

Job: A Peek Behind the Curtain

Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful (James 5.11).

Introduction

The book of Job is a microcosm of human history with Job as the archetypal man who believes in God. The theme of the book is how a person continues to trust God in the face of seemingly irrational suffering and evil.

Over the centuries men have labored to explain evil. The question of the "problem of evil" has arisen from pondering the questions, "how can God exist and allow evil?" and "if there is a God, how can he be good and allow his creatures to suffer?" In the book of Job, this problem is examined by Job and his friends. The problem becomes painfully real to Job through his own sufferings. Job and his friends explore numerous explanations for evil but they all prove inadequate and unsatisfying. But the book steps outside human viewpoint; we have an explanation of evil beyond human perception. God draws back the curtain to reveal a normally unperceived spiritual dimension. This revelation provides us with insight into God's dealings with evil far greater than is possible with human or naturalistic explanations. Through revelation, we began to understand the role mankind plays in God's purposes to resolve the problem of evil and the angelic conflict.

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Date

No one knows when Job lived or when the book was written. We have some indicators, however. One is that Job lived after the Flood on the basis of a speech by Eliphaz (Job 22:15-16).

A date earlier than Moses is supported by the fact that we have no references in the book to historical events such as the Exodus, the Conquest, or the Exile. No mention is made of the monarchy, the tabernacle, the temple, the priesthood, sabbaths (or anything associated with the Mosaic Law), or the prophets. The references to God and the practice of religion also indicate a pre-Law date. For example, Job offered sacrifices as the head of his family (Job 1:5; 42:8) as the patriarchs did before the Law. Another fact is that according to Mosaic Law, inheritance was passed on to daughters only in the absence of sons (Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-13), but Job gave his daughters "an inheritance among their brothers" (Job 42:15). Another factor is that Job's wealth was measured by his livestock holdings (Job 1:3; 42:12), which was characteristic of patriarchal times.

Biblical lifespans provide us with probably our best clue as to when Job lived. Antediluvian lifespans generally lasted over 900 years (Genesis 5:5-31). Noah, the last of the antediluvians, died at age 930. The case of Enoch was anomalous. He did not die. The Scripture states that God "took him" (Genesis 5:24). After the Flood, the biblical record indicates that lifespans dropped precipitously.

Shem died at age 600 (Genesis 11.10-11), Arpachshad died at 438 (Genesis 11.12), and Abraham, at least nine generations later than Shem, died at 175 (Genesis 25.7). Isaac, the son of Abraham, died at 180 (Genesis 35.28). Moses died at 120 but the Bible says he was still strong at that age (Deuteronomy 34.7). He died prior to Israel's entering the Promised Land because God had told him he could not enter because of disobedience .

That Job lived long before the time of Moses is supported by the fact that his lifespan was comparable to the lives of the patriarchs who lived around 2200 B.C. Job lived long enough to marry, become "the greatest of all the men of the east" (Job 1:3), witness his first 10 children reach at least the age of accountability (Job 1:5), and probably to much greater ages (cf. Job 1:13,18). After great physical suffering and losing his children and material wealth, God blessed him with 10 more children and doubled his wealth (Job 42:10-13). The Bible tells us that Job lived 140 years after his trial (Job. 42.16) and that God gave him a double blessing (Job. 42.10). This double blessing consisted of the following:

Job's Initial Blessing	Job's Double Blessing
Seven Sons and Three Daughters	Seven Sons and Three Daughters ¹
7,000 Sheep	14,000 Sheep
3,000 Camels	6,000 Camels
500 Yoke of Oxen	1,000 Yoke of Oxen
500 Female Donkeys	1,000 Female Donkeys



Job restored to prosperity

As we can see, each item noted above doubled. Job lived 140 years after his trial. By the logic of the double blessing, it would seem Job was 140 years old when his trial began. This would mean Job lived to be 280. Such a lifespan would be consistent with the lifespans of men who lived between Eber, who lived to be 464 and Serug, who lived to be 230 (Genesis 11:22-23). Thus, it would appear Job lived well into his 200s or beyond. The Septuagint² states Job died at the age of 240—an age comparable to the ancestors of Abraham (e.g., Serug, Abraham's great-grandfather lived to be 230, Genesis 11:22-23).

