkward postural dance.

Over the years, the word **chuwI** expanded its meaning beyond “dancing,” to more often used as “writhing in pain, a torturous state, contorted posture, and twirling in the wind while in anguish.” It also was used for “giving birth” in some instances, because of the intense pain prior and during the birthing process. For the most part, however, we would think of it, in our vernacular, as being left “flapping in the breeze.” There are times and circumstances when we are emotionally writhing in pain, when we are free-falling, when there is absolutely nothing we can do as “we are suffering.” **ChuwI** is a grave word that applies to those periods in our lives when we are flat up against the wall and there doesn’t seem to be a quick fix. Can you visualize this?

In Psalms 37, David is writing what is referred to as “proverbial utterances.” Through out the first nine verses, he uses dissimilar words for “wait” and “trust.” Our English translations do a poor job of making these distinctions, and unfortunately most of the commentaries refer to the translated English words as well, leaving us with superlatives rather than instruction. David used succinct words to express his specific thoughts. In verse 3 it says, *“Trust in the Lord and do good.”*

The word used is **batach** that means “to have a confidence.” Verse 5 says, *“Commit your way, trust in Him,”* with “commit” from the Hebrew word **galal** meaning “to blend, roll with, and to wallow.” The word “trust” is again **batach**. In Verse 7 it says, *“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.”* The phrase, “wait patiently for Him” is the word **chuwI**. It tells of one who is in pain, in a torturous situation, who is distressed and longingly waits in pain. The remedy or antidote that David details here (that God gives through David) is this: When you are in the circumstance of **chuwI**, as you *“wait patiently,”* we are to “be still.”

This **chuwI** thing can be very confusing. How can prolonged suffering happen to us? Today we read so much about the successful or “prosperous” life God has for each of us. I personally took offense when I read one book talking about getting to heaven and

finding a room full of gifts with bows on them; gifts never opened because we didn't ask! What? That seems more like a mean spirited game! God knows our hearts, He knows our pain, and He knows our needs long before we can even speak them! Consider Romans 8:26: *"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."*

There are those who like to take a few words from James 4:2 and build an entire "cause and effect doctrine" around it. When James writes, *"You do not have, because you do not ask God (NIV), or "Yet you do not have because you do not ask (KJV),* he is not proclaiming a spiritual axiom. Those words were written because of the entire tenor of what was going on among the various Christians. They wanted things that they did not have and were trying by their own power to obtain them. They were acting brutish and getting into literal fighting. James appears to be thinking in a series of clauses, coming in pairs with contrasting positive and negative verbs. This is reflected in the KJV as a series of three such pairs:

"Ye lust, and have not."

"Ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain."

"Ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not."

In the context here, God was being left out of the equation, so James said, "You have not because you're going about things all wrong. You've have forgotten your relationship with the Father!" The words, *"You do not have, because you do not ask God"* was not submitted as a magical formula by James. If that were the case, we could all stitch them on pillows and life would be simple. But we don't call all the shots. Do I believe in prayer? Of course! Is God awesome and able to do all things? Absolutely! But if this don't-ask-don't-receive mantra is categorically true, then so is the inverse, which would say, "If you ask God, he's sure to do it!" That is a dangerous supposition. The last thing we need is the universe moving about at the very whim of every person on the planet!

I want to be very clear on this; there are those times when we suffer or have pain and there are no answers for now. It is part of the package! **ChuwI** exists because we are in

the outskirts of Eden. We lost our place in paradise until the Lord comes back and sets it up again! Let's consider some examples of **chuwI** from the New Testament.

New Testament ChuwI

The world as we know it is far from perfect, but it wasn't always that way. Man and woman were part of creation and it was good. They were placed in the Garden and everything was incomparable. We understand that God would visit and fellowship with them directly. Imagine the beauty and perfection of God's first choice! Things were balanced and perfect. Once Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command concerning the Tree of Knowledge, a whole new dynamic began. Man was now as God was, in that he had acquired the knowledge of good and evil. That established our freedom of choice! Once initiated, life became an entire realm of choices and consequences, action and reaction. Pleasing God was no longer routine; it took effort, repentance and sacrifice. Man was locked away from the garden and the Tree of Life, and "perfection" gave way to "pain, struggle and heartache."

With man's capacity and God given ingenuity, systems were developed for commerce and accumulation and that produced the "haves" and the "have-nots." It wasn't long until human emotions plagued the world with issues of jealousy, envy, hate, robbery and even murder. We see that as early as Cain and Able. God wanted to instill some assemblage of order back into the world, so He began communicating through Prophets and written words. He even developed a nation of people that could follow His ways closely; but that failed as well.

The world that I call "The Outskirts of Eden" was a far cry from God's original intent. But by His very nature, God was aware of this dilemma and had placed a redemptive plan in queue from the very foundations of the world. It was time for God to visit the planet and take us back to the Tree of Life!

Enter Jesus

Early in the study of Christian theology one encounters the "Kenosis Theory" which was introduced by a Lutheran theologian in the late 1800's. The term "kenosis" was derived

from the Greek word **keno**, which means, “to empty.” This is based on the passage in Philippians 2:5-8 in which we are told that Jesus, *“who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.”* In other words, Jesus was both God and man as spoken of in Colossians 2:9, *“for in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,”* as defined in the doctrine called Hypostatic Union.

I mention all of this not as a separate doctrinal lesson, but to prepare our hearts to consider what it meant for God to enter the scene and take in, through human eyes, what had happened. Notice that He held nothing back. He was born in obscure poverty and to a people that were under bondage, disillusioned and confused. As Jesus was about to enter his ministry, He was led by the Spirit to a remote place to have an encounter with an old acquaintance named Lucifer or Satan. After Jesus had fasted 40 days, Satan began to tempt Him.

We read of the event in Matthew 4:1-11, and notice the intensity of an onslaught so severe that angels came and ministered to Him. This whole scenario reminds me of the cosmic events in the book of Job where we see God with angels and Satan discussing man’s plight on earth. It seems that before Jesus began His ministry to us, He wanted a full dose of our weakness (hence His 40 day fast!) in dealing with temptation and the lures of man. Notice the various “hot buttons” that Satan was pushing; sustenance, fame, wealth, and power.

As we read the gospels we observe the many times that Jesus was responsive to our plight. I believe that He was very sensitive to our frustration and **chuwł**. *In Isaiah 53:3 it says, “He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...”* Ours is a God that sees us. We can gain new awareness of his empathy for us as we reflect on various encounters that our Lord experienced during His ministry and note His reaction to our sojourn.

Chuwł was used by the original authors because it does an excellent job of defining our plight as human believers traveling through this fallen world. Sometimes life presses in on us; when it does, we must press on to seek God’s strength, healing and grace.