



## WHEN GOOD PEOPLE SUFFER Studies in the Book of Job Lesson 1

### “THE ARROWS OF THE ALMIGHTY”

Sooner or later everyone relates to Job. Suffering is as much a part of the human experience as breathing. Touch any house and some time, someday, somehow, somewhere, it will bleed. And when that time comes, most of us will ask, “Why?” - Why me? Why now? Why this? All of us at times will raise questions, like Job, of our righteousness, God’s justice and religion’s answers.

Indeed, the book of Job does not give us definitive answers to these questions. It is not so much about why people suffer as it is a lesson in how to act when suffering.

Most Christians I know do not think too much of Job (perhaps because most do not think that much of the Old Testament in general.) Yet it has been called the greatest literary achievement in the history of man. The Book of Job has been called “...*the most profound and literary work of the entire Old Testament.*” - John L. McKenzie, Dictionary of the Bible. It has been given the highest praise:

Victor Hugo - “*Tomorrow, if all literature was to be destroyed and it was left to me to retain one work only, I should save Job.*”

Tennyson - “*...the greatest poem, whether of ancient or modern literature.*”

Daniel Webster – “*The Book of Job taken as a mere work of literary genius is one of the most wonderful productions of any age or of any language.*”

#### I. ITS PLACE IN THE BIBLE

Job is part of what is called “The Poetical Books” - Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon

Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) offered this concise summary of the five books:

- \* Job - *How to suffer*
- \* Psalms - *How to pray*
- \* Proverbs - *How to act*
- \* Ecclesiastes - *How to enjoy*
- \* Song of Solomon - *How to love*

#### II. TITLE

The book takes its name from its central character. The name is given various meanings – “*hated,*” “*persecuted,*” (*Constable*); “*to come back,*” or “*repent,*” thus describing one who “*comes back*” or “*returns to*” God. - David Malik

#### III. DATE

There are two different questions here:

When did the events occur?

Probably pre-Mosaic, even patriarchal from the second Millennium B.C.

When was the book composed?

Probably during the time of the Patriarchs (Second Millennium B.C.) though some have guessed as late as the time of Isaiah.

Job is lacking references to historical events and reflects a non-Hebraic cultural background which little is known about.

#### IV. LOCATION

**A. Uz Was Located in Northern Arabia (Though Some Have Thought It was in Edom in Southern Palestine.)**

**B. Job's Friend, Eliphaz, Came from Teman, a City in Edom.**

**C. Elihu Came from the Buzites Who Lived Next to the Chaldeans in North-east Arabia.**

#### V. SCOPE – LENGTH OF THE EVENTS

Constable writes:

*It is also difficult to determine how much time the events narrated in the book cover. The first chapter tells about Job's life before his trial, and the last chapter reveals what happened after it until Job's death. The chapters in between deal with a relatively short period in Job's long life. How long was this period? We have a few clues. Job referred to months when he spoke of his sufferings (7:3; 29:2). In view of Job's physical symptoms his ailments seem to have bothered him for several months at least. He may have suffered for years. However, Job said the same people who had respected him previously had come to reject and avoid him. He implied that his rejection was fairly recent. The main part of the book contains dialogue that took place between a few individuals. There is no indication in the text that extended periods of time interrupted Job's sojourn at the city dump where these conversations took place. It seems to have continued for a few days at the most, though the conversations may have stopped and then restarted. The writer may have telescoped the events to keep the narrative flowing smoothly. It appears that the scope of the main scene at the city dump lasted no longer than a few days or possibly weeks.*

- Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Job,  
<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

#### VI. JOB, THE MAN

##### A. Job Was Innocent

According to God, he was "*perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil*" (Job 1:1). The word "perfect," from the Hebrew word *tam*, means complete, sound or upright (always in a moral sense). It is slightly different from "perfect" used in 2 Samuel: "*As for God, His way is perfect*" (22:31).

In this passage, the word "perfect" comes from the Hebrew word *tamim*, meaning entirely and literally whole, complete and faultless. In other words, what the text is saying is that Job is a righteous man who has great integrity, but he is not sinless. If ever a man was justified in asking why he was afflicted with sorrow and suffering, Job was that man.

But bad things do happen to good people, even to the best of the good ones. Job was one of the choicest among God's people. The Lord Himself testified of Job that there was none like him in the earth, that he was a perfect and an upright

man and that he feared God and hated evil (Job 1:1, 8).

### **B. Job Was Known for Being Faithful.**

He was not sinless, as the word perfect in verses 1 and 8 might imply. A better word might be blameless, meaning that he was ethically upright, morally above reproach and religiously devoted to God. Job had a deep and devout reverence for the Lord. His consistent practice was to hold God in highest awe and respect. He was faithful.

