

A STUDY OF JOB

When Suffering Comes

Session 1

[Job] said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; GOD gave, and GOD has taken away; blessed be the name of GOD" (Job 1:21)

Job 1:1-3, 8-11, 20-21

1 There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. **2** There was born to him seven sons and three daughters. **3** He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all people of the east...

8 The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil." **9** Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? **10** Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. **11** But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."...

20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. **21** He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

Job 2: 4-6, 9-10

4 Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. **5** But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." **6** The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."...

9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." **10** But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job 1:1-3. Most of what we know about Job is what we learn of him in the book of the Bible that bears his name. Job was a man who pleased God by the way he lived his life. In Ezekiel 14:14, Job's righteousness is ranked with that of Noah and Daniel.

We cannot identify the land of Uz with certainty. Some Bible scholars have suggested that it may have been the land also known as Bashan, to the east of the Sea of Galilee, or the territory of Edom, to the southeast of Palestine. In any case, Uz was an area that was able to support the large herds Job owned; for he was a prosperous man, "the greatest of all the people in the east."¹

Verses 8-11. *Satan* was not originally a proper name but a title that meant "the adversary." The scene these verses portray, in which Satan appears before God, shows that a powerful force exists that works against humankind. This force determinedly seeks to foul up the created order that comes from God and to drag the human soul away from God. In the midst of all the beauty and potential happiness of our world, some perverse element or adversary, so to speak, seems dedicated to bringing misery into our human story."

Satan's challenge to God to allow Job to suffer affliction was based on the assumption that Job's righteousness was really self-interest. Satan argued that Job was living uprightly because doing so paid off and not because of any true desire to please God.²

Verses 20-21. Satan afflicted Job with calamity after calamity. Yet Job, despite his trials and losses, acknowledged that everything he owned and all his children were gifts from God. If God chose to take them back, that was God's right, even if Job could not understand why. These disasters that Job experienced in no way excused him from his duty to praise God.³

¹ Stanley H. Purdum, *When Suffering Comes: A Study of Job*, 13.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

Job 2:4-7. Since the loss of his children and material possessions did not destroy Job's faith, Satan sought and received permission from God to afflict Job physically. This consent that Satan obtained was quite powerful, for many people fear loss of health above all else. Satan claimed that the loss of health is a greater affliction than the loss of one's children.

The "loathsome sores" with which Job was afflicted are called "sore boils" in the King James Version of the Bible. To have been covered with these sores or boils from "the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" would have been agony beyond belief.⁴

Verses 9-10. The Bible does not identify Job's wife by name. On first reading, her remark to Job in verse 9 seems cutting and calculated only to add to his pain. Let us not forget, however, that except for the physical illness and agony, she suffered as much as her husband from the loss of possessions and children. She too was grieving.

Also, her advice to "curse God, and die" may actually have been the result of pity and love she felt for her husband. In Job's day his people believed that to utter blasphemy, to curse God, was to invite certain and swift death. Therefore, Job's wife, seeing his physical suffering, may have been telling Job to utter blasphemy so that he could die quickly and escape his suffering.

Job, however, branded her as "foolish" and refused to curse God. His integrity remained intact. He did not "sin with his lips."⁵

Questions for Discussion

1. List words that come to mind related to suffering.
2. What events in your life have caused you to ask, "Why did this happen? How could God let it happen?"
3. What answers have you heard people give to the "why" question? Are any of these answers fully satisfying?
4. What have been the thoughts and feelings you have experienced during a hardship or illness?
5. How do you feel about the idea that God would allow the Satan to cause bad things to happen to Job? How does that affect your image of God?
6. What is your opinion about Old Testament view point that all things, good and bad, come from God?
7. Can you recall any instances of people who have not only kept their faith during a time of trial but have lifted others by the beauty of their courage?
8. What do you think about Job's wife? Do you find her an appealing character? Unappealing? Are you indifferent to her? Do you sympathize with her? What are your reactions to her statement to Job?
9. What do you think of Job's response to his wife? Have you ever verbally attacked someone, as Job did his wife, when he or she criticized you? What do you think motivated your attack?
10. Some people think that the Book of Job answers the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" In truth, it does no such thing. At a certain point, any discussion of the question of evil ceases to be productive. The larger question is "What shall we do about suffering?" What can you do to reduce the power of pain and suffering in the world?

⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁵ Ibid.

A STUDY OF JOB

Helping People Who Hurt

Session 2

Those who withhold kindness from a friend forsake the fear of the Almighty. (Job 6:14)

Job 4:1, 7-8

- 1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:...
- 7 “Think now, who that was innocent ever perished?
Or where were the upright cut off?
- 8 As I have seen, those who plow iniquity
and sow trouble reap the same.”

Job 8:1, 5-7

- 1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:...
- 5 “If you will seek God
and make supplication to the Almighty,
- 6 If you are pure and upright,
surely then God will arouse for you
and restore you to your rightful place.
- 7 Though your beginning was small,
your latter days will be very great.”

Job 11:1, 4-6

- 1 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered:...
- 4 “For you say, ‘My conduct is pure,
and I am clean in God’s sight.’
- 5 But O, that God would speak,
and God’s lips be opened to you,
- 6 and that God would tell you the secrets of wisdom!
For wisdom is many-sided.
Know then that God exacts of you
less than your guilt deserves.”

Job 13:1-5

- 1 “Look, my eye has seen all this,
my ear has heard and understood it.
- 2 What you know, I also know;
I am not inferior to you.
- 3 But I would speak to the Almighty,
and I desire to argue my case with God.
- 4 As for you, you whitewash with lies;
all of you are worthless physicians.
- 5 If you would only keep silent,
that would be your wisdom!”

Job 4:1, 7-8. Eliphaz is identified as a Temanite. Teman was a territory in Edom. At one time the residents of Teman were noted for their wisdom (Jeremiah 49:7). Indeed, when Eliphaz spoke, he echoed the philosophy considered in that time to be wise. That philosophy was basically that God blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked in this life. One who is prospering must therefore be pleasing God, and one who is suffering (as was Job) must have sinned.

Eliphaz was a firm believer in the notion that “we reap what we sow.” In Eliphaz’s opinion, since Job was reaping misery, “he must have sowed bad seed.”

The name *Eliphaz* means “God crushes.” Unfortunately, that name also reflects Eliphaz’s theology. Eliphaz saw God primarily as a stern judge who crushes and punishes those who are disobedient.¹

Job 8:1, 5-7. Bildad, the second friend of Job, was a Shuhite. Shuah was the son of Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:1-2). Many scholars believe that Shuah was the ancestor of a tribe of Aramean nomads who were called Shuhites. In any case, Bildad belonged to that tribe. At least he had a better dame than Eliphaz, for *Bildad* means “Beloved of the Lord.”

Regrettably, Bildad’s words to Job evidence little consciousness of being loved by god. Like Eliphaz, Bildad viewed God more as a giver of rewards and punishments than as one who loves.

In these verse Bildad appears to be angry at Job, probably because Job refused to acknowledge any sin. Bildad specifically urges Job to repent and live an upright life again so that Job’s latter days will be great.²

¹ Stanley H. Purdum, *When Suffering Comes: A Study of Job*, 18.

² *Ibid.*, 18-19.

Job 11:1, 4-6. Zophar speaks in these verses. He was a Naamathite, which may mean that he came from a village called Naamah. Joshua 15:20, 41 mentions Naamah as a city belonging to the tribe of Judah, but we know nothing else about it.

