

POW Job 1:1 – 4:6, January 20, 2011

In a place far, far away and in a day long, long ago, there once lived a man renowned for his wealth, wisdom, and faith. His reputation was great throughout the land. His riches and possessions were legendary. His peers and customers respected him for his business ethics. His wisdom earned him the honored place as an elder at the city gates. His integrity was unrivaled and he gave to the poor and needy. His young family was a model of faith and happiness. He lived an idyllic life filled with prosperity and dignity until one day without warning or explanation everything about this man changed. The stock market crashed and he lost all his holdings. That same day all of his children were killed in a mysterious windstorm. In spite of this devastation in his life, his faith remained intact. While still suffering in his grief, he noticed unexplainable sores on his skin. Leprosy, the feared and cursed disease, began spreading over his entire body. He instantaneously became an outcast, no longer seated in the gates of the city but in the city dump. This man's plight drew mourners who attempted to ease his pain; instead they only added to his misery. His counselors sought theological answers to his plight. None were satisfactory.

Human wisdom, then and now, is inadequate to account for the inscrutable ways of God. Some people reason that human suffering exists because God is either not all good or not all-powerful. More problematic is finding a satisfactory explanation for why the righteous suffer. This pursuit is not just theological curiosity but theological practicality, especially when unexplainable hardship, disease, and adversity enter our lives or the lives of those we love. Why do bad things seem to happen to good people while it seems to escape the wicked? Why do the wicked seem to prosper while the righteous suffer? Does God really rule over all things? If so, what kind of God sits silently on the throne of heaven while the righteous call out for deliverance? Is all suffering a direct result of transgressing God's law? Is the severity of human suffering in direct proportion to a person's sin? Does every man have a price by which he will sell out his faith to save his skin? How far will God go to test the faith of His own? Do men worship God because they believe this is the way to garner His favor? Or do those of faith worship God in spite of their hardships and sufferings? How are we to pray when things come crashing down upon us? Does God hear? Does prayer change things?

Welcome to the world of Job. His story is captured in one of the most profound books ever written. It has retained its place in world literature as a masterpiece of poetry and prose. Martin Luther referred to Job as "more magnificent and sublime than any other book of Scripture." It is prophetic as well as poetic. It is a gigantic, sweeping drama, encompassing heaven and earth. Job is the actor on the stage of life who is caught in a struggle between heaven and hell. Behind the earthly scenes, the heavenly director masterfully weaves the actors and their actions to serve His purposes. It is a real human story only God could tell and that is why it remains a bestseller. Let us begin our journey back in time to rediscover the truths of Job.

The Backdrop to Job's Story

Job is mentioned as a real historical figure in Ezekiel along with other righteous men like Noah and Daniel ([Ezekiel 14:14, 20](#)). The New Testament also refers to Job as an example of suffering and patience. An important insight given by James is that Job's story reveals the compassion and mercy of God, which is often overshadowed by the tragic events in Job's life ([James 5:10-11](#)). This is so typical of the way many people read the Old

Testament. There is an inclination to let the earthly drama overshadow the heavenly drama and our sight of God.

Job certainly is one of the oldest biblical stories. The events and circumstances alluded to in Job seem to place it during the patriarchal times - perhaps during the time of Jacob. His story, however, could have been written from reliable oral sources much later by Moses, Solomon, or Ezra.

