

KNOWING GOD THROUGH JOB

Suffering is a test. It's a test of our faith, our character, our values, and our love for God. It's a test that can make us bitter or better. It can make us bitter if we jump to the wrong conclusions about why God has allowed our pain. It can make us better if our eyes are opened to the wonder, power, wisdom, goodness, and love of God.

Job went into the fire a good and godly man. He came out better for his trouble. In this booklet, David Egnor gives us a summary of Job's experience. We pray that through it you will come to a deeper appreciation not only of Job but of the God he learned to trust as never before.

Martin R. De Haan II

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Managing Editor: David Sper

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HOW COULD GOD DO THIS TO ME?

When the telephone brings us bad news, or when the doctor's quiet voice says the words we dreaded to hear, how do we respond? Emotionally, do we become saddened, or angry? Mentally, do we become detached, or philosophical? Spiritually, are we hurt, or puzzled? Do we ponder our situation in the light of what we have been taught about the goodness and fairness of God?

In all probability, we will question why this is happening to us. After all, we've been led to believe that God is a God of love. We've been told over and over again that He treats His people right. We have heard that God wants us healthy and prosperous. So why are we getting all this bad news now? Why is He hammering us with blow after blow? We may begin to ask:

- How could God do this to me?
- Why couldn't He have waited a few more years?
- The world is full of people worse than I. Why couldn't He have hit one of them?
- I've been faithful to God. Why is He treating me like this?

These are not unusual responses. In fact, a man in the Old Testament named Job asked similar questions. Before we look into his book to see the conclusions he came to, let's look at some of the wrong answers people give for suffering.

WHAT DO PEOPLE SAY?

Why does God allow suffering? What kind of God lets terrible affliction strike good people while He lets bad people off the hook? Here are some popular explanations that express various points of view.

God Must Be Down On Me. When suffering and trouble come, some people feel that they must have done something to make God mad at them. A woman who gets bad news about cancer, for example, may say to herself, “My failures as a mother are finally catching up with me.” Others may feel that they are “taking it on the chin” because God is angry at someone close to them. Or a teenage boy may say, “God gave my dad a heart attack because of something I did.”

“Why me?” they ask. “Why do I have to get the short end of the stick?”

God Doesn't Care. These people react to suffering by thinking that God just doesn't care about them. They transfer their low view of themselves to God, feeling that they are not worthy of His attention. They believe that if He really is concerned about mankind, He is giving His attention to more important people. If He cared, He would answer their pleas and heal them of their disease or take away their sorrow.

God Isn't In Control. Other people believe that the circumstances of life are out of God's reach. They are convinced that even though He can control many things, God cannot keep the harmful effects of our world from reaching us. He may rule heaven, but He

cannot rule earth. Their view of God's power is limited. They conclude that there are some things He just cannot keep from happening.

God Doesn't Stop Satan. People who hold this view conclude that since Satan is the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2) and "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4), God is only in control of heaven. Because of that, Satan can do whatever he wants with us. And because we are God's children, Satan focuses his attention on us. These people sometimes say that Satan doesn't pay much attention to us as long as we are not serving God. But if we begin to overcome sin aggressively, or if we start to have success in leading others to Christ, then Satan sends some affliction to us like he did to Job. He wants to discourage us and stop our spiritual growth.

God Isn't Fair. Some people honestly believe they are suffering because God is not treating them fairly. They are convinced that He has shortchanged them, while giving others more than they deserve. Such people are wrapped up in human comparisons. They determine who deserves what on purely human terms. "Why me?" they ask. "Why do I always have to get the short end of the stick?"

In so doing, they are accusing God of being both unjust and unfair. They are echoing the cry of the prophet Habakkuk: "Why do You hold Your tongue when the wicked devours one more righteous than he?" (1:13).

Job could have responded to his suffering in any one of these ways. In fact, at times each of these thoughts may have gone through his mind. But in the end, Job had learned to trust God while enduring the worst kinds of suffering. This should help us in our times of trouble as well.

BOOK CHART OF JOB

JOB'S PROSPERITY	JOB'S TESTING	DIALOGUE WITH JOB'S FRIENDS: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar	ELIHU SPEAKS	DIALOGUE WITH GOD	JOB'S RESTORATION
1:1 1:12	1:13 2:10	2:11 31	32 37	38:1 42:6	42:7 42:17
Prose		Poetry			Prose
God & Satan	Job & Friends		Job & God		
Two Cycles	Three Cycles	Four Speeches	Two Cycles		
The Problem	Incomplete Answers		God's Answer	Resolution	
Job Obeys	Job Laments & Questions		Job Repents		

“When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (23:10).

SETTING THE STAGE

Before we can understand the experience of Job, we need to review his times and his story.

Was Job a real person? Some have said that the man from Uz was not a real person. They say he represents all who suffer. But the evidence, both from the Bible and from history, indicates that Job actually lived in the Middle East long ago, and that he did experience the things recorded in the book that bears his name.