### **C. Job Was Known for His Fortune.**

*"His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household"* (Job 1:3). He possessed vast wealth, and it was God who had caused him to prosper (Job 1:10, 21).

### **D. Job Was Known for His Family.**

*"And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters"* (Job 1:2). Job's family and his fortune were the blessings of God. The record shows that Job loved his family. His love for God was reflected in his love for his children. As the spiritual leader of his family, he carried them all in his prayers to God. The highest service a parent can render to his children is to care for their spiritual welfare. Job was a good family man.

### **E. Job Was a Man of Fame.**

The inspired record says he was "the greatest of all the men of the east" (Job 1:3). Job stood head and shoulders above the men of his day. He rated high with both man and God. God Himself affirmed that He had no reason to afflict Job (Job 2:3).

## **VII. JOB, THE SUFFERER**

### **A. Job's First Round of Suffering – What He Has**

Yet God allowed Job to go through a deep valley and subjected him to a severe trial. Most of us would have cracked under the same conditions. How are we to understand the sorrows and sufferings of Job? How can we enter into the meaning of his adversities and afflictions?

Blessed with a loving wife, seven sons and three daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and many servants, Job is the greatest man in the land at the time. Yet, he is appointed to suffer.

We are provided with a divine glimpse into Job's life as God allows Satan to afflict him in order to test his faith. One fateful day, a messenger approaches Job with a disturbing report: foreigners (The Sabeans) have invaded his land, killed his servants, and carried off his donkeys and oxen (Job 1:14-15).

While the first messenger is still speaking another enters, telling Job that his sheep and his servants tending them have been killed by fire that fell from the sky (1:16).

Still, another messenger approaches Job reporting that other foreigners (the Chaldeans) raided his land, stole all of his camels, and put to death the servants tending them (1:17).

Finally, the last messenger enters describing how a mighty wind (possibly a tornado) destroyed the home in which his sons and daughters were eating, killing

them all (1:18-19).

Job's reaction is astonishing:

*"Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped.*

*And 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."*

*In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong."*

Job 1:20–22

## **B. Job's Second Round of Suffering – Himself**

The second council meeting in heaven followed the pattern of the first (Job 2). Once more the angels appeared before God, and Satan again presented himself. The Lord once more spoke His thoughts about His servant Job (Job 2:1-3). But this time He added the words, *"And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause."* Job 2:3

God restated His faith in Job's integrity and reminded Satan that his accusation against Job was without foundation (*"without cause"*). Satan's lie about Job was disproved.

Satan accused God again of protecting Job, insisting that the restrictions God had placed upon him were a hindrance in proving his charge against Job. He could not deny that the loss of Job's family and his fortune had not lessened his loyalty to God. Even so, Satan made no mention of Job's faithfulness to God or to his own failure.

And Satan answered the Lord, and said *"Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"* (Job 2:4-5)

Satan was saying that a man is not really tested until his own flesh and bones are made to suffer. Any person will surrender his possessions as long as he himself is spared.

The word "life" in verse 4 has reference to Job's person, his body. H. H. Rowley comments, *"Job's life is not in question here, since if he were killed the motive of his piety could not thereby be determined."* Satan was asking God for permission to afflict Job's body. Death would be easier than painful, agonizing suffering; so, if Job were subjected to torture, he would renounce God. Satan's language clearly shows his low estimate of a true child of God.

*"And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in your hand; but spare his life"* (Job 2:6). God accepted Satan's challenge but gave this limitation: Satan could not kill him. The word "life" in verse 6 is rendered differently from that in verse 4.

So the devil went forth with a vicious vengeance to do his ugly work against the good man of God. Satan *"...struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown"* (Job 2:7).

Remember, the physical affliction of Job was added to the grief over the death of his children and the loss of his earthly possessions.

Has ever a man or a woman, apart from our Lord Jesus Christ, been in a valley so deep or suffered a trial so severe? I think not.

Burning ulcers like a leprosy covered Job's body, causing him great pain and agony. The symptoms mentioned in the book of Job are many: inflamed eruptions (2:7); maggots in the ulcers (7:5); terrifying dreams (7:14); running tears blinding the eyes (16:16); fetid breath (19:17); emaciated body (19:20); erosion of the

bones (30:17); blackening and peeling off of the skin (30:30). Satan went to the limit to turn Job against God.

### **C. Job's Third Round of Suffering – His Wife**

Job's wife advises him to curse God and die! *"Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!"* (Job 2:9)

We need to be compassionate in our judgment of his wife after all she suffered the same losses as Job did. She is hurting, hurting, hurting. She can only stand by and now watch her husband suffer.

There is no indication of why she responded the way she did. She may really have thought that death was preferable to what Job was suffering. She does not seem to know God with the same intimacy as her husband.