A Job is mentioned as a son of Issachar, a son of Jacob, who had four sons (Genesis 46:13). This son does not accord with the lifespans above, however. Of the three friends of Job (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar), a person by the name of Eliphaz (Genesis 36:4, 10) was a son of Esau and Adah but there is no certainty they were the same person. Again, these individuals do not seem to be contemporaneous with Job due to the lifespans. The exception to this logic would be if God did something extraordinary to extend Job's life far beyond what was normal. Such an explanation seems unlikely, however, since God did not employ extraordinary efforts with the other double blessings.

Chiastic Outline

A Introduction (Job 1.1-5)

B Satanic Assault (Job 1.6-2.10)

C Job's Friends' Arrival (Job 2.11-13)

D Job's Friends (Job 3.1-31.40)

E Elihu the Mediator (Job 32.1-37.24)

D' Job and YHVH (Job 38.1-42.6)

C' Job's Friends' Departure (Job 42.7-9)

B' Satan's Defeat (Job 42.10-13)

A' Conclusion (Job 42.14-17)

Purpose of Job

A parallelism exists in Job and the history of mankind. In many ways, the life of Job is a pattern of the story of mankind. All share characteristics with Job as sons and daughters of Adam.

Righteous

Job is introduced as "blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil" (Job 1.1). While Job was a fallen man, such a description of Job establishes him as a kind of unfallen Adam. Adam, the prototypical man, was created perfect and without sin. This is how mankind began.

Rich

Job was rich. He had "7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants" (Job 1.3). He was known as the greatest man of the east (Job. 1.3). Adam was the king of the world. The entire world belonged to him.

Satanic Attack

Like Adam, Job experienced direct Satanic attack. The book of Job begins with a brief introduction of Job. Through it, we learn he was blessed with family and material wealth. Most importantly, we learn Job was a righteous, godly man. The author then shifts focus from earth to a heaven. There, the sons of God, (אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים), i.e. angels (Genesis 6.1-4; Job 1.6, 2.1, 38.7), came to present themselves before God—and Satan came also. God questioned Satan about his activities (Job 1.7-8) and then asked him a question concerning Job:

⁷ The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." ⁸ The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."

Satan replied Job feared God only because He had protected him and made him rich. He challenged God that if he were allowed to take away his possessions, Job would curse God (Job 1.9-11). God accepted Satan's challenge. As a result, Satan destroyed all Job's possessions and killed his children. But instead of cursing God, as Satan predicted, Job remained faithful to Him (Job 1.20-22). Satan, a second time, accompanied by the sons of God, came to give an account of themselves and God repeated his question to Satan regarding Job. God declared there was no one like him in all the earth and that he remained faithful even though he had lost everything. Satan answered that if Job's body were afflicted, he would curse God (Job 2.5). God permitted Satan this power and Job was afflicted with boils over his entire body.

In the beginning chapters of Genesis, we read how God allowed Adam, the first man, to be attacked by Satan. Adam was defeated by Satan. He rejected God's word and sinned. Because

of this act, he lost his kingship of the world and all his possessions to Satan. Satan boasted to Jesus in his temptation that all the kingdoms and their glory were his. He told the Lord that he had the power to give them to whomever he wished (Luke 4.6). Jesus did not dispute his claim; it was true. So mankind, by the work of Satan, and the failure of Adam, lost his estate to Satan.