The Bible treats Job as a real person. In Ezekiel 14:20, for example, Job was named with two other men, Daniel and Noah, as examples of holiness. And in the New Testament, James used Job as an example of patience (5:11).

Archaeologists have found that there were several men of history named Job (Hebrew, *Iyyob*). The earliest of these lived about 2000 BC. While none of them was the Job of the Bible, they show that the name was commonly used.

What kind of man was he? Two phrases summarize what we know about Job. He was:

A good and godly man. The Bible tells us that Job was a person of strong character and unparalleled godliness. In 1:8 this is what God said about Job:

Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?

We are also told that Job offered sacrifices every day on behalf of his children in case they had sinned in their days of feasting (1:5). Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he served as the family priest.

A prosperous man. The Lord had blessed Job with

great wealth. He owned so many domesticated animals and had such a large household of workers and servants that he was called “the greatest of all the people of the East” (1:3).

When did Job live? It is very likely that Job lived in Abraham’s time. We can conclude this because, like Abraham, he lived more than 100 years (42:16), he was priest for his family (1:5), and His wealth was in domesticated animals (1:3). Further, no mention of Israel was made, and the mention of Sabeans (1:15) and Chaldeans (1:17) fits the time historically. All of these factors indicate that the events of Job appear to fit chronologically into the Bible at about Genesis 12.

Where did Job live? Job was from “the land of Uz” (1:1). The exact location of Uz is not known, but two are suggested. Some scholars locate Uz northeast of



Palestine in the land of Aram (modern Syria; point A on map). They do this because Genesis 10:23 states that Uz was the son of Aram. Further, an eastern location is supported by the fact that Job was referred to as “the greatest of all the people of the East” (1:3). Other scholars, however, citing Lamentations 4:21, place Uz south of Palestine in Edom (point B on map). They also point out that Eliphaz, one of Job’s three friends, was from Teman, a city in Edom.

TELLING THE STORY

Before moving on in our study of Job, let's get an overview of the story so we can see the details more clearly in their context. The events take place in two locations: in heaven and in the land of Uz. When Satan appeared at an assembly of "the sons of God" (angels), the Lord asked him where he had been (1:6-7). When Satan said that he had been roaming the earth, God asked him, "Have you considered My servant Job?" (v.8). With attention drawn to Job's goodness, Satan then mocked God by implying that if Job had not been so richly blessed by the Lord, he never would have considered serving Him.

Testing. So God gave Satan permission to test Job. It's as if the Lord said, "Let's test your theory. Take it all away from him. We'll just see what happens." God placed Job into His enemy's hands for two cycles of oppression. First, Job would lose his possessions and his children. Then, he would be afflicted with a loss of health and a loss of his reputation in the community.

**"Behold, all that he has is in your power;
only do not lay a hand on his person."**

—God to Satan (Job 1:12)

The blows fell upon Job one after another. Nothing was left. Everything he had worked for was gone. He had buried each of his children. His mind was in agony. His body was filled with pain. His heart was burdened with sorrow. And his wife, her own heart filled with grief, advised Job, "Curse God and die!" (2:9).

Although he was grieved and broken, Job did not

collapse. He responded to his trouble in a way that revealed his inner character—his godliness. When crushed, worship flowed out in his words, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:21).

Inadequate Consolation. Three of Job’s friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, came to the side of their suffering friend. A fourth person, a younger man named Elihu, listened in. These friends, however, did more than just console Job. After sitting in silence 7 days, they began to give their own explanations for his suffering. In three cycles of speeches, they assumed that Job was guilty of some terrible sin. They said that God was punishing him and that he must confess his sin before God would take away his trouble.

Hurt and frustrated, Job answered each of his critics’ speeches by insisting that he was not guilty of the kind of sins they were accusing him of. When he remembered how happy he had once been, it made his situation all the more unbearable. Job cried out to God from the depths of his misery.

The Storm Rises. (Unable to stand it any longer, Elihu broke in to offer four separate speeches (chs. 32–37). As a great storm began to rise, he criticized Job’s friends for accusing Job of evils they could not prove. He criticized Job for defending his own honor at the expense of God. Things were building to a climax as the storm swept in upon them.

The Voice Of God. Finally the storm broke—and out of its fury came the voice of God (38:1–40:2). Job answered; then God spoke again. With a long series of penetrating questions, He called attention to His might, revealing His character to Job—majestic in holiness, limitless in power, and deserving of his trust.

What could Job do? Completely overwhelmed and filled with awe, he acknowledged God's right to be God, fell at His feet, and repented in dust and ashes. In the presence of God's creative wisdom and power, he was humbled and silenced. Even though he had not received an explanation for his suffering, his perspective had been renewed.