Job's Theology

Job's perspective of God is the most important thing about him. He had an adequate and appropriate theology, but was still mystified about God's ways. In the midst of his unexplainable suffering, he called out to God for answers to his prayers. He wanted explanations to things for which he had no answers. What Job could not reconcile was why he had been appointed to suffer? Job also pondered why God would ever be pleased for the righteous to suffer. Job sincerely believed God was all-wise (cf. [Job 38:36-37](#); [39:26](#); [Isaiah 55:8-9](#)), but by what wisdom had He assigned the righteous to suffer? God created the world and all the things in it out of His infinite wisdom. Job believed God's ways were far beyond his own finite understanding. Yet even with this great theology, Job's sufferings seemed to have no purpose or explanation. What he lacked was perspective. He did not have the perspective of heaven which we enjoy as the readers of his life. We are privileged to see behind the curtain of time and see God on the throne. We are able to see that the trials he faced were not because he was unrighteous, but because he was righteous. This was foreign to him, but not to those of us who have read the life of Christ. Job's theology was far more developed than we might give credit to those living before Moses. He, like others dating back to Abraham and before, had great faith in God and His promise of redemption. Even with great theology, Job's knowledge of God and understanding in his crisis was blurred by tears, grief, and pain. His story should be read with an eye to the same possibilities in our own lives.

Who Was Job?

The story begins with a simple statement about a man in the land of Uz. The geographic location of this land is not certain. Some suggest it is near the ancient city of Damascus which borders the desert. It may be identified with Abraham's nephew who was named Uz ([Genesis 22:21](#)). But wherever it existed, it was a thriving region for trade, commerce, and crops.

Essential to our introduction of Job is his character. The suspense and drama revolve around his righteousness. His righteous character is attested to not only by men, but by God. What was this man like? First Job is described as "blameless" by the author and later, twice by God Himself. The Lord said of Job, *"There is none like My servant Job on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil"* ([Job 1:8](#); [2:3](#)). To be blameless is to be a man of integrity above reproach. It does not mean Job was sinless or morally perfect—this can only be assigned to Christ. Secondly, Job is considered "upright" ([Job 27:7-11](#); [29:7](#); [29:21-24](#); [31:13-21](#); [31:32](#)). To be upright is to walk with distinction, not diverting from the path set forth by God. Job was highly esteemed for his moral standards and commitment to the truth. Thirdly, he was a "God fearer." This is the ultimate compliment that can be given any man or woman. Job had a legitimate awe and appropriate

reverence for God that influenced every aspect of his life and values. Finally, because Job feared God, *"he shunned evil"*

Who Was Job's God?

Job's God was gracious and benevolent ([Job 1:2-3; 2:10](#)). God made Job prosperous beyond his greatest expectations ([Job 2:10](#)). The very list of his possessions expresses the goodness of God. He had a wife, seven sons and three daughters; the number of children (being ten) numerically represents God's number of complete provision. Job's children were the glory and joy of his life (cf. [Proverbs 17:6; Psalm 127:3-5](#)). The Lord also completely provided possessions for Job as seen in the number ten again. The Lord blessed the work of his hands by giving him 7,000 sheep for food and clothing plus 3,000 camels for hauling merchandise. Everything he enjoyed was a gift from God. Job believed that we are to accept adversity with the same gratitude that we accept prosperity. We, like Job, do not know what we will face in days ahead. God has ordained that this knowledge be hidden from us. That is why we are to live by faith. [Psalm 62:10](#) warns us: *"If riches increase, do not set your heart on them."* Wealth, relationships, and health can be taken from us so quickly. Life is not to be mourned or squandered; rather it is to be enjoyed while time, resources, and health permit. That is the beauty of Job's story. It is a reminder to live every day as a gift from God. God is immutable, but His ways are not always revealed to us. He is most pleased when we are pleased to radically trust in Him.

The Lord Questions Satan

Without any hint of surprise, the Lord questioned Satan's walk when he asked, *"From where do you come?"* ([Job 1:7](#)). There is no question about God's supremacy or omniscience in His asking this question. Even as the holy angels had to give an account of their walk, so Satan was required to declare his intentions and ways. Satan replied with a self-righteous smirk on his face, *"Going to and fro on the earth..."* ([Zechariah 1:10; 4:10; Luke 22:3; 1 Peter 5:8](#)). Satan, however, answered the Lord with these words as if he were the conqueror claiming his territory. His agenda, which is to slander God and Job, was not hidden to the Lord. Here is the hard-hitting reality we must all face; not only do we struggle in this life with the desires of our sinful flesh, but also with an adversary who is determined to seek us ill. Fortunately for us and Job, God is sovereign! As much as we regret that these things are true, they are hard-hitting realities of what it means for the just to live by faith.