Explanations For Evil

The introduction of Job's friends begins Job's discourse on his condition and his friends' attempted explanation for it. Job bewailed his condition and lamented his birth (Job 3.11). Job's friends attempted to comfort him and to explain why evil had befallen Job. However, as the conversations continue, their initial words of comfort turned accusatory and reproachful. Their explanations for Job's condition reflect a limited perception of evil. For them, evil was a matter of reaping what was sown. Thus, God was chastening Job for his own good. But Job knew better. He knew he had done nothing to deserve his condition and defended his life. Job's friends were unsympathetic. They replied Job was a hypocrite and advised him to seek God and repent. The discourses of Job's friends are replete with the knowledge and wisdom of men in the east of that time and provide us with valuable insight into their worldview. Their words should be cautionary to us. Explanations for evil and suffering are complex, beyond what might appear.

Each of us, from Adam onward, are types of Job. Evil befalls us and we don't understand why. Many attempts have been made to explain the nature and reason for evil but none are wholly successful or satisfying.

God's Response to the Explanations For Evil

After the discourses of Job's friends, God spoke to Job. He told Job, "gird up his loins like a man and I will ask you,

and you will instruct Me!” (Job 38.3). God answered Job a series of humbling questions: “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (Job 38.4), “have you understood the expanse of the earth?” (Job 38.18), and “can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion?” (Job 38.31). These questions demonstrated God’s majesty, power, and knowledge. Compared to God, man is puny, weak, and ignorant. Job’s response to God indicated he had abandoned any conceit, indignation, or view of himself as a victim. His response was full surrender: “Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to Thee? I lay my hand on my mouth” (Job 40.4). Job went on to say,

² “I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. ³ ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”

⁴ ‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.’ ⁵ “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; ⁶ Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42.2-6)

Following Job’s acknowledgment, God vindicated Job to his friends and doubled all he had before.

Conclusion and Lessons

Job’s story is in a sense the story of everyone. The Bible says each of us is “in Adam.” All he had we had. As sons and daughters of Adam. we were righteous as long as Adam obeyed God. But Adam lost everything when he rebelled against God. He “fell.” His fall was orchestrated by Satan and he lost everything due to Satan’s attack. God accepted Satan’s challenge that Job would curse him if he took away his possessions and health. Satan also used the “comfort” of Job’s

friends against Job and against God. But Job remained faithful to God despite his terrible misery and confusion.

The suffering of the innocent cannot be explained by mere human reason or experience. In the story of Job, God revealed a supernatural explanation for suffering. God drew aside the curtain to reveal that other players are involved, spiritual beings, in a universal drama of good and evil. God showed that in ways that we do not yet fully understand, that mankind is a participant in His plan to resolve the problem of evil. It is instructive to note that as a stage drama has an audience, God's drama has an audience also. It is composed not only of the human race but of all creation. The beings above man observe and participate in the drama. In the Job account, we learn that when Satan reports to God about his activities, he is aware of Job. We also learn from Satan's answer to God that he is active in our realm (Job 1.7).

As an aside, this is probably a good place to dispel the popular notion that Satan is in hell. The Bible provides no evidence that Satan is in hell, has even been in hell, or will ever be in hell. The idea Satan is in hell or rules hell comes from poets such as Dante, Milton, and Goethe. Such an idea is not the Bible. The Bible teaches Satan is presently in heaven and has access to the throne of God in heaven when he is summoned by God (Job 1.6, 12; 2.1). He also operates in the heavens (Revelation 12.7) and on earth (Job 1.7; 2.2, 7). One day God will remove him from heaven (Revelation 12.9-10, 13 cf. Luke 10.18) to the earth (during the Tribulation). Later, God will confine him for 1,000 years in a place called the "abyss" (ἄβυσσος, Revelation 20.1-3). Finally, he will be imprisoned permanently in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20.10). Once there, he will not be a ruler but a victim who will be mocked and ridiculed (Isaiah 14.15-21). His humiliation will be complete.

In the drama of good and evil, man plays a key role. Each of us has a part in resolving the problem of evil. Each of us

stands, as Job, as soldiers who will be loyal to our Creator or rebellious.

