



Job: Life in the midst of suffering

Introduction

The book of Job is an amazing story about a man who lived in ancient times. Job's life is an incredible account of a man who, despite losing everything, was able to grow in his understanding of and relationship with God.

The book begins with a narrative of Job's life and what happens to him. After this is a large section of poetry, where Job discusses his circumstances with his friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Elihu) and God. At the end of this book is another narrative that recounts the rest of Job's life.

This particular study will look at several segments of scripture that consider Job's attitude and beliefs towards the suffering he experiences in his life. For a complete understanding of the book of Job, it is important to read and study the whole book, however, this study is a snapshot into the character and experience of Job.

1. The first section of scripture we will look at is the narrative of Job's life and what led to the struggle that he faces for the rest of the book (Job 1-2)
2. The second section of scripture is part of God's answer to Job, considering all that Job and his friends have said (Job 40)
3. The third section of scripture is Job's confession and repentance for his attitudes towards God (Job 42)

The hope for this study is that you will understand the attitude we should have towards suffering or trials in our lives. We will look to Job and his experience of horrendous suffering and consider what we can learn from the way that he reacted and behaved.

Section One: Job 1 - 2

This first section is an account of Job's life leading up to and including the horrible events that happen to Job.

Observation

In the passage highlight these terms:

- God, his titles, and pronouns
- Job and pronouns
- Fear
- Satan
- Curse
- Each message brought to Job from the messengers

Job's Character and Wealth

1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. **2** There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. **3** He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. **4** His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. **5** And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed^[a] God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Satan Allowed to Test Job

6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan^[b] 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? **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." **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.

Satan Takes Job's Property and Children

13 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, **14** and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, **15** and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants^[c] with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." **16** While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." **17** While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." **18** While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, **19** and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

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

²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

Satan Attacks Job's Health

2 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. ² And 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." ³ 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? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." ⁴ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. ⁵ But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." ⁶ And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."

⁷ So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸ And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

⁹ Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." ¹⁰ But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"^[d] In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Interpretation

Q: What were the different ways in which God allowed Satan to impact Job?

Q: In 1:9, Satan asks God, 'Does Job fear God for no reason?'. Simply put, Satan is asking God if Job only fears God because he has a good life. What are all the good things in Job's life (verses 2-3)?

Q: 1:21 What does Job mean when he says, "... and naked I shall return."?

Q: 2:9 What does Job's wife say to her husband?

Q: What is her attitude towards their suffering?

Job's wife suggesting that it is not worth following God if there is nothing to gain from it, is an example of someone fearing God for a reason. Her reason for fearing God is because she is scared of losing all the wealth and prestige that she and her husband enjoy.

Q: What is Job's response to his wife?

Job is saying to his wife that they worshipped God while their life was good. He then asks her why then they shouldn't worship God when life becomes difficult. Job's perspective is that God is constant and worthy of praise whether life for them is good or bad.

Application

Q: When bad things happen to you, what tends to be your go to attitude?

Q: Do you blame God when bad things happen?

Q: Would you still worship God if you lost all the good things in your life? Why?

Q: Do you fear God? If so, why do you fear God?

From this passage we can learn:

- That suffering can happen to anyone, for seemingly no reason.
- That some people will encourage us to turn away from God.
- That God is always worthy of worship, no matter the circumstance.

Section Two: Job 40

This section of the study is located towards the end of the book. Prior to this section Job has had a long debate with his friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar.

This is followed by Job's fourth friend Elihu rebuking the false things that were said towards God by Job and his three friends.

God then speaks to Job and rebukes him for the false things that he has said. This next section of scripture will look at this in more detail.

Observation

Highlight

- Job and his pronouns
- God and His pronouns and titles
- All the verbs
- Each question God asks of Job

40 And the LORD said to Job:

² "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?

He who argues with God, let him answer it."

Job Promises Silence

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."

The LORD Challenges Job

⁶ Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

⁷ "Dress for action^[a] like a man;

I will question you, and you make it known to me.

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?

¹⁰ “Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity;
clothe yourself with glory and splendor.

11 Pour out the overflowings of your anger,
and look on everyone who is proud and abase him.

12 Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low
and tread down the wicked where they stand.

13 Hide them all in the dust together;
bind their faces in the world below.^[b]

¹⁴ Then will I also acknowledge to you
that your own right hand can save you.

Interpretation

Q: In Job 40:1, what does the title “faultfinder” mean?

Q: Do you think it is possible for Job to do all the things that God commands him, in verses 10 to 14? Why?

The point of verses 10 to 14 is that no one can do these things, only God can. Only God is adorned with majesty and dignity and clothed with Glory and splendor. Only God can abase and bring low the proud. God is telling Job that he cannot save himself (v14), only God can.

Q: What are the two questions God asks Job in verse 8?

Verse 8 highlights that throughout the discussion between Job and his friends, Job claimed that God was wrong to allow Job to suffer and Job condemned God so that he can be right. Read the following verses for some examples of this.