**“I know that You can do everything,
and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld
from You. . . . I have uttered what I did not
understand, things too wonderful for me,
which I did not know.”**

—Job to God (Job 42:2-3)

Restoration. In a brief epilogue, we are told of Job's restoration. His possessions were increased, he was given seven sons and three beautiful daughters, and he lived another 140 years before he died.

In the cycle of Job's suffering we can see our own response to terrible, heart-breaking calamity. Job grieved; we grieve. Job lamented; we cry out for sympathy. Job was falsely accused; so sometimes are we. Job remained strong in his faith; so can we.

Yes, we can learn from this book. We can learn about ourselves. We can learn about our own deep and powerful emotions, our own sorrow, and our own capacity to rise to great heights of faith.

Even more, we can learn about God and His role in human suffering. And, as we will see in the pages to follow, that is what will help us to understand and endure the afflictions that come into our lives.

THE VIRTUE OF JOB

To grasp the tremendous force of this book, we must keep in mind the exceptional character of Job. He was a man of virtue and integrity—a man who believed in God and obeyed Him in a way that is exemplary to every Christian.

God's Testimony. As we have already seen, God said that Job was a man who feared Him and hated evil. We also have the testimony of God (by the inspiration of Scripture) that Job did not sin in the first two rounds of his temptation (1:22; 2:10).

Job's Testimony. Job's critics accused him of being guilty of some terrible sin. Eliphaz accused him of being insensitive to human need (22:4-11). Job defended himself against these charges by citing his works for suffering humanity (chs.29–30):

- He rescued the poor and the orphaned (29:12).
- He helped the dying and the widowed (v.13).
- He was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame (v.15).
- He was a father to the needy and a friend to strangers (v.16).
- He rescued the oppressed (v.17).
- He wept for the troubled and the poor (30:25).

He went on to name the sins he had not committed:

- Lust (31:1-4).
- Cheating in business (vv.5-8).
- Marital unfaithfulness (vv.9-12).
- Insensitivity to human need (vv.13-23).
- Greed and idolatry (vv.24-28).
- Gloating over fallen enemies (vv.29-32).
- Hypocrisy (vv.34-35).

Testimony Of Scripture. Two passages of the Bible indicate the virtuous life of Job.

- **Ezekiel 14:14,20.** In these verses, Job's righteousness was compared to that of Noah and Daniel.
- **James 5:11.** James pointed to Job as a model of perseverance. Job stood the testing of his faith without falling.

On the basis of these passages, we must admire the outstanding virtue and integrity of Job. No wonder the Lord pointed to him as an example!

THE DISCIPLINARY PURPOSES FOR TEMPTATION

Satan's purpose for afflicting Job was to tempt him to deny the Lord. In a sense, suffering always brings with it the temptation to sin against God. But it also gives us a wonderful opportunity to testify to His greatness. In an old classic, *The Argument Of Job Unfolded*, William Henry Green listed these disciplinary purposes for temptation:

- To drive us to God so that we will learn always to take refuge in Him.
- To train us for Christian warfare.
- To intensify our hatred of sin.
- To add to our knowledge of ourselves.
- To lead us to growth in grace.
- To wean us from love for this world.
- To heighten our future glory.
- To testify to the glory of God's grace.

KNOWING GOD THROUGH JOB

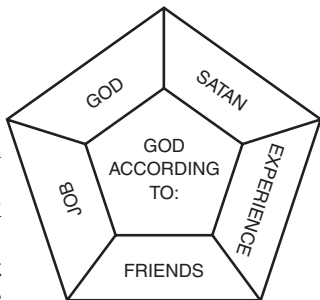
The book of Job is the inspired account of one man's intense suffering. But it is more than that. The events of earth were the counterpoint to a dramatic confrontation in heaven. The opponents were not only Job versus his affliction, but also God versus Satan.

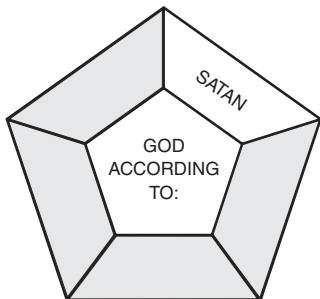
In this sense, then, the book of Job is the record of a representative experience. Job's reputation—his faith and virtue—was severely tested. The way he handled the series of tragedies that came into his life reflected his response to God's character. In a similar manner, the way our faith survives testing gives witness to the knowledge of the One in whom we have put our trust.

Because of this, when we look at the book of Job we also see God. And what we learn about God through Job will strengthen us for the times of suffering that come our way. We will study five different viewpoints of God from the book of Job. We will see God according to:

1. Satan
2. Job's Experience
3. Job's Friends
4. Job's Dialogues
5. God Himself

As we probe the depth and reality of Job's experience we will also look deeply into God's character. And we will find that when suffering comes, He is the One who is powerful enough, good enough, and wise enough to be trusted.





