

## The Book of Job (part 2)

### 1A. The book as argument

The whole work is a narration but at points, the narrator's perspective stands out in distinct relief. All through his perspective is central to the reader's perspective. This is where we get our reading cues.

The narrator states the problem and sets the stage for the wisdom debate. Next, he unfolds the 3 cycles of debate itself in which the solution emerges through the failure of human wisdom countered by the wisdom of God (3 cycles countered by God). Then he presents God's final word regarding the contenders and summarizes the resultant conduct and blessing of Job beyond his suffering and beyond the debate.

We should observe some things about the participants in each section. We hear the narrator throughout the book. The Lord speaks and acts in each section. Job speaks in the first two sections but only acts in the epilogue. The 3 friends are silent, then verbally combative, and finally quietly repentant. Elihu speaks and disappears from the narrative and from all comment. Job's wife speaks only in the prologue (dropping her from view-as hot potatoes- indicates a rebuke of her lack of faith in, and submission to, God's sovereignty). Satan speaks only in the prologue then fades out of the picture receiving no mention in the epilogue. There is no direct or explicit comment to or about Satan at the end of the book where the resolution occurs, even though Satan is part of the problem (but evidently, his part is not central).

The problem/solution character of the book of Job reveals the fact that it is a misplaced emphasis to confine the argument of the book to the poetic dialogues. The narrator is making an argument in the book as a whole. It is not only all narrative, it is also all argument. Discovering the lines of this argument that takes the arguments of Job and the friends up into itself is the reader's challenge. We must keep this in mind throughout our reading of the book and we must return here when we draw conclusions from the book as a unit.

### 2A. Perspectives

1) From the perspective from within the story (the perspective of Job, his wife, and the friends), we learn a number of things.

a) We learn that we cannot understand our suffering as servants of God. It is beyond our capacity to understand (God's thoughts and ways are high above ours like the heavens are above the earth).

b) We learn something about being in awe of His knowledge and wisdom as we reflect on His handiwork in creation, its marvel, orderliness though cursed in the fall, its mystery, and its place as a communication or speech from God relaying His wisdom to us for fellowship every day.

c) We learn to trust His wisdom while seeing how frail our own is. We are not to trust in our own understanding but in all our ways acknowledge Him.

d) We learn to attribute justice to the Lord instead of faulting Him when we or other "innocent people" suffer.

e) We learn to repent of our sins, even if there is some seeming disproportion between our present suffering and our sins. This means that we will not justify ourselves. We will claim our justification only in Christ our intercessor who suffered as the innocent one in our place.

f) We learn about His sovereignty, even in the afflictions we experience, and that He is free in distributing His gifts according to His own purposes, goodness, power, and wisdom.

g) Thus, we learn that there is no mechanical formula that connects our suffering or blessing with our goodness or sinfulness. The general principle holds that blessing comes by obedience and cursing comes by disobedience. How this works out in history and beyond history is conditioned by the wise and sovereign purposes of the Lord our God (cf. the Sermon on the Mount regarding serving God in all earthly things in relation to the certainty of answered prayer for His blessing. We must always fix our eyes on Him and not on isolated blessings or cursings).

2) From the narrator, we know that God has a purpose that He is carrying out regarding His servants. This is reassuring.

What point does the narrator make then in the argument of the book as a whole? It is not an answer to the question, “why do the righteous suffer” (except in the general and reassuring point that they suffer for a purpose that God is carrying out behind the scenes of history). The argument of the book from the narrator’s perspective (1.9; 2.4) is to give an answer to the question, “Does Job, do your servants, serve you for no reason? Do they not serve you because you hedge them about with possessions and health in such a way that if you took these things away, they would curse you to your face?”

What then transpires? How does Job’s experience answer this question?

Does Job curse God? No, but he comes close to doing so. He faults God and justifies himself but in the end and while still suffering, he repents of faulting God (and justifying himself) and acknowledges that the sovereign purposes of God are irresistible.

### 3) We have both perspectives

I cannot see behind the scenes but knowing no more than the fact of God’s matchless wisdom must be my rock; He must be my rock here in the suffering I face (dying and death). In my ignorance, I rest in His wisdom. I have His word; hearing His voice, I have all I need. Different from the remarks during the debate, the wisdom of God in creation is not only there in creation but God Himself tells us about it. He speaks, He enters the story, He enters history, and hearing His voice I am comforted and called to repent at the same time.