The meaning of the name *Zophar* is unclear but seems to be “twittering bird” or “sharp nail.” Certainly Job experienced Zophar’s words as piercing like a nail, for Zophar accused Job of hypocrisy and lying. Zophar even went so far as to say that Job deserved more suffering than he was experiencing. None of Job’s friends believed his claims of innocence.³

Job 13:1-5. While Job had a great deal to say to his friends, these five verses sum up Job’s reply. He made three points:

(1) Job knew as much about God as the three friends did. Job said, “I am not inferior to you” (verse 2b). In his time of trouble the one thing Job did not need was a lecture about God.

(2) Job was not interested in arguing his case with these three people anyway. Job wanted to confront God with the injustice of all that had befallen him. Job evidently had great confidence in his own sense of innocence.

(3) Job’s friends may have intended their speeches to be helpful to him; but because they were assuming Job had sinned, the effect of their words was to “whitewash with lies” (verse 4a) Job’s situation. Intending to help, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar only added to Job’s suffering. They were “worthless physicians” (verse 4b). They urged Job, to be silent before God. If only, said Job, they were wise enough to be willing to take their own advice.⁴

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you experienced any of the following three difficulties?
 - a. We say something to a suffering person and then feel that what we said was either inadequate and trite or completely inappropriate.
 - b. We try to tell the suffering person how to solve his or her problem without really understanding it.
 - c. We know someone who is hurting; but because we cannot think of anything helpful to say or do, we avoid the person altogether.
2. What suffering or illness prompted you to feel it was a punishment for your sins?
3. Do we deserve all the problems that befall us? Do we always reap what we sow? Do we *ever* reap what we sow?
4. We may sometimes come to the end of our patience with someone we are trying to help when that person seems bent on continually reciting a “litany of pain.” Zophar appears to have been angry with Job for this very reason. How can we be helpful to a person who blocks any help by continually dwelling on the pain?
5. Have you ever heard, “I know what you’re going through”? Every person’s pain is unique. On the one hand we want to know that others have had the same sort of experience and have survived. However, suffering is personal, and we should never treat it otherwise. What other expressions have you heard that treat the sufferer impersonally?
6. People often speak of “the patience of Job”; but if we read this book carefully, we will see that he was not always a patient man. Is it acceptable for Christians to complain to God about our lot in life, or are we always to be submissive to God’s will?
7. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once said, “I will listen to anyone’s convictions, but pray keep your doubts to yourself.” What would have been an alternate response to Job besides keeping quiet or speaking negatively to him?

³ Ibid., 19.

⁴ Ibid.

A STUDY OF JOB

Asking God Why

Session 3

Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy? (Job 13:24)

Job 29:1-6

- 1 Job again took up his discourse and said:
- 2 “O that I were as in the months of old,
as in the days when God watched over me;
- 3 when God’s lamp shone over my head,
and by God’s light I walked through darkness;
- 4 when I was in my prime,
when the friendship of God was upon my tent;
- 5 when the Almighty was still with me,
when my children were around me;
- 6 when my steps were washed with milk,
and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!”

Job 30:19-26

- 19 “God has cast me into the mire,
and I have become like dust and ashes.
- 20 I cry to you and you do not answer me;
I stand, and you merely look at me.
- 21 You have turned cruel to me;
with the might of your hand you persecute me.
- 22 You lift me up on the wind, you make me ride on it,
and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.
- 23 I know that you will bring me to death,
and to the house appointed for all living.
- 24 “Surely one does not turn against the needy,
when in disaster they cry for help.
- 25 Did not I weep for those whose day was hard?
Was not my soul grieved for the poor?
- 26 But when I looked for good, evil came;
and when I waited for light, darkness came.”

Job 29:1-6. All of Chapter 29, including the six verses indicated here, are a wistful look back by Job to the days before the calamities came on him. In that happier time the presence of God was so obvious to Job that it shone on him like alight and lit his way through darkness. We do not know that what darkness Job meant. We may guess, however, that other people who were less righteous than Job had some troubles. Since back then Job did not have problems similar to those other people had, he assumed that God’s blessing was the light that enabled him to avoid such difficulties.