1. GOD ACCORDING TO SATAN. The angels were assembled before God. For some reason, Satan was there with them (1:6). The tension was high between Satan and the Lord. In fact, the name *Satan* means “adversary.” At issue was God’s place in man’s heart. Satan had

been roaming the earth, and we may assume that he had observed the extent of man’s rebellion. It was then that the Lord called attention to Job and pointed out, “There is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil” (1:8). But Satan accused Job of following God for materialistic reasons, and he implied that God was his accomplice because He had blessed him. “Take everything away,” he suggested, “and Job will curse You to Your face” (1:11).

“Satan’s strategy had two goals: to cast doubt on Job’s motives, and to attack God’s right to be followed.

Satan’s strategy had two goals. First, he wanted to cast doubt on Job’s motives for righteousness. God was “paying him off,” he insinuated, like a political candidate today who trades votes for \$50 bills.

Second, Satan was attacking God’s right to be followed and obeyed. A follower who is bought, after all, is not a true follower at all. He is serving himself. If

Satan could prove that Job was serving himself and not God, he thought he would have evidence that no one loves God for who He is. God accepted Satan's challenge and put Job into Satan's hands. The devil was free to afflict Job, but he had to stay within certain limits (1:12; 2:6). Satan must have been delighted as he left the assembly, for he was convinced that it would be easy for him to get Job to deny the Lord.

SEEING GOD

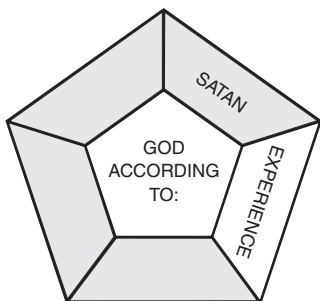
This behind-the-scenes interchange between God and Satan helps us see into God's character more clearly. For example:

- God not only knows who leads a blameless and upright life, but He is also pleased to show Satan that not all of mankind follows his evil ways.
- God is still faced with rebellion. The devil is in conflict with God, and we are the battleground.
- God is our defender; Satan is our adversary.
- God is in control. To be challenged is not to be dethroned. God has given Satan room to operate—even to enter the assembly of the angels. But he cannot overstep his bounds.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

This exchange between God and Satan carries some valuable lessons for us when affliction comes.

- Our suffering may be for a supernatural cause. Job did not know that God had singled him out or that Satan was masterminding the attack.
- God limits Satan. Though the devil is the “god of this age,” he can go only as far as God will allow.
- God knows all about us, just as He knew about Job. We do not go unnoticed.
- God uses our suffering to show His glory. Job's response was to witness to God's grace.



2. GOD ACCORDING TO JOB'S EXPERIENCE. Let's shift our attention back to earth. An unsuspecting Job has begun the day like any other. He is unaware that Satan has been granted permission to attack him. But before the day is over, he will experience profound loss and deep sorrow.

As we look into the crucible of Job's suffering, we will see things that seem to suggest that God had changed into an angry, unjust, uncaring, and sadistic Creator.

The First Assault. A succession of messengers rushed breathlessly up to Job, each bearing bad news.

Message 1. Sabeans had swept down from the hills and stolen all of Job's oxen and donkeys. All the herdsmen except the messenger had been killed (1:14-15).

Message 2. Fire had fallen from heaven and destroyed Job's sheep and all the shepherds but the one who brought the report (1:16).

Message 3. Raiding Chaldeans had taken his camels and killed all the attendants but the one who brought the message (1:17).

Message 4. A mighty wind had struck the house in which Job's children were dining, killing everyone except the servant who came with the news (1:18,19).

Job was devastated. He had received no forewarning. The news had come to him in rapid succession. Before one messenger stopped speaking, another rushed up. All that he had worked for over the years, and all that was dear to him, was gone. His mind went numb, and his heart was filled with sorrow.

Even so, Job did not lose his confidence in God. He easily could have. How simple it would have been to change in view of his changing circumstances. How quickly and (apparently) justifiably he could have vented his anger at God and cursed His name.

But as trouble and pain rushed in like a flood, Job did not change his view of God. True, he sorrowed. He shaved his head and tore his robe to show his grief (1:20), which was the custom of his day. But he worshiped God and blessed His name, saying:

*The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away;
blessed be the name of the Lord (1:21).*

His herds were gone and his beloved children were dead, yet he did not stop trusting God.

**“Job had gone down for the count,
but he wasn’t out. While still on his knees,
he won the first round.**

The Second Assault. Satan does not give up easily. He reappeared in heaven and challenged God again, implying that a person can withstand all external attack, but if he himself is affected he will fall. So he asked permission of God to attack Job again.

This time Satan attacked Job’s body. He afflicted him with ugly, ulcerous sores that caused him to withdraw from everyone. His honor, his dignity, and his place in society were gone.

His wife, perhaps expressing the depths of her own sorrow, advised him, “Curse God and die!” (2:9). What more could happen to him? Why should he even continue to live?