She raises the real problem in the book: is God unjust and arbitrary to allow such suffering? Those who think He is do not know Him any better than Job's wife.

Job's answer is classic:

*But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. Job 2:10*

## **VIII. JOB'S FRIENDS**

Many commentators are harsh with Job's friends, and indeed they do add to Job's anguish, though in a well meaning but misguided way. The key to understanding their "solutions" is in understanding the thinking of the time. Assuming the book is referencing a pre-mosaic time, the common understanding of any suffering was that all suffering was the result of personal sin committed by the sufferer.

In fact, this thought-pattern existed still in the time of Jesus. In John 9:2-5 His disciples came asking Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."*

They take it for granted that this extraordinary calamity was the punishment of some uncommon wickedness, and that this man was a sinner above all men that dwelt at Jerusalem, (See Luke 13:4).

Matthew Henry's comments on this passage are relevant to Job's condition:

*God has a sovereignty over all his creatures and an exclusive right in them, and may make them serviceable to his glory in such a way as he thinks fit, in doing or suffering; and if God be glorified, either by us or in us, we were not made in vain. This man was born blind, and it was worth while for him to be so, and to continue thus long dark, that the works of God might be manifest in him.*

- Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible

## **IX. PURPOSES OF THE BOOK**

### **A. The Book Attempts to Answer the Questions:**

How can a God who is described as the very essence of love and grace initiate or even allow suffering in the lives of His saints?

How can His attributes be reconciled with His actions, especially when those actions appear to run counter to all He claims to be?

- B. The Book Is Meant to Demonstrate That God Is Worthy of Love Apart from the Blessings He Provides.**
- C. The Book Is Meant to Explain That God May Allow Suffering as a Means to Purify and Strengthen a Person in Godliness.**
- D. The Book Is Meant to Emphasize That Man Is Unable to View Life from God's Vast Perspective.**
- E. The Book Is Meant to Explore the Justice of God Who Treats the Righteous With Suffering.**
- F. The Book Is Meant to Demonstrate to the Evil Angel (Satan) That God's Practice of Blessing the Righteous is Not a Hindrance to the Development of True Righteousness.**
- G. The Book Is Meant to Address Mankind's Wrestling with Affliction That Defies Human Explanation.**

## **X. OUTLINE OF THE BOOK**

*(adapted from Warren Wiersbe)*

### **I. JOB'S DISTRESS Job 1-3**

- A. His Prosperity (1:1-5)
- B. His Adversity (1:6-2:13)
- C. His Perplexity (3)

### **II. JOB'S DEFENSE Job 4-37**

- A. The First Round (4-14)
  - 1. Eliphaz (4-5) Job's reply (6-7)
  - 2. Bildad (8) Job's reply (9-10)
  - 3. Zophar (11) Job's reply (12-14)
- B. The Second Round (15-21)
  - 1. Eliphaz (15) Job's reply (16-17)
  - 2. Bildad (18) Job's reply (19)
  - 3. Zophar (20) Job's reply (21)
- C. The Third Round (22-37)
  - 1. Eliphaz (22) Job's reply (23-24)
  - 2. Bildad (25) Job's reply (26-31)
- D. Young Elihu Speaks (32-37)
  - 1. Contradicting Job's friends (32)
  - 2. Contradicting Job himself (33)
  - 3. Proclaiming God's justice, goodness, and majesty (34-37)

### **III. JOB'S DELIVERANCE Job 38-42**

#### **A. God Humbles Job (38:1-42:6)**

- 1. Through questions too great to answer (38:1-41:34)
- 2. Job acknowledges his inability to understand (42:1-6)

**B. God Honors Job Job 42:7-17**

1. God rebukes his critics (42:7-10)
2. God restores his wealth (42:11-17)

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

Read Lesson 1 and share a time when you experienced suffering.  
Read Job 1–10 and answer the following questions:

- 1. What was Satan's initial challenge to God concerning Job? (1:11)**
  
- 2. What did God allow Satan to do? (1:12)**
  
- 3. What did Job lose in one day? (1:13-19)**
  
- 4. What was Job's reaction to this great loss? (1:20-21)**
  
- 5. What three friends came to mourn with him and to comfort him? (2:11)**
  
- 6. As Job begins his soliloquy, what two things does he curse? (3:1-3)**
  
- 7. What was Eliphaz's main argument? (4:7-8)**
  
- 8. What challenge does Job give his friends? (6:24)**
  
- 9. For what does Bildad rebuke Job? (8:2)**
  
- 10. What does Job bemoan? (9:32-33)**
  
- 11. As Job continues his complaint, what does he ask of God? (10:1-2, 18, 20)**