In verse 4, Job says, “when I was in my prime.” He was thinking of a harvest season when the earth yields abundant fruit and when, in his part of the world, the early rains come and revive the parched ground. In happier times Job experienced the joy of youthful vigor and promise.¹

Job 30:19-26. All of Chapter 30 is the other side of Chapter 29. *Then* God seemed friendly and caring. *Now* God is treating me as an enemy, says Job, and is actively hostile. The speech in Chapters 29-31 is a soliloquy. However, one departure from that form of monologue occurs. In Job 30:20-23, Job addresses God directly.

In a theater setting soliloquies serve to let the audience in on thoughts supposedly taking place in the mind of the actor who is speaking. The other characters on stage do not “hear” the soliloquy. Up to this point in Job’s speech, we as Bible readers rightly assume that we are the audience intended to overhear Job’s thoughts. Suddenly though, with verse 20, we become aware that it is God’s ear that Job really wants.

Verse 19 makes clear that even though Satan is introduced in the opening act of Job’s story, Job is either unaware of Satan’s existence or else does not consider him to be the ultimate source of his troubles. Job says, “[God] has cast me into the mire.”

Note that in verse 26, Job declares that the light that shone on him earlier (Job 29:3) is gone. The darkness that afflicted others but not him has become his companion.

The undertone of weary resignation that was apparent in Chapter 29 has given way to a fresh bout of bitterness in Chapter 30. Some of Job’s complaints seem to border on paranoia. Yet, who, when suffering like Job, does not feel that they are on some deeper level under attack?²

¹ Stanley H. Purdum, *When Suffering Comes: A Study of Job*, 23.

² *Ibid.*, 23-24.

Questions for Discussion

1. If you could confront God and be assured of an answer, what unfair circumstances in *your* life would you want God to explain?
2. Arthur John Gossip preached on the subject “But When Life Tumbles in, What Then?” In the sermon he said, “I do not understand this life of ours. But still less can I comprehend how people in trouble and loss and bereavement can fling away peevishly from the Christian faith. In God’s name, fling to what? Have we not lost enough without losing that too?” What sort of life philosophies do people “fling to” when they turn away from the Christian faith?
3. Have any of you ever gone through a period when you turned away from the Christian faith? If so, to what did you turn? What was the result?
4. What period of time do you recall as “the good old days”? What made that period seem better than today? How can you experience those qualities in your present circumstances?
5. Do you feel that you have the liberty to speak your mind to God, or are you unflinchingly polite in your spiritual conversations? Why?
6. Do you ever feel that God is either powerless or unwilling to help?
7. J. Ellsworth Kalas describes a battlefield “on which the warfare between good and evil is carried on.” Three possible positions exist regarding our relationship to this conflict. We can be a party to the pain, a participant for God’s side, or a member of a middle group of people who never commit themselves either way. List the three positions: “Actively Evil,” “On the Fence,” and “Actively Believing.” What are some behaviors that might fit into each column? Do not mention names of persons because doing so tends to set up an us-them situation that can cause us to overlook our own neutral or evil behaviors.

A STUDY OF JOB

Overcoming Through Faith

Session 4

I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. (Job 42:5)

Job 38:1-7

- 1 Then God answered Job out of the whirlwind:
- 2 “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
- 3 Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.
- 4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
- 5 Who determined its measurements – surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
- 6 On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone
- 7 when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?”

Job 40:3-5

- 3 Then Job answered GOD:
- 4 “See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
- 5 I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but will proceed no further.”