Still Job did not deny the Lord. “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversi-

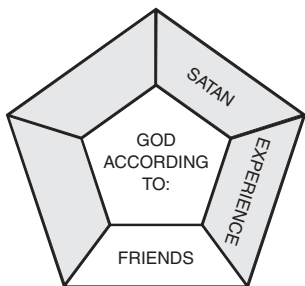
ty?” he asked. Once more we are told, “In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (2:10). His faith remained.

SEEING GOD

- God has not promised us an affliction-free life.
- God may let us lose what it has taken us a lifetime to accumulate.
- The same God who sends us good may let us suffer physical or emotional anguish.
- God does not change because our circumstances change. In bad times He is still a good God.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

- There is nothing wrong with grieving. Job mourned his loss; so may we.
- Job’s assault came in waves, so we too may have more than one bad thing happen to us at once.
- We do not need to lose our spiritual integrity during affliction. Even Job’s wife urged him to “curse God and die,” yet he stood firm.



3. GOD ACCORDING TO JOB’S FRIENDS. Suppose you are in the hospital with a dreaded disease. You are suffering and discouraged. Then the news comes that friends are going to visit you. You are glad, because you need their sympathy and encouragement.

This was Job’s situation. He assumed that his friends had come to listen to his lament and to console him. But what did he hear? Words of comfort and encouragement? No! They ended up telling him that it was all his fault—like a

person who visits a cancer patient and tells him that God is punishing him because he is covering up some terrible sin.

Job's three visitors, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, were wise, articulate, and respected men of the Middle East. When they heard the news of Job's affliction, they came to console him as custom demanded.

The three men sat in sympathetic silence beside Job for 7 days, the accustomed time set aside for mourning. They did not speak until Job spoke first (ch.3). They listened intently as Job poured out his feelings. But they felt that Job was not being honest—that what he was saying cast shadows on the justice of God. So they set out to defend the honor of the Lord. They spoke in turn for three cycles of speeches. Job responded to each of their addresses, as the following chart indicates.

SPEAKER	FIRST CYCLE	SECOND CYCLE	THIRD CYCLE
Eliphaz	4:1–5:27	15:1-35	22:1-30
Job	6:1–7:21	16:1–17:16	23:1–24:25
Bildad	8:1-22	18:1-21	25:1-6
Job	9:1–10:22	19:1-29	26:1-14
Zophar	11:1-20	20:1-29	
Job	12:1–14:22	21:1-34	

The three men lived in different regions around the Middle East. They were different in temperament, yet each knew a lot about God. We will look at the counsel each of them gave to Job.

ELIPHAZ: "Come clean, Job."

Since Eliphaz was the first to respond, it's assumed that he was the eldest. He came from Teman, a region known for its wise men. This philosopher/theologian, who was the most considerate of the three, spoke from the wisdom of his own life and walk with God.

Eliphaz' major point was that people do not suffer without a cause. Experience had taught him that affliction was God's punishment for sin. His view is summarized by this excerpt from his first speech:

Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off? Even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of His anger they are consumed (4:7-9).

Eliphaz did not directly accuse Job of harboring some terrible sin; he merely implied it. But that was the only conclusion one could draw from his first address.

In his second speech, however, Eliphaz spoke more bluntly. "Your iniquity teaches your mouth Your own mouth condemns you" (15:5-6). Again appealing to observation (vv.17-18), he assumed Job's guilt.

WARNING:

**Beware of the trap fallen into by Job's friends!
While standing on enormous rocks of truth,
they jumped to the wrong conclusions.**

Eliphaz' third speech was an open charge of guilt. Almost cruelly, he accused Job of being filled with evil. "Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquity without end?" he asked (22:5). He concluded by demanding Job's repentance (vv.22-26).

BILDAD: "You're lying, Job."

Bildad, a resident of Shuah, was a hard-nosed traditionalist. He dismissed Job's protestations of innocence as "strong wind" (8:2). He even said that Job's children had died as punishment for sin. These were hardly words of comfort to a man who had faithfully sacrificed on behalf of his children (1:5).

Bildad assumed Job's terrible guilt on the basis of the past. Here is his philosophy:

For inquire, please, of the former age, and consider the things discovered by their fathers Will they not teach you and tell you? (8:8,10).

In his second speech, Bildad spoke in harsh, graphic terms of the consequences of evil: the sinner's lamp is snuffed out (18:5), his light is dark (v.6), a trap lies in his path (v.10), and terror eats away at his skin (v.13)—a reference to Job's physical condition.

His third speech is very brief. It exalts God and compares man to a maggot—obviously what he thought of Job for insisting on his own integrity at the expense of God (25:6).

ZOPHAR: "You're hopeless, Job."

