

“My Servant Job” (Job 1:6–12)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (11/3/2019)

Introduction

1. The background of the book of Job

Job is considered a theological and literary masterpiece whose author remains unknown. The time of writing varies between 1500 and 500 B.C. Jewish Scholars held that Job was written before Moses, making Job the first book of Scripture. It is only recently that some argue for Job’s being written at the time of Solomon.

2. The historical setting of the book is also vague.

Job lived in Uz (“counsel”), identified either as Teman in northern Arabia or, recently, as Edom. He was not of Abraham’s lineage, but he knew God and walked in His ways. Some have recently identified Job with Jobab, a royal descendant of Esau, making Job the second king of Edom (Genesis 36:33) This is not likely to be the case.

3. Job and his friends wrestled with the issue of suffering and its cause.

a. Job’s friends sought to answer this question with three main human ideas: (1) Suffering is punishment for sin. (2) When a “righteous” person suffers, it proves his hypocrisy. (3) Suffering is supposed to be corrective, provoking repentance. This view is the basis of the prosperity gospel.

b. Job, on the other hand, struggled to understand his suffering in view of his own integrity and walk with the Lord. (1) God has reasons for the suffering His servants endure that they may not understand in their trial. (2) Suffering is by divine providence, and God is fully sovereign in all His ways (Philippians 1:29). (3) All believers understand that God loves them and works all things for their good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29).

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

4. Job teaches us: (1) The need for patience in suffering (James 5:11); (2) The sovereignty of God and the submission of His creatures (James 4:4–10); (3) That suffering does not always result from sin (1 Peter 2:19–25), demonstrating God’s grace, and (3) testing the spirit of His people, making His people examples to others. Well-grounded faith cannot be shaken (Ephesians 4:13, 14). God will never forsake His own (Hebrews 13:5, 6). The right response to suffering will prove that people can and do serve God with pure and unselfish motives (1 Timothy 1:5).

Today’s message will focus on three points: (1) We are in a spiritual war, but God is clearly sovereign in it. All His people are more than conquerors through Christ. (2) Job survived his ordeal because his faith was secure in eternal hope revealed. (3) All we really need to know is to know God.

I. Spiritual War

1. Observe Job’s spiritual character

- a. *Job* is a name of uncertain origin, but it has been suggested that it comes from an Arabic root meaning “to repent” or “to return to God.”
 - b. Job 1:1 lists four things that made up his character.
 - 1) He was “blameless” or “perfect,” meaning that he was whole or complete, not sinless but earnestly pursuing God’s will for his life (Deuteronomy 8:13; Matthew 5:8; 1 Kings 8:61).
 - 2) He was *upright* or straight, meaning that he was motivated to obey all God required of him (Proverbs 15:21).
 - 3) His *fear of God* produced his blamelessness (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10) because God sees and knows all, which will be judged by Him (Proverbs 5:21; Genesis 16:13; Job 28:28).
 - 4) As a consequence, he “*turned away from evil*,” knowing that God watched and recorded all his thoughts and deeds (Proverbs 3:7).

In spite of Job’s righteousness, God allowed Satan to test him, knowing that Job’s trial was to be in his own best interest.
2. The book opens with a view into the divine counsel where the *sons of God* are to appear before the Lord.
- a. This summons required that all heavenly beings (angels) appear to give account to God of their activities (Psalm 82).
 - b. A heavenly being known as “*the satan*” (*accuser* or *adversary*), acting as a prosecutor, also came before God. He is assumed to be the devil who opposes and resists God and His kingdom.
3. This revelation of the affairs of God’s moral rule shows that Satan and his minions may be powerful but are not all-powerful.
- a. They are on a divine leash and able to do only what God permits them to do.
 - b. What they are permitted to do may cause what seems to be great harm or damage, but they cannot cause permanent harm or loss to God’s purposes or His people.
4. This enemy of God, who fancied himself to be equal to God, was nevertheless accountable to God.
- a. Satan does not willingly submit himself as demonstrated by his obvious contempt for God. When God demanded a recounting of his behavior, he was evasive (1:7). This contemptuous answer to God’s inquiry provoked the rebuke, “*Have you considered my servant Job?*” (1:8). The Lord used the solid spiritual character of a supposed inferior (Job) to rebuke the rebellious and stubborn character of an angel created in holiness to serve God at His throne.
 - b. Thus, the Lord’s raising of the subject of Job’s character serves to inform the reader that the spiritual attack Job experienced was divinely designed to demonstrate to this rebel God’s ability to keep and preserve his own. Job’s suffering really had nothing to do with Job.

