

The Book of Job

Three Questions in Suffering

INTRODUCTION: It has been said that *the minister who preaches to suffering people will never lack a congregation - for each person is either in a storm, coming out of a storm, or about to enter a storm.* This is as true as the sun.

• We suffer because of the fall -

We have seen, thus far, in our chronological journey through scripture that God created the Heavens and the Earth in splendid perfection, a virtual paradise. However, we have also seen that a rebellion born in Heaven spread like a virus to Earth. Satan through deception struck an alliance with our ancestors thus corrupted the human race. The curse fell upon mankind, upon the demonic race, upon the very earth itself - which the New Testament tells us “groans as in childbirth up until the present time”. If the pangs of childbirth began with the curse, and continued into Paul’s day - how much greater might we expect them to be in our own two millennia years removed?

• We suffer because of our faith-

There is no guarantee more certain than this - you will suffer. Not only under the weight of sin’s curse - your sufferings in this life will be amplified by your following of Christ. **2 Timothy 3:12** (ESV) ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

• We suffer because of our sin -

If this were not enough - you will personally bring some suffering upon yourself by your own poor choices. We lack perfect wisdom and we lack perfect faith so it is inevitable that we will at times engage in activities that will cause us to suffer. At other times we will fail to engage in activities that will relieve our suffering.

In 1 Corinthians we see that some are sick and others have died because of sin in their lives. But we must not assume that all suffering is because of sin - this was the mistake of Job’s friends.

• We suffer because of God’s Providence -

Beyond all of this - we serve a God who employs suffering as his choice tool of sanctification. By his very hand of Providence storm clouds will at times be moved over our homes. Like the very rain that fall from the sky these clouds will move over the just and the unjust.

Job’s friends will fail to recognize God’s Providence as it relates to suffering. The disciples made the same mistake when they found a boy blind from birth. “Who sinned this man or his parents”, they asked. “Neither” answered Jesus, “but he was afflicted so that the power of God may be demonstrated”.

Since suffering is so predictable (inevitable) - ***we would do well to prepare for it.*** God in His great wisdom knew that the suffering of man would cause him to raise many questions. So he gave us Job.

DATE - Chronologically, it seems Job lived during the time of Abraham. We know this because he measured his wealth by numbering his cattle rather than gold - as was done in the time of Solomon. He reflected no knowledge of organized religion. He never mentions the law of Moses. He served as a priest to his own family.

SETTING - "The land of Uz," as best we can guess, was in the area of northern Saudi Arabia or southern Jordan, which, since the time of the patriarchs has been called Edom.

STYLE/GENRE - His story is told as an Epic Poem. It is divided into three parts. 1. God's Conversation with Satan, 2. Job's Conversation with his Friends, 3, God's Conversation with Job.

TEXT: Job 1:6–12 (ESV)

⁶ Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. ⁷ The Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." ⁸ And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" ⁹ Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason?"

Now that word **fear** in the Hebrew is different than our English word for fear it means an deep sense of respect and awe. It is a sense of terror baptized in love.

God points to Job and says, "Do you see how deeply he loves me?"

¹⁰ Have you not put a hedge 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 and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."

So Satan is suggesting to God that Job's love is based on what he's getting out of it. So in other words - Job doesn't really love you, he loves the stuff you give him. Ultimately, he loves himself - not God.

ILLUSTRATION: You've had this experience haven't you?

- **Ladies** - Have you ever dated a guy who says he loves you, but in reality he doesn't love you he loves what he can get from you. When you refuse to sleep with him he leaves.
- **Men** - Ever had someone befriend you, hang out with you, seem so interested in being your friend, but then asking for you to help him get a promotion at work? If you don't come through - suddenly he doesn't want to hang out anymore.

They want what you can give them - they don't really love you. Satan is suggesting - that's all this is, Job doesn't love you, Job loves Job. Take his stuff... that will show you.

¹² And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

See that this is not a 50/50 battle against God and Satan - God is the Omnipotent King of all creation and Satan is simply a created being. Compared to us, Satan is terrifying, but greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world.