Zophar of Naamah, a moralist, was arrogant in his orthodoxy. He reasoned that because God is fathomless and almighty, He "knows deceitful men" (11:11). Therefore, if Job would put away his evil, God would restore him (v.14). His rigid moralistic view is summarized in this excerpt from his second speech:

Do you not know this of old, since man was placed on earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment? (20:4-5).

Zophar did not offer a third speech. He probably just dismissed Job from his mind as a hopeless case.

ELIHU: "Let a young man speak."

While all this was going on, a young man sat quietly at the edge of the circle. He listened carefully to all that was said. When the cycle of speeches was finally over, he arose to speak. As the storm clouds began to gather, he angrily expressed his views in four speeches recorded in chapters 32–37.

In his first speech, Elihu acknowledged that he was with men older and wiser than he (32:6-9). He pointed out that when Job had protested his innocence, no one had proven him guilty (v.12). He went on to suggest that a person who is suffering may not be enduring punishment but may be receiving a call to uprightness (33:16-18). If men were to be punished to the degree they deserved, none would survive (34:10-15).

Elihu paused, but Job did not respond as he had to the others. So he pressed on to point out that Job had made some hasty remarks about the Lord. Further, he too implied that Job's sin had brought about his suffering (34:10-12,31-37). In chapters 36 and 37, Elihu repeated his basic premise—that a just God would not make a good man suffer—and then closed by saying that God's ways are beyond man's knowledge.

When Elihu was finished, all the talking was done. The wisdom of men had not brought satisfaction. Instead, the emotions of Job had risen with the mounting thunderclouds. The silence between the men was mirrored by the pre-storm stillness. There awaited a more authoritative voice: the thundering voice of God. And from the storm He would speak.

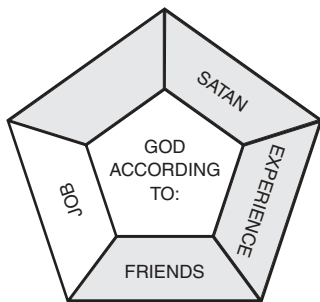
SEEING GOD

- The three friends of Job were accurate in their view of God as the One who punishes sin (8:20; 11:6; 18:5-21).

- They were correct in their belief in God as the One who knows men's hearts (11:11; 22:12-18; 34:21).
- They saw God as their Maker and the Sustainer of heaven and earth (4:17; 5:10).
- They were right in seeing God as the One who chastens His own (5:17-18; 36:8-12).
- They believed in God's justice. That's why they assumed Job must be sinning (5:15-16; 34:10-14).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

- We can learn from Job's friends that we can know some things about God but not everything.
- We can increase the suffering of our friends by jumping to wrong conclusions about them.
- We can speak on behalf of God to our suffering friends just as Job's friends spoke to him.
- We need to beware of assuming that we know what God is doing in someone else's life or in our own.



4. GOD ACCORDING TO JOB'S DIALOGUES.

It's one thing when affliction strikes someone else; quite another when it hits you. Even a close friend or loved one cannot know the pain you are experiencing. The time comes when the phone stops ringing, the visitors all

leave, the pastor returns to his office, and you are left alone to cope with the reality of your suffering.

- It's then that the hard questions force themselves to the front of your mind.
- It's then that you cry out to God.

- It's then that you find words to express the feelings that are rolling over your soul like the pounding waves of the ocean.
- It's then that you are ready to learn from Job.

We have observed that Job's friends did not console him at all. If anything, they increased his burden. They were actually a third phase of Job's temptation.

This left Job to deal with God about his affliction. And in his words we hear the anguished cries of all who have been afflicted; in his pleadings, their cries for mercy; in his questions, their plea for answers from God for the reasons they are suffering.

What Job said may be examined in four groupings:

Group 1 (Job 3): Job's Initial Lament

Group 2 (Job 4–26): Job's Responses To His Critics

Group 3 (Job 27–31): A Series Of Monologues

Group 4 (Job 38–42): Job's Dialogue With God

We will look now at the first three groupings in detail. The fourth will be examined in the next section.

Group 1: Job's Initial Lament. For 7 days the men of the East sat before Job. Custom demanded that the sufferer speak first, so Job finally broke the silence (ch.3). His first speech expressed two themes:

- It would be better if I had never been born (vv.1-19).
- My life is in turmoil (vv.25-26).

How many times have we too thought that God made a mistake in bringing us into the world? And haven't we also felt that the world (and we ourselves) would be better off if we were just allowed to die? Life was once so good, but now there is no peace. This is Job's lament.

Group 2: Job's Responses To His Critics. The second grouping of what Job said contains eight

speeches. Each time one of Job's friends spoke, he responded. Job's answers to his miserable "comforters" show that he carried mixed feelings about God and his experience. His laments, his wish to die, and his self-defense indicate that he was somewhat self-righteous and rebellious. Yet he also praised God and expressed deep faith in God's goodness.

