

Introduction

What are the answers to the questions that come up within the book of Job? What are the questions and answers to the questions that the book of Job implies? To tackle this piece of wisdom literature is a monumental task because the book is "both deeply moving and incredibly complex" (Dillard, *IOT* 199). Therefore, I want to set out everything in this message in the pattern of questions and answers. We will cover questions raised within the dialogue, those raised by the epilogue, and those raised by the prologue.

1A. Questions raised within the dialogue

Is Job righteous? Job says yes and the friends say no.

Is God righteous? The friends say yes and therefore they conclude that Job must be unrighteous in some exceedingly sinful way. Job holds to his uprightness (though excessively due to the pain and passion of his experience and the debate that afflicted his soul). Therefore, he faults God as unjust and he "demands" answers from God (31.6, 35-37).

How does God's speech speak to these questions? When God finally steps into the debate, we expect Him to indicate which side is right. However, in His speeches from the whirlwind, He does not comment on either question. He does not assert His righteousness and confirm the view of the friends. The Lord does not answer Job and confirm Job's uprightness (as He does in the prologue). In fact, He faults Job for faulting Him in order to justify himself and for doing so without wisdom (38.1-30). He calls for an answer from Job, the faultfinder (40.1-2): do you condemn me to justify yourself and have you an arm like God so that you can judge all the proud (40.7-13)? If you can judge all the wicked with divine strength and adorn yourself with divine majesty and dignity, then I will grant your self-justification and that your own right hand can save you (40.14). Thus, there is no answer for Job's court case where he said he would stand like a prince (showing God his princely righteousness and insisting that God explain His actions).

However, the Lord owes Job no answer; He is sovereign and owes man nothing (He is debtor to none, 41.11; cf. the use of this text in Rom 11.33-35). With majestic *a fortiori* argument, the Lord drives home the point that no one can stand before Him, stir up His anger (like stirring up the anger of a crocodile), and not be laid low (41.8-10). He shows that the hope of man who contends with the Lord is false (41.9) and the consequences will be far more devastating than doing hand-to-hand combat with a crocodile (41.8).

Thus, from the dialogue, we have no settled answer to the questions raised there (Is Job righteous? Is God righteous?). Job and his friends take surprisingly different positions and God, surprisingly, does not decide the matter between them and declare a winner. In fact, God says things about Job that appear contradictory to His words about him in the prologue. Thus, although the suffering theme hits us in the face and stays there like a painful bruise, the book captures our thoughts and takes them captive in a different direction. It forces us to stretch and wonder about life and the ways of God with a sense of longing for answers we apparently cannot have. We long for both emotional and intellectual satisfaction as we ponder the heavy subject matter. Accordingly, we want to read past the dialogues to the epilogue to find some answers.

2A. Questions posed by the epilogue

In the epilogue, the Lord continues to speak (though the record is no longer poetic but prosaic). His words are now conclusive. The dialogue is past. What does this add to the righteousness questions about Job and God? (Is Job righteous? Is God righteous?). Instead of direct answers, what God says adds more complication. We now have to wonder how 42.7 can be true in terms of the book as whole.

1) How is it that the friends spoke wrongly about the Lord (42.7)?

Interestingly, though they defended the Lord's justice, they spoke wrongly about the Lord and Job who challenged God's justice spoke what was right about the Lord! Where is their error?

Their error is in how they coordinated the justice of God with human sin. They wrongly put God in a mechanical box. We might think of this misinterpretation in terms of a retribution triangle. Picture three points that represent three statements that cannot all be true at the same time: God is just, Job is righteous, and Job suffers. If any two are true, the third must be false. A) If God is just and Job is righteous then Job should not be suffering, but he does suffer. B) If God is just and Job suffers then Job is not righteous. C) If Job is righteous and he suffers, then God is unjust. The friends opt for B: God is just and Job is suffering so Job is unrighteous. They all conclude that Job is a great sinner because God's actions are predictable, even mechanistically predictable.

They did not speak correctly about how God justly carries out His purposes. They failed to see how the blessings and cursings of God's justice make up a general rule that holds true in the end but that has many exceptions within the unfolding of His purposes for history. They failed to acknowledge the sovereign freedom of God in the accomplishment of His holy will.