William Gurnall reminded us, *“When God says, “Stay”, Satan must stand like a dog by the table while the saints feast on God’s comfort. He does not dare snatch even a tidbit, for the Master’s eye is always upon him.”*

The Earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof the **Psalmist** writes -

Therefore in the word’s of **Martin Luther**, *The sea is God’s sea, the Sky is god’s sky, the storm is God’s storm and the Devil is God’s devil*

Erwin Lutzer said, *“Blessed are those who are understand that the prince of this world is the slave of the prince of peace”*

So God says to Satan, *“go this far - and no further”*.

ATTACK #1 Job 1:13–22 (ESV)

1. A Messenger says there was a Sabeans attack on your servants
2. A Messenger says, “lightening struck your sheep and shepherds”
3. A Messenger says, “The Chaldeans attacked and stole your camels”
4. A Messenger says, “a Great wind it the home where you children were feasting - they are all dead”.

Job’s world has been destroyed, his heart has been crushed...Throughout the book Job raises **three questions to God that we need to have the answers to as we face suffering.**

1. **Can you Reveal?** Will you tell me why you let this happen?
2. **Can you Relate?** Is there any way you can really understand what I’m feeling?
3. **Can you Resolve?** Will you allow me to suffer forever or will you make things right?

As the story progresses you have to look at it much like a **boxing match** - Job doesn’t win every round. Round One he soundly defeated Satan... but in chapter 3, he doesn’t look so good...As a matter of fact he starts to contemplate death.

That’s how it typically happens - when you first learn of a tragedy you have a rush of adrenaline that sweeps through your system and you respond with enormous optimism - it’s the days and weeks afterward that are trying.

Job 3:11–12 (ESV)

¹¹ “Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire? ¹² Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?”

He reminds us of the words of Solomon **Ecclesiastes 6:3–6 (ESV)**

³ ... I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. ⁴ For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. ⁵ Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest...

Job is saying - it would have been better if I had died at birth. Have you ever felt that way? Has life ever seemed that unbearable?

It is at this point that Job begins to raise questions... In his mind he believes that if only God will answer my questions - I can survive....

Question #1

1. Can you Reveal?

Job 3:23 (ESV)

²³ Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?

Job Asked Why... why do you give me the ability to understand, yet you hide understanding from me. Why won't you just tell me what is going on.

Remember - Job never got to read **Job 1**. He has no clue about this cosmic conversation that has take place.

What happens in the next few chapters is very revealing - Job's friends try to answer his question... one after another they try to explain why.

This goes on chapter, after chapter, verse after verse....

Then in Job 38 we see one of the most amazing passages in all the bible...

Job 38:1-4 (ESV)

¹ Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind

Can you see it - a Theophany - a visible manifestation of God. It's in the form of a tornado - perhaps in North Alabama can understand Job's fear better than most. The darkness, the thunder, the lightening... the terrible winds that could wipe him off the face of the planet....

...and God said: ² "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? ³ Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. ⁴ "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.

God says - you oh man who questions the wisdom of what I have allowed... remember that day when I spoke and galaxies spun into existence? Remember the bludgeoning forth of magma on the day I called the land out of the sea? You were there right?

Job 38-39 is the remedy for pride.

Job 38:31-34 (ESV)

³¹ "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? ³² Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children? ³³ Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth? ³⁴ "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover you?

God concludes in **Job 40:2 (ESV)**

² "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it."

Job 40:3–9 (ESV)

³ Then Job answered the Lord and said: ⁴ “Behold, 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 I will proceed no further.”

Then in verse 6...

⁶ Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: ⁷ “Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.

God says, “Hold on, I’m not finished....”

⁸ Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? ⁹ Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?

Job 41:1-9 (ESV)

¹ “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down his tongue with a cord? ² Can you put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook? ³ Will he make many pleas to you? Will he speak to you soft words? ⁴ Will he make a covenant with you to take him for your servant forever? ⁵ Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your girls? ⁶ Will traders bargain over him? Will they divide him up among the merchants? ⁷ Can you fill his skin with harpoons or his head with fishing spears? ⁸ Lay your hands on him; remember the battle—you will not do it again!