- ***He continued his lament.*** Job repeated his cry (6:4; 7:1-21; 9:17-31; 10:1-22; 12:13-25; 13:20-14:22). His feelings are summed up in 6:4 where he says, "The arrows of the Almighty are within me."

- ***He defended himself.*** In response to his critics' insistence that he must have been committing terrible sins, Job consistently maintained his innocence. He did not claim to be sinless. But he firmly believed that his suffering was far worse than any wrongdoing he may have done (9:25-35; 13:1-28; 16:15-21; 27:2-6).

- ***He expressed his wishes.*** Job's answers to his critics contained these wishes: (1) A repeated sorrowful wish to die (6:8-10; 7:15). (2) A wish that God would leave him alone (7:16; 9:34-35; 10:20; 13:21-22; 14:6,13-15). (3) His wish to be heard (16:18-22; 19:23-24). (4) His wish to confront God (23:3-12).

- ***He offered praise to God.*** In spite of his suffering, Job exalted God for His majesty (9:4,10-11; 12:10,13), His lordship of history (5:11-16; 12:14-25), His power as Creator (9:5-13; 10:8-12), and His work of creation (26:5-14).

- ***He expressed his trust in God.*** In one of the most triumphant passages of the Old Testament, Job cried, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth" (19:25).

Job's comforters had driven him toward doubt, yet he resisted the onslaught and burst forth with this

wonderful expression of triumph. Many feel that this was a turning point in Job's dialogue with his critics.

Group 3: A Series Of Monologues. Job concluded his dialogue with a final protest of his innocence.

My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live (27:6).

In chapter 29, Job remembered his happy estate before the attack came. In chapter 30, he expressed the depth of his hurt. Finally, Job challenged God by saying:

Oh, that I had one to hear me! Here is my mark.

Oh, that the Almighty would answer me, that my Prosecutor had written a book! (31:35).

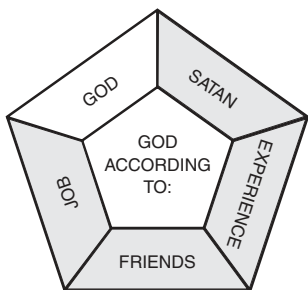
Having expressed his feelings, Job fell silent.

SEEING GOD

- God's majesty as Creator of the universe and Source of life is reflected throughout Job's speeches (9:15; 26:5-14).
- In good circumstances and bad, God the Living Redeemer will be there when earth passes away (19:25).
- God is our source of wisdom and strength in every changing situation (12:13-17).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

- When our feelings are in turmoil because of deep trouble, we must cling to what we know about the goodness of God.
- We can express our hurt and anger to God when we are afflicted.
- In trouble, it helps to look beyond the moment to the day when our Living Redeemer returns.
- It helps to praise God in times of suffering.



5. GOD ACCORDING TO HIMSELF. Our look at God through Job began with Satan's hostile, distorted point of view. It continues through Job's sad experience. It was expressed in the one-dimensional perspective of Job's friends and in the agonized speeches of Job himself. But now,

at the close of the ordeal, God Himself speaks. In His two speeches, and in the responses of Job, we find the resource for bearing our own affliction.

God's First Speech (38:2–40:2). Job had challenged God to show him his wrong (31:35). Finally, out of the raging storm, God spoke.

The Lord's first speech began and ended with a reply to Job's challenge (38:2,3; 40:2). In essence, God said, "I am about to speak, Job. And when I am finished, will you have anything left to say?"

After referring to Job's "words without knowledge," God asked a series of penetrating questions. They forced Job to observe the witnesses to God's power and goodness that surrounded him. Job was called to consider evidence he was familiar with; evidence from earth—not heaven. The Lord paraded the witnesses before Job in a poem with two stanzas.

Stanza 1: Witnesses from the created world.

- the earth (38:4-7,18)
- the sea (vv.8-11,16)
- the sun (vv.12-15)
- the lower world (v.17)
- the light and darkness (vv.19-20)

- the weather (vv.22-30,34-38)
- the constellations (vv.31-33)

Stanza 2: Testimony of the animal world.

- the lion (38:39-40)
- the raven (v.41)
- the mountain goat and the deer (39:1-4)
- the wild donkey (vv.5-8)
- the wild ox (vv.9-12)
- the ostrich and the stork (vv.13-18)
- the war horse (vv.19-25)
- the hawk (v.26)
- the eagle (v.27)

Job's First Response (40:3-5). Job was humbled and silenced before the Lord. Here are his words:

Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth (40:4).

Faced with the grandeur of God as evidenced in the natural world, Job had nothing more to say.

God's Second Speech (40:7-41:34). God spoke a second time to Job, again telling him to brace himself for some hard questions (40:7; see 38:3). God reminded Job of His ability to judge rightly (40:8-14). Job's only course of action was to place himself in the circle of God's care and to let His justice prevail. He need not try to justify himself any longer.