Job 42:1-6, 10

- 1 Then Job answered GOD:
- 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 uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
- 4 ‘Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you declare to me.’
- 5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
- 6 therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.”...
- 10 And GOD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and GOD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

Job 38:1-3. At last Job’s demand that God put in an appearance is met. God speaks to Job “out of the whirlwind” (verse 1). Such divine appearances are known as *theophanies*. Often in the Old Testament, theophanies are accompanied by dramatically powerful weather (Psalm 18:7-15; Nahum 1:3b; Zechariah 9:14). God accuses Job of speaking “words without knowledge” (verse 2). Job had been judging God by human standards. Job, however, was not capable of acquiring the knowledge or perspective necessary truly to understand God’s ways. In fact, no one is. As Isaiah 55:9 reports God’s words,

For as the heavens are higher than
the earth,
so are my ways higher than
your ways
and my thoughts than your
thoughts.

In any case, God reveals God’s self to Job in a way that Job has not experienced before. Never again will Job be able to accuse God of being indifferent to the problems of daily life.¹

Verse 4-7. Take time to read Job 38:4-39:30 for your own background information. This passage comprises the rest of God’s first speech to Job. Verses 4-7 in Chapter 38 are a sample section.

¹ Stanley H. Purdum, *When Suffering Comes: A Study of Job*, 28.

God's speech is in the form of a wisdom catechism, which is a series of rhetorical questions. The impact of such an approach is to overwhelm the hearer with the obvious conclusion. This conclusion is that neither Job nor any human being could do the things that God has done in creating the world. therefore, God's ways and motives are beyond human understanding. Providing Job with the explanations he wants would be like trying to explain the theory behind nuclear fission to a ground hog. The end result is that Job becomes truly aware of the gap between him as a human being and God, the Almighty Creator.²

Job 40:3-5. These verses are Job's reply to God's confronting remarks in the two preceding verses. I would paraphrase these verses to read, "I have already spoken without understanding the real issues. I feel like a fool. I could say something now, but I will not."

The mention in verse 5 of having spoken "once" and "twice" is simply a poetic device referring to Job's earlier remarks about his rough treatment from God. The important thing to notice, however, is that Job does not say that he cannot answer but that he will not answer.

Evidently, even at that point Job was having trouble being humble. His answer sounds a bit like the neighborhood bully who has at last confronted someone he knows he cannot defeat. So, he avoids a fight saying, "I could beat you up if I wanted to, but I just don't feel like it right now."

Thus God launches into a second speech, contained in Job 40:6-41:34. Again God speaks of things that no human can accomplish. This time Job is truly repentant.³

Job 42:1-6. At last God's probing questions have penetrated Job's pride. In these verses Job speaks with real humility. He says in verse 6 that he repents. This is not a statement acknowledging guilt, however; that is, Job does not say that he deserves all the bad things that have happened to him. Throughout the book Job has maintained his plea of innocence, and God has not said anything to contradict Job's plea. In these verses Job is repenting of being so presumptuous. In demanding answers from God, Job placed himself above God by implying, "You, God, are accountable to me, Job." However, at this point Job repents of his deadly pride. His new understanding of his real status before God is, in fact, deeper faith.

Verse 10. This verse introduces the "happy ending" to Job's story. His fortunes are restored double what they were prior to his trial. He has the same number of sons and daughters as before, and he lives to a ripe and wealthy old age. All that is missing is a scene in which God says to Satan, "See I told you so!"⁴

Questions for Discussion

1. In Job 38:3, do you think God was saying, "Stop you sniveling, and act like an adult!" or do you think God was paying a compliment by actually speaking to Job?
2. It seems ironic that Job had been waiting for a chance to appear before God so that he might state his case; yet when the meeting occurred, it was God who asked the questions and made the points, while Job sat in overwhelming silence. When have you found yourself overwhelmed in awe and silence?
3. Do you sometimes feel, as you read this passage, that God is bullying Job? Why or why not?
4. Do you think it's possible to come to the place of sublime faith in ways other than through great suffering? Elaborate.
5. Regardless of whether your present circumstances are pleasant or hard, are you satisfied with the direction your faith is traveling?

² Ibid., 28-29.

³ Ibid., 29.

⁴ Ibid.