KEEP IN MIND - through all of this discourse God never answers why - but rather WHO.

Job asked why? God answered with Who?

That is one of the great keys to enduring through suffering - remember who God is. Remember his power, his character, his goodness...

ILLUSTRATION: Peach Business

*I read about a young Christian who was trying to get into the peach growing business. He had worked hard, invested everything he had in a peach orchard, which had blossomed beautifully. But then a frost came, and it destroyed his entire crop. He didn't go to church the next Sunday, nor the next, nor the next. So his pastor went to see him to find out why. The young fellow said, "Pastor, I'm not coming to church any more. Do you think I can worship a God who cares so little for me that he would let a frost kill all of my peaches?" The preacher replied kindly and wisely, "Son, God loves you better than he loves your peaches. You see, God understands that while peaches can grow without frost, Christians cannot grow without trials. **God is not in the business of growing peaches; He's in the business of growing Christians.**"*

Spurgeon said, “When you cannot trace God’s hand, you must remember to trust God’s heart....

The first question was, Can you Relate?

2. Can you Relate?

Job 9:32–33 (ESV)

³² For he (God) is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. ³³ There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both.

It seemed to Job that the gulf was too great - there was no way God could really understand what he was going through. God ruled on the throne of Heaven, Job suffered on plains of Moab. How could the two possibly relate.

Beyond this - Job suffered in innocence... He wasn't suffering for his sin.. he was suffering because of the evil of Satan... Could God relate?

OH! That there was some way that there could be a mediator... someone who could understand God in his eternal essence... and understand me in my mortal plight.

OH! That he could lay a hand on God and live... and still care enough to lay a hand on me... and bring peace between me and God.

OH! That somehow God could know what it's like to suffer without cause....

Oh but wait... Job... you have no idea what's coming...

Because 2000 years after Job raised this question there came another innocent sufferer... He too cried out - "My God, My God, Why??? Why have you forsaken me???" And for him too - heaven was silent.

Whatever you are going through - you have to remember that God can relate. I have yet to find a single circumstance or suffering of which Jesus would have to say - I can't relate to that.

ILLUSTRATION:

- I heard of a man whose son died prematurely - I reminded him that we serve a God who can relate.
- I heard of a woman who had lies and rumors spread about her - I reminded her that we serve a God who can relate.
- I heard of a young man who had become fascinated with the occult - I reminded him that Satan tempted Jesus to bow down and worship him.

Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Well... there is a third question that is raised in suffering....

3. Can you Resolve?

Is this just the way it is? Will Satan be allowed to ultimately steal, kill and destroy us? No my friend... look at Job 42...

Job 42:10–17 (ESV)

¹⁰ And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.

Never forget that we serve a Just God.

Mark 10:29–30 (ESV)

²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

Friend, no matter what you are going through - it is not over.
The final chapters of Job are like the turning point in a Rocky fight... it looks like Job is down for the count... perhaps Satan has won...

He's lost everything
Except his wife, bless her heart... she's telling him to curse God and die... some theologians say that she's encouraging suicide. What an encourager.
His friends turn against him...

But at the darkest point God says like Rocky Balboa - I didn't hear no bell....

¹² And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. ¹³ He had also seven sons and three daughters.

Oh what a great truth is buried here at the end of Job by the way - Do the math!!!!
Job started out with 7000 sheep... God doubles it and he has 14,000
Job started out with 3,000 camels... God doubles it and he has 6,000

BUT LOOK

Job started out with 10 children... and God doesn't give him 20, he gives him 10.
Why is that? Because Job still has 10 kids in Heaven and now he has 10 more on earth.

Oh, Vance Havner was write - we haven't really lost anything if we know where it is....

¹⁶ And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. ¹⁷ And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

I can't tell you how it will all work out... I can't tell you that you will get what you want when you want it... but I can tell you that it's not over... Jesus says to you what he said to John the Revelator - Behold - I make all things new.