The Bible teaches the perfect archetypal man, the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, was obedient. He defeated Satan and evil at the cross. He won the strategic victory over sin and death. But the curtain is not yet lowered, the play is not yet finished. We remain as players on the stage, acting out our given roles. Those who trust God have the privilege of being sons and heirs of Him (Romans 8.16-17). We have the encouraging words of Paul that the sufferings of this life are nothing to be compared to the glory that is our destiny (Romans 8.18-19). Paul words are not idle; he knew more of suffering than almost anyone, including Job (2 Corinthians 11 cf. Acts 9.15-16). As believers in Christ, we share Christ's victory over Satan and evil for we are "in Him" just as we were "in Adam." Just as with Job, the blessings for those who have trusted God will be far greater than those that Adam lost (1 Corinthians 2.9). All that is Christ's will be ours (Romans 8.17, 28-39). John wrote,

"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 John 3.2).

God allowed the world to fall into sin (Romans 8.20). Had He desired, He could have done otherwise. But God in his wisdom determined a fallen, redeemed world was greater and more glorious than one that never fell (Romans 8.18-21). Does this make God responsible for sin? No. Each of us has his own will and the ability to make the choice to trust and obey God or to go our own way. We also must not forget that it is God himself who is the chief victim of sin, suffering, and death. This is a high mystery but the Bible teaches that Christ died for every person (Romans 5.7-8; 1 Timothy 4.10; Hebrews 2.9; 1 Peter 3.18; 2 Peter 2.1; 1 John 2.2). He suffered the penalty

of eternal death for each person to redeem us from the penalty and power of sin and death.

Why did God allow the Fall? Here is a bit of speculation. Even of Christ, it is written, "He learned obedience by the things He suffered" (Hebrews 5.8). God knows all. But even God had to become human to understand suffering and obedience. To be human requires human experience. Through Adam's Fall, we come to understand good and evil experientially. Adam was innocent and perfect. But he could sin. The new man, the new Adam, the resurrected Adam, will be perfect, clothed with knowing innocence, innocence born from costly experience. The new Adam will be unable to sin. The new Adam will be unable to sin, not because he does not understand good and evil or sin. On the contrary. He will be unable to sin because he understands good and evil all too well. Satan's poisonous gift will have worked to man's healing. For the New Man, the very thought of sin will be so horrific and so repugnant it will be unthinkable, much less doable. Sin cost God His own life. It also cost the lives of billions of human beings who refused God's gift and suffer eternal torment. This hard lesson will be unforgettable. It will be a lesson unlearnable by any other way than the way God chose. At the end of that day, man will be exalted above the angels (1 Corinthians 6.3). God will have a creature that understands all of good and evil and yet chooses to love and obey God, not in mere "innocence" as great as that was, but through hard experience. We, like our Creator, will have learned obedience by suffering.

Job was victorious because of faith. He trusted God despite the apparent irrationality of his suffering and the limited viewpoint of his friends. In God's plan, the end will be ineffably more glorious than the beginning. We are not able to comprehend the glory God has prepared for those who love him. Satan and evil will be destroyed forever and all who have trusted Him—as Job—will be vindicated. The essential thing God seeks is for men and women to trust him—even when

circumstances might seem to militate against that trust. Hebrews reads,

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 9.6).

We can not please God without faith. The Bible says it is impossible. Job’s mind and will were revealed in his statement,

“Though He slay me I will hope in Him” (Job 15.15).

Another man, Jacob, was far from perfect. He was a chiseler and we would question doing business with him. But, Jacob knew God and trusted him. When he wrestled with God he refused to turn Him loose until he blessed him. Job was Jacob. We are to be the same.

Job declared,

²⁵ *“As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. ²⁶ “Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; (Job 19.25-26).*

Job knew God lived. He knew He would one day rule the earth and set things right. He looked past his torment, in expectation of that day. God is looking for Jobs. He is looking for men and women who will trust him in spite of circumstances that belie appearances. Job is a model and an encouragement for all to trust God.

¹ In this accounting, the sons and daughters do not double. This may be a subtle hint that Job’s children who died were believers.

² *Commentary on the Old Testament, “[Job](#)”, D. D. Whedon, editor,*

New York, 1881.

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