Q: Job 9:15-23 What are Job’s critiques of God?

Q: Job 16:7-14 What are all the things that Job says that God has done to him?

Job is wrong to accuse God in these ways. While Job has suffered greatly for no reason, he must trust that God is almighty and in control of all situations, whether he understand the reason or not.

Application

Q: Has there ever been a time when you have been upset or mad with God? Why?

Q: Think back to a time when something bad happened to you and answer the following questions:

a. Do you think God had planned it?

b. Did you learn anything from this? What did you learn?

c. Can you see any benefit to come from it? What was it?

d. Did it draw you closer to God? How?

Q: Do you think it is possible to understand everything God wants for our lives? Why? Read Isaiah 55:8-9

From this passage we come to learn

- That Job was wrong to accuse God and argue with Him about everything he went through
- God is expressing to Job just how great he is

- That Job is only a man and cannot totally understand what God's plan is

Section Three: Job 42:1-6

The final section of this study is in the final chapter of the book of Job, and it is Job's confession and change of heart.

Observation

Highlight

- Job and his pronouns
- God and His pronouns and titles
- The things that Job didn't have
- Ears and eyes
- Understand and know

42 Then Job replied to the LORD:

² "I know that you can do all things;
no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

³ You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.

⁴ "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.'

⁵ My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.

⁶ Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes."

Interpretation

Q: What is Job repenting for (verse 3)?

Job is repenting for the way that he spoke throughout his discussions with his friends. Through his suffering the sin in Job's life became apparent. Job became proud and somewhat arrogant. Job thought he knew better than God. If Job had not lost all that he did, this sin may not have been brought into the light.

Q: What does Job say in verse 5?

Q: Job 42:5 - What is the difference between Job's ears having heard of God, and Job's eyes now seeing God?

Q: Job 42:6 - What does repent in dust and ashes mean?

The idea associated with dust is that it is "nothing." Dust is associated with lowliness or humility. When Job repented in dust and ashes, he was repenting in humility.

Even though Job had suffered without doing anything wrong, it was important for him to continue to live faithfully and humbly in God's sight. Job lived out the command found in 1 Peter 5:6 (and received the accompanying promise): "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."

Application

Q: Have you ever felt sorry for your attitude towards God? What did you do about it?

Q: Think of a time when you have come closer to God, what was it that drew you closer?

Q: In 42:2 Job says that God can do all things and no purpose of his can be thwarted. Is this a comforting idea to you? Why?

From this passage we can learn

- That God can do all things and is in complete control no matter the situation
- That through our suffering, if we repent for any sin in our lives and come to God in humility, we can build our relationship with Him.

Conclusion

There are three main points that we can take away from Job's life that can help us in our day to day life, even when we are faced with suffering.

1) We cannot always know why we suffer

This is made really clear through Job's life, and the suffering that he endured for no apparent reason. God is the most high, most powerful being and his reasoning for our lives is far beyond our understanding (Isaiah 55:8-9). While we may not know why we are suffering, we can know that God is trustworthy and has our best interests at heart (Psalm 100:5)

For example, when Jesus was tortured and crucified, all his disciples had no idea the plan that God had and the good that would come because of this suffering.

2) We have hope

Even though Job suffered greatly, he repented and acknowledged that God is all powerful and worthy of respect. We know that God has our best interests at heart, he sent his one and only son to die so that we can have relationship with him (John 3:16).

If we put our hope and faith in Jesus we can receive eternal life, which is the end of all suffering (John:13-14, Revelation 21:4)

3) Suffering can deepen our relationship with God

Often people think that God is being mean or abusive when we suffer, the same way that Job did (Job 9:15-23). However, that's not true. God uses trials and suffering the way a surgeon uses a scalpel, to extract the sin from our lives. A refinement of righteousness (Psalm 119:71, James 1:2-3).

The suffering Job went through brought out the hidden sin in his life. His attitudes towards God were made clear when he was at his lowest. His eyes have now been opened to his remaining imperfection (Job 42:5)

Closing Statement

Suffering is present in all our lives. It is almost certain that at some point in our lives we will question God's plan and authority, asking him "Why is this happening to me?", or "How could you let this happen?".

After learning from Job, we have come to understand three big truths:

Firstly, while we may not know why bad things have happened, God is always in control. If we can't handle a difficult situation, then we should remember God can easily bring us out of it. Trust him. Trust that he has a plan for your life.

Secondly, we have Jesus. No matter how bad it gets, we always have Jesus. We no longer have to fear death. Jesus defeated death. We can live our life with complete freedom, knowing that we have and will always have an eternal relationship with Jesus our God.

And thirdly, we can know that if something bad is happening to us we can look to God to support us, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you" (Psalms 55:22). Through trials and suffering God will bring us closer to him, and we can enjoy a fuller and more satisfying life with God.

Written by Garth Kinley, September 2021