2) How is it that Job spoke rightly about the Lord (42.7)?

How can this be the case in light of his faulting of the Lord (that the Lord pointed out in His rebuke of Job)? What has changed as we reach the epilogue? Is this a contradiction of the words of God in the dialogue?

Job had used the retribution triangle in a different way than the friends. He had the mechanical view of God's actions in blessing and cursing obedience versus sin, but he used his own uprightness (going into the trial) to fault the Lord. If I am righteous (as a sinner walking uprightly with God), and if I suffer (exceedingly and excessively), then God must be unjust. We know from the prologue that he is a righteous-sinner, but the word of commendation in 42.7 refers to what Job said *about God* not about himself.

Thus, we wonder how God can commend him for speaking rightly.

Whatever the right speaking may be, it must be the words of a saint in tension. There is no contradiction but there is plenty of tension of a sinner-saint. For example, his use of the retribution triangle stands in tension with his view of God's sovereignty. (How is it different from the tension of the friends? God does not commend them. In addition, the Lord did not speak to them from the whirlwind as He did to Job. He speaks to them here in rebuke. Of course, His speech to Job was a rebuke.)

Job's right speaking must be what He said about God in various stages of his trial. It is a blanket statement of right speaking that pertains to the following times:

Before the dialogue

In the lament

In the dialogue with his friends

In the dialogue with God

1) First (1.20-22), He spoke rightly in affirming the absolute sovereignty of God in disposing of the affairs of his life through murdering Chaldeans and Sabeans (1.13-17) and through a great wind that caused the oldest brother's house to fall on his children, killing them all (1.18-19).

When Satan struck Job with loathsome sores (1.7), and his wife told him to curse God and die (1.9), "he did not sin with his lips" (1.10). Instead, he said, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (1.10; this does not come from a mechanical view of divine justice).

He acknowledged that God is sovereign and active in human history. Even the evil acts of men are within His control serving His will. The "evils" that befall us from the created world (such as windstorms) are in His control so much so that when people die, we worship the Lord and say, "this too is from His hand." There is no inferring from these happenings to injustice on

the part of God. Job worships and praises God as the sovereign Lord of all things (the earth, the sea, and all in them from all the properties of matter to all the actions of men).

2) Second, in the lament (chapter 3), Job revealed the intensity of his pain of body and soul. He curses the day of his birth wishing in powerful language that he had never been born. He therefore asks the “why” question with deep feeling (11, 12, 20, and 23; cf. Christ asking “why?”).

Per the context of His affirmation of the sovereignty of God, Job questions the purpose of God as least in a hinted way. Instead of God placing a hedge about him (as Satan said He did, 1.10), Job asks, “why is light given to a man...whom God has hedged in?” (3.23). However, there is no faulting of God as unrighteous or denying of God as sovereign. He still affirms the sovereignty of God in the afflictions (*God has hedged me in; these things are from His hand*). He is asking why God gave him life in light of the fact that God has hedged him in.

3) Third, in the dialogue with the friends, he affirms that we find wisdom only in God and that the fear of the Lord is wisdom for man (28.12-14, 23, 28). Granted, he also questioned the justice of God and over emphasized his own righteousness. He faulted God in order to justify himself. Indeed, Job shows the tension of the sinner-saint that faults God to justify himself on one hand *while exalting God* on the other hand. (Have the friends also affirmed that wisdom is only in God? We seem to need to ponder what is distinctively right about Job’s words in contrast to the words of the friends.)

4) Fourth, the dialogue continues with God directly. Confronted by the Lord, Job spoke words of repentance. He shows himself to be a sinner-saint *in repentance*. Now he accents the sinner part of his life without self-justification or over emphasis on his uprightness.

In 40.4-5, Job expresses repentance. He turns away from trying to answer God in self-justification. There is no word about God here except the implication of His greatness that demands acknowledgment of our smallness (v. 4, I am of small account).

Then after further interrogation by the Lord, Job expresses repentance again but this time *his words about God are explicit*. He speaks of God’s matchless power (42.2a), His irrepressible purposes (42.2b), and His inexpressible knowledge (42.3).

