

Different words translated “Affliction” in the Old Testament

The same Hebrew word “anah” is translated “Afflicted” in the following three verses in the 119th. Psalm:

Psalms 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.

Psalms 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

Psalms 119:75 I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

If we assume that here the word affliction means “bad, ill, accident, calamity, misery, or adversity etc.” and if we have experienced some of these adverse things, then it would appear from these scriptures that they were brought upon us by God. However according to Strong's concordance the Hebrew word “anah” which is translated “afflicted” in all three of the above scriptures means the following:

To depress, abase self, afflict, chasten self, humble. In fact the same word is translated “humble” or “humbled” eleven times in the Old Testament, for example:

Deuteronomy 8:2 And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, [and] to prove thee, to know what [was] in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

Deuteronomy 8:3 And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every [word] that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

Deuteronomy 8:16 Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end;

Clearly the meaning of the word “anah” is to afflict in the milder sense of “to humble, to bring low, to teach obedience to and dependence upon” and not to bring misery and adversity upon. But there is another Hebrew word also translated “affliction” in the Old Testament that does mean adversity, that is the word “ra” or “rah”. It is found in the following scripture:

Psalms 34:19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.

According to Strong's concordance the Hebrew word “ra or rah” means:

“Bad, evil, adversity, calamity, distress, mischief, trouble, wickedness.”
In fact the word is translated “evils” 415 times in the Old Testament as in these scriptures from Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 31:17 Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God [is] not among us?

Deuteronomy 31:18 And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.

From these scriptures the picture becomes quite clear – when we indulge in wickedness ourselves and turn from the one true God to other gods the adversity type of affliction will come upon us because our God, whom we have forsaken, is not among us to protect us. On the other hand when we walk with God our Father in His righteousness, while many adversity type afflictions may come our way, by the hand of our spiritual enemies, our God will always deliver us and keep us safe from them all.