However, I do know that God is working behind the scenes (I have some glimpses). I know that He is carrying out specific purposes that reveal how He sustains His servants.

The fact is that the removal of His blessings of possessions and health would lead us to doubt Him (and to eventually curse Him) if He did not give us the blessing of His word and a sense of His presence with us. The narrator gives us this insight into how Job eventually repents. Even in rebuke, we are disciplined in a way that reassures us of His love (cf. Hebrews 12 quotes Job 5.17, a word of Eliphaz, to confirm the love of our Father even in times of His chastening; how can it be that Eliphaz spoke wrongly about the Lord, 42.7 while Hebrews shows how right he was? The sages were wrong in their retribution theology but not wrong in everything they said.). Job is an example of the outworking of persevering grace.

Knowing God has purposes, purposes we cannot fathom (we do not know why this suffering or that, why this amount or that amount, or why it could not be some other way), enables us to know that He loves us as a Father even in our pain; the pain does not show us that He does not love us! This underpins Romans 8 (that nothing we experience separates us from His love; that conclusion cannot be inferred from tribulation, famine, etc) and ties it with Romans 11.33-36 where Paul quotes from Job on God’s wisdom and sovereignty (34 is from Job 15.8; 36.22-23 and 35 is from Job 35.7 and 41.11).

### 4) We have the perspective of wisdom in Christ

The ultimate word from God, the place of His presence, the gate of heaven, and the ladder that connects earth and heaven is Jesus Christ on whom the angels ascend and descend (Jn. 1.51). He is the intercessor, the betrayed Joseph and Job, the Isaac on the altar of suffering, the seed of Abraham and Eve (the book of Job presupposes the history of Genesis at least up to Abraham; definitely the fall and promise of a redeemer are part of the story presupposed by the narrator). Job is a priest to his home showing the need of sacrifice for sin. Not knowing the date of the book gives its content broader usage than confinement to a particular time; we have to read the book in light of the large story that culminates in Christ as both priest and sacrifice. He is the innocent one who suffers per the hand of God and at the hands of His friends/enemies to become mediator for the deliverance of His friends/enemies from the anger of God.

Trusting the sovereign Creator, we trust Jesus Christ the risen Lord. He delivers us from all the effects of the fall, from suffering and death, in and through suffering and death.

Now as we wait for His coming (Jas 5.7) we have a basis for patience and can look to the example of Job who was steadfast (patient, 5.11). How was he patient in his lamenting and faulting God? He affirmed the sovereignty of God in his suffering. Then in weaker moments, he lost his way but repented because God sustained him by coming to him and revealing Himself to Job in personal fellowship in His word. So Job reaffirmed the sovereignty of God by asserting the irresistibility of His purposes to which he submitted himself. We too now see that purpose clearly (Jas 5.11). We also see how the Lord is compassionate and merciful to Job who sinned in the trial, but was chastened and disciplined showing God's love; he was justified at the end showing God's mercy. Mercy came to Job for speaking right about the Lord (in his affirming and reaffirming of the sovereignty of God) despite the fact that Job sinned by faulting God and seeking to justify himself at God's expense. His justification cannot be by his works but must be by the grace of God through the suffering one who becomes intercessor and sacrifices Himself to restore his people from the affects of the fall, of dying and death with no possessions and no health.

God's people do serve Him in their trials when they face great loss of things and health; they do so because God sustains them (He makes Himself known to them through His word in creation and Scripture). They have the comfort of the Scriptures. Even in trial, the saint finds strength by God's presence and His words of promise or covenant.

#### Thought Qs

1. With which character do you identify? It may vary depending on who you are and where you are in your journey (Job, Job's wife, old friend, young rambunctious friend, the narrator).
2. What do the readers of the book of Job know that none of the characters of the book ever find out? How does this affect our reading and understanding of the book?
3. Why does the narrator drop Job's wife, Elihu, and Satan from the narrative and epilogue (state a lesson from each)?
4. How can we call Job patient (James 5) in light of 3:11ff; 6:10-11?
5. The reader of the book of Job has two distinct perspectives (Job's and the narrator's). Regarding the problem of evil and suffering, what are two lessons from these two perspectives?
6. How does the book of Job point us to our foundation for perseverance in both God's indirect and direct word and to what do these refer for us today?