In a word, Job confessed the complete, wise, and irresistible sovereignty of God over all the affairs of life; he confessed these things on bended knee though crushed and hedged in by the Lord. This is right speaking about the Lord.

3A. Questions suggested by the prologue

1) Does Job or any saint or Christian serve God for no reason? Would any saint serve God without a hedge of blessing that provides possessions, family, and health?

Job gave his answers, his right answers, while he was still *in* the trial! He spoke in firm repentance *before* his restoration. He did not focus on his healing or need for anything; He humbled himself and glorified God. The answer to Satan’s challenge is clear: Job never cursed God to His face (though it may be that he verged on doing so and came close in how he faulted God and demanded answers from God).

2) How can this be?

With all of our frailty, and with all of our tensions as sinner-saints, how can we serve God even if He removes the hedge of blessings of possessions, family, and health (or when it appears to be the case that He has done these things)?

The book teaches us that God enters our experience. He makes His presence known to us in His word to us; even the word of rebuke is a gracious word of the Lord present with us. This causes us to see Him, to know Him, and to repent and acknowledge His just, wise, loving and sovereign purposes for us (cf. discipline w/ love, Job 5.17; Heb 12.5-6 &).

3) How can there be mercy to such sinners as we are (cf. James 5.11)?

Answering this question intensifies our wonder even more. The book of Job teaches us about the wisdom of God that is in Christ who is wisdom personified and humanized in flesh and blood for our redemption.

It is by sacrifice (Job 1.5) that restoration from the effects of the fall (Gen 3.15) will come. It is by the wisdom of God that resides in Christ. He is the seed of Eve that is Isaac on the altar. He is the one who suffers at the hands of his friends and then intercedes for them from the jaws of suffering. This turns God's wrath away. God's wisdom is Jacob's ladder (Gen 28.12). The angels ascend and descend on the Son of Man (Jn. 1.51).

4) What is our hope in the presence of suffering in a final way?

The book reveals the promise of our restoration in the restoration of Job.

We should note the profound fact that we all will experience the loss of family, possessions, and health *in the end* unless we live until the second coming of Christ. Death strips us of all we have! Job's experience before the restoration is truly "everyman's" experience. By aging, dying, and death, our condition parallels Job's condition. Our experiences are not exactly like Job's experience. We may not have our possessions stolen, we may not see our children die before we die, and we may not have long battles with ill health. However, these things could happen to us, but they may not. No matter what transpires in our lives before we die, it is certain that death brings us into a situation parallel with Job's situation for death brings us a decisive loss of family, things, and physical health.

The fact that Job is everyman should make us think about the point of the epilogue in context of the prologue. The point is not to teach that the righteous who suffer will find a double portion of earthly things in this life in such a way that believers have the promise of utopia in the here and now. We know this from a number of facts.

a) Job's children died even though they were under the protection of his intercession (1.5). In other words, they are righteous, not in themselves but by sacrifice, and death overtakes them in their youth.

b) The wicked often live to old age with prosperity (cf. 21.7). This is an age-old difficulty for the people of God that has them ask, "Why do the unrighteous prosper?"

c) If the point of the epilogue was to teach that believers will always have temporal blessings here and now, this would contradict the teaching of the book on the sovereignty of God in the way He administers justice (He is not in a mechanical box and no formula can explain His ways).

Therefore, the epilogue accents the experience of Job as a priest who is exalted after His suffering. This anticipates the post-resurrection exaltation of the great high priest of our souls, the Lord Jesus, who interceded for us in His suffering but who passed through the heavens to receive the blessing from God of comfort, family, and friends.

Conclusion (also in the form of a question)

What is our basic duty that relates to living wisely in the presence of suffering?

It is to cling to God in faith trusting His wisdom and sovereignty. This involves our speech in confession of repentance and confession of the sovereignty of God.

a) We are to confess our comparative smallness before God's greatness and acknowledge that we should not argue with God (cf. 40.2 w/ 4-5 and 42.3, 6).

b) Thus, we are to confess God's matchless power (42.2a), His irrepressible purposes (42.2b), and His inexpressible knowledge (42.3).

This book is ultimately about the wise, loving and irresistible purposes of God that are coming to pass in human history through the suffering and exaltation of our great high priest, Jesus Christ the Lord of glory.