II. Eternal Hope

- 1. Satan’s vicious attack on Job came suddenly and with great devastation.

- a. God did not warn or inform Job of either the attack, His purpose in it, nor what Job should do about it.
 - b. God was not testing Job to see if he could stand up to his suffering nor to determine how Job would respond to it, for God already knew Job's faith.
 - c. Job was to prove to Satan that a redeemed sinner can and will serve God from pure and selfless motives.
2. Satan's ambush was designed to tempt Job to curse God to His face, and God knew he would not.
- a. Taking his possessions and even his family failed to move Job's confidence in God (1:20–22).
 - b. Even after his wife's foolish appeal to the final straw, Job's health, he would not curse God.
 - c. However, the suffering began to wear on Job's faith, leading him to doubt, question, and even despair of God's goodness. However, Job never succumbed to Satan's attempt to get him to sin against God.

The book's length prevents an extensive review of the arguments and debate of his friends, but they held to the prevailing view that suffering is punishment for unrepented sin. Sadly, Job bought into this false premise, as do many believers today, which led to his despair. There is a false doctrine based on faulty interpretation that God is obligated to provide a blessed, happy, prosperous, and worry-free life to those who pay some tribute to God.

3. The real battle requires Spirit-enabled resolve to die to self and endure, persevering against all obstacles in joyful obedience to Christ. This resolve requires every true believer to feed on the Word of God, to trust His goodness, and to hold fast to the hope as set forth His promises. Like Job, we must *"turn away from evil"* and to repent when sin is discovered.
4. Job had searching questions forming the heart of his patient endurance as proof that he was a truly righteous man.
- a. In 9:1 Job responds to Bildad's assertion that Job needed to repent. Bildad charged, *"If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation"* (8:5, 6). Job's question to Bildad: *"How can a man be in the right before God?"* (9:2). Job longed for God to vindicate his righteousness in his trouble. He knew that he was a sinner and that, to the best of his knowledge, he obeyed the light he had to be right with God. Job was fully willing to submit to God if sin caused his suffering. He wanted to know what the sin was and what required for him to make it right. Thank God, this question is clearly answered in the NT with Jesus Christ, who makes it possible for sinners to be justified (Romans 3:25, 26).
 - b. In chapter 13 Job responds to Zophar's argument that Job's suffering is not near what he deserves. *"Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves"* (11:6). In 14:14 Job asked the greater question, *"If a man dies, shall he live again?"* This is the foundation hope in salvation. Job recognized that his suffering pointed to the inevitable truth that, because of sin, *"man wastes away like a rotten thing"* (13:28). Yet, there is hope: *"Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face"* (13:15). Even a cut-down tree will sprout again (14:7). We should expect God's image-bearers do like-

wise. That the redeemed will experience resurrection comes in 19:23–27: *“Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!”* How can one not read these words and see the great eternal hope sustaining Job, even when his wrong views create some doubt and discouragement.

III. Knowing God

1. In the final chapters, Job is humbled then restored.
 - a. All the wisdom of four men could not bring light to Job’s darkness. Indeed, God rebuked these comfortless “comforters”: *“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”* (32:2). God cannot be known by reasoning. He must reveal the truth to man. Salvation is the sovereign work of God.
 - b. In chapters 38–42, God reveals Himself to Job in all His power and greatness. He never explains to Job the reason for his misery but simply asks, “Job, who am I?” probing Job’s understanding of God and His workings.
2. Job began to see the greatness of God and, in the grace of God, repented (42:2–6): *“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. . . . I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes”*.
3. Job was restored.
 - a. In the final chapter the wrath of God was kindled against Job’s friends for their “wise” counsel. They had *“not spoken of me [God] what is right, as my servant Job has”* (42:7).
 - b. The friends were to go to “my servant Job” to offer sacrifice and pray for them. God would accept Job’s prayer (v. 9).
 - c. When Job prayed for his friends, God restored his family and fortune.

What to Take Away

We know that the prosperity of the wicked is only short-lived (Psalm 37:1, 2). God’s people are often in trouble and sufferings. According to Romans 8:23 and 29, in their correct response to suffering, believers become more like Christ. God is more interested in our eternal good than in our temporal happiness and comfort. Only when He graciously enables our seeking Him in His Word and holding to His promise to be found of Him, will we find the joy and courage to endure. *“But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him’— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God”* (1 Corinthians 2:9, 10).