Satan's Enmity and God's Purposes

Unknown to Job, however, was the agreement made in heaven between God and Satan. On the very day Job performed his priestly duties to honor the Lord, one courier after another arrived with bad news to intensify Job's shock and broken heart. Twice Satan used evil men to rob Job of his possessions and kill his servants. The wicked still serve Satan's evil purposes as well as God's holy purposes. Two messengers also came together announcing destruction by the forces of nature. Satan not only used the wicked but he also used the forces of nature to work his evil. But again, be reminded these things came only after God permitted Satan to have this power.

Through it all, Job's faith was tried and proven true ([Job 1:20-21](#)). The righteous' love and faith for the Lord does not have to be dependent upon God's blessing of things (cf. [Psalms 49:17; I Timothy 6:7; Ecclesiastes 5:13-16](#)). It can even thrive and flourish

through tears and sorrow (cf. [John 11:35-36](#)). Job's adversity awakened within him an appreciation for all of God's blessings that had been previously enjoyed. He realized these blessings were no more deserved than the sufferings he endured. He glorified the Lord, not knowing why he was going through this appointed time of suffering. James tells us Job's suffering revealed the mercy and compassion of God ([James 5:11](#)).

God's Goodness

Let us clarify a few basic doctrinal truths about God's goodness before we return to Job. Providence is God's continual perfect guidance and provision for all of His creation by which He accomplishes His good pleasure through the power of His sovereign will. God's providential plan is good because God is good. Sometimes His goodness comes to us with severe mercy through adversity, heartbreak, and pain. That is why we must have an adequate theology of the goodness of God to better understand how He uses suffering, loss, and pain for His good and ours. It is with this brief theological sidebar that we return, now, to Job.

Job's Three Friends

As the curtain rises in Job's drama, three friends enter the hedge God put around him ([Job 2:11-13](#)). We are told they heard of Job's adversity and each one came from his own place. We will learn much more about Job's counselors later in the story. Eliphaz, the Temanite, is mentioned first because he was the oldest friend. He came from Teman, a famous city of Edom known for its wisdom ([Jeremiah 49:7](#)). Teman was a grandson of Esau. As we will learn, he is the most gracious and conciliatory of the three friends. He claimed that much of his advice came from supernatural revelation and tradition.

The second friend is Bildad, the Shuhite. The Shuhites may date back to Shuah, who was Abraham's youngest son by Keturah. He came with more of a scholarly and traditional perspective. His favorite motto was "*back to the fathers*" from which he quoted ancient proverbs.

The third friend is Zophar, the Naamathite. Not much is known about him or his land of origin. He is the youngest and most sarcastic, dogmatic friend. He prided himself as the straight shooter and the self-appointed, fix-it man. He will accuse Job of such undisclosed and unrepentant sin, that he deserved to be punished even more severely by God. With friends like these, Job did not need any more enemies.

How Should Job's Story Affect Us?

The record of Job's sufferings awakens in all of us a sense of fear and hope. Only the Lord knows what any of us will face in the future. Will it be bankruptcy or prosperity? Will it bring sickness, dementia, paralysis, or years of good health? Will we soon lose the most precious people in our lives? Or will we live to enjoy many more years with our family and friends? These uncertainties remind us that "the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (cf. [Proverbs 9:10](#)). As we face an uncertain future, we who trust in God through faith in Christ, know God is good and His providence is good, regardless of what He allows to enter our lives. He will remain good no matter how dark the night and how great the pain. Everything

serves God's holy and perfect purposes. *"I had far rather walk, as I do, in daily terror of eternity, than feel that this was only a children's game in which all the contestants would get equally worthless prizes in the end."*(Elliot).