This was followed by a dramatic description of two mighty beasts: behemoth (40:15-24) and leviathan (41:1-34). These may be references to the hippopotamus and the crocodile. Each description contains a challenge to man to capture these powerful creatures that reflected God's might (40:15-24; 41:1-10).

Job's Second Response (42:2-6). Job responded in two ways. First, he expressed an even deeper understanding of God's greatness.

I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You (42:2).

Then, referring to what God had said earlier (38:2-3; 40:7), Job confessed that he had been wrong and repented of his earlier statements.

Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes (42:6).

Job acknowledged that he was wrong to challenge God and that he would never do it again. He finally agreed that a God powerful enough to create all things is wise enough to be trusted and loving enough to do what's right.

SEEING GOD

- The created world witnesses to the greatness of God (38:4-38).
- The animal world testifies to the majesty of God (38:39-39:30).
- God is the righteous Judge (40:4-8).
- God is the Maker of great creatures; He is the Sovereign Lord (40:15-41:34).
- God's ways are to be accepted as right because He is far above man (42:2-7).

PRACTICAL LESSONS

- When affliction strikes, we cannot let ourselves lose sight of the awesome power of God.
- When trouble comes, we need to remember that God is just in all He does.
- When we cannot understand, we can take refuge in the truth that God's ways are above our ways.
- Repentance and humility are better than questioning God or demanding a trouble-free life.

JOB, GOD, AND ME

Job lived 4,000 years ago in a culture vastly different from ours. Besides, God talked directly to Job. He's not likely to do that with us. So how does the record of his experience help when

- you hear that your lovely, vivacious daughter has MS?
- you learn that you have to go in for dialysis twice a week?
- the doctor tells you that you have a brain tumor?
- you wake up in the hospital to find that 60% of your body has second- and third-degree burns?
- you've attended the funerals of all your children?

The book of Job does help. It helps because it not only focuses on one man's suffering, but it also takes us beyond that and into the mind and character of God. It tells us things about the sovereign Lord that help us cope with trouble and heartache. The following principles stand out in the book of Job.

Suffering is part of life. No one has a right to expect a life free from affliction. Even a man as righteous as Job did not escape. True, we can be healed these days in ways that would have seemed miraculous a few short decades ago. But there is still heart disease and cancer. People still have traffic accidents, planes still crash, and children still drown. From the day Adam and Eve left their garden paradise, suffering has been part of life. To expect to live free from it is to ask more than God has said He will grant.

We may never know why. The supernatural reason for our suffering may never be revealed to us. Remem-

ber, Job never knew about the confrontation between Satan and God in heaven. We may never know either.

We bring suffering on ourselves. Job's friends were right in recognizing the principle of sowing and reaping (Job 4:8; Gal. 6:7). When we neglect or abuse our bodies, we will suffer the consequences. An alcoholic may get cirrhosis of the liver. A reckless driver may end up in the hospital or the morgue. We have no right to hold it against God if we suffer as a consequence of our own foolish choices. But remember that sometimes our suffering won't be the result of sin. In this case, Job was right.

The resolution to suffering is to be found in God's character. When affliction disrupts our lives and destroys our serenity, we can have refuge in the goodness of God. He is the sovereign Lord. His ways are above our ways. He is the all-wise, infinite, holy, and good God. We are the creatures; He is the Creator. Therefore, like Job, let us rest in Him and trust in His incomprehensible perfection and goodness.

God has joined us in suffering. Job could see only dimly what we can see clearly—that God became man to suffer on our behalf. Jesus knew the reality of excruciating pain. He knew bone-wracking tiredness. He endured mental anguish and emotional distress. He was tempted in every way we are. And He never stops interceding for us.

Our faith need not fail. We may lose loved one after loved one. We may know the reality of prolonged, intense pain. Our bodies may fail and our emotions may crack. But we can always maintain our faith in God. Even though Job struggled to understand why God would allow him to suffer, he kept taking refuge in the knowledge of God's goodness.

IS JOB'S GOD YOUR GOD?

You can't hide from suffering. It forces its way through the petty issues and empty self-deceptions of life. It washes away the naive idea that you will never know the kind of trouble other people are facing. It forces you to face the realities of pain and remorse and sorrow.

At the very heart of the matter, coping with affliction becomes a personal matter between you and God. When your life is built on a solid trust in Him, you can respond to suffering as Job did. It is only a deep faith in God that enables a person to say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15).

Perhaps you've been making your way through life without God. You're trying to do it all on your own. If so, you need to trust in Christ and make God a part of your life.

Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives." That Redeemer is Jesus Christ, who came to rescue you from your sin. Paul wrote, "In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. 1:7).

Trust in Him today. Acknowledging that you are a sinner, and admitting that you cannot save yourself, receive Him as your personal Savior (Jn. 3:16).

When you do, Job's God will be your God. And you will know the One in whom you can place your complete trust in every circumstances of life—whether it be in times of great joy or in the kind of affliction Job had to endure.

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