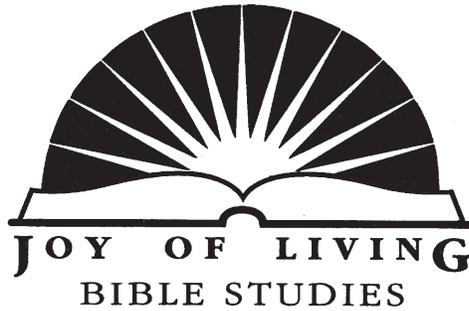


Job

Lesson 1



Introduction to Job

The book of Job is, perhaps, the oldest book in the Bible. No one knows who wrote it. Some scholars think it may have been written by Moses, and perhaps it could have been, while some date it as late as the time of Solomon. But one thing is certain: this book was given to us by the Holy Spirit.

Job was a real man, not a mythological figure. He is mentioned by Ezekiel and he is classified as one of the three great men of the Old Testament, along with Noah and Daniel (see Ezekiel 14:14,20). He is mentioned also in the New Testament by James, who refers to Job's patience and steadfast endurance (see James 5:11). According to the opening part of the book, Job lived in the land of Uz, and he was probably one of the most prominent citizens of that land. He was a contemporary of Abraham, most likely, so this book goes back to the very beginnings of biblical history.

There is a tremendous setting forth of great and marvelous truth in this amazing book. It does what every book of the Bible does to some degree: it strips away the illusions of life and permits us to see life as it really is. Now, in my judgment, there is nothing more valuable about Scripture than that, for we do not live very long without learning, often to our chagrin, that life is not what it really seems to be, that things that we think to be reality and truth turn out to be illusions—delusions if you like. We are surrounded by widely accepted philosophies and ideas that are not true. Men are exhorted to live on the basis of ideas that are false, and we have to learn that. It is very hard for us to do so.

It is very difficult to believe that what we think we see happening is not really what is happening. That is why we struggle so with believing the Bible, because it is a book that corrects these false conclusions that our senses often bring us to, and challenges the phony

thinking of the world around us. That is why it is so important to come together and let the Spirit of God take the Word of God and set us straight, to correct our thinking and renew our minds.

A Glimpse Behind the Scenes

The first surprise we will find in Job is in chapter 1 where we are suddenly taken behind the scenes of this world and shown what goes on when a believer is being tried or tempted. Now, we are all tried and tempted, we are all presented with alluring invitations to get involved with deadly and destructive things, or we are pressured to lose our tempers, or lose our faith, and act in a different way than the Word of God says we should. We always see those temptations as coming to us from a combination of adverse circumstances, or perverse people, or both. We think that our trouble is that things are not working out the way we planned. If God would only straighten out these things and make them work according to our expectations, everything would be fine—or if He would just get rid of some of these troublesome people around us!

But in the book of Job we see that is not the whole story. What is really hap-

pening is that we have suddenly become the point in God's line of scrimmage (if I may use a football analogy), through which the devil and his angels have decided to try to run the ball. All the pressure of that well-trained, powerful team of evil is directed at us, and we discover that we are the focus of his attack. That is what went on with Job, and that is what goes on in our life as well. We find we are no longer sitting safely on the bench, watching the game and enjoying it. Suddenly, we find ourselves thrust right out in the middle of it. And the most important thing is that we forget that is what is happening. We see it only in terms of what is visible to us.

In reading the book of Job we must never forget what we are introduced to in the first chapter. In facing the problems of our own lives, we must never forget that this book reveals what is happening to us in the midst of the troubles and temptations and pressures that we are being subjected to. The world around thinks that life is a picnic, or that it ought to be, that somehow we deserve to have a good time and enjoy ourselves, that that is what we are here for. Now nothing is further from the Christian position.

We are not here to have a good time. God gives us good times, but every one of them comes as a gift of His love and grace; they are never something we deserve. We are not here to try to enjoy ourselves, to amass as many comforts as we can, and retire to a happy life. We are here to fight a battle against the powers of darkness. We are here to be engaged in an unending combat with powerful forces that are seeking to control human history. We have been called into the battle; we must never forget that.

We can think of our present life very much as a person might who goes away to college. He is there to learn something, to get ready for something, not to enjoy himself. Now you can have a lot of fun in college; that is not wrong. But no one goes to school for that purpose—or at least they should not. College is not for spending money and having fun; college is for learning something. And so is life. That is why God teaches us what is going on behind the scenes right here at the beginning of the book of Job. That is reality.

The Nature of Human Evil

The book of Job also reveals something about the nature of human evil.

What is humanity like in its basic character? We will see how Job's friends speak to him about various wicked people and almost always they speak in terms of murderers, thieves, rapists, fornicators, cruel tyrants, unjust, wretched people. These are the wicked, as these friends see them, but as we pursue the book and the argument of it, it becomes clear that these things that they point out as wickedness are really only the fruit of something deeper in human nature. They are coming from a deep-seated root of pride in fallen humanity, pride that expresses itself as independence, self-sufficiency, "I've got what it takes, I can run my own life, I don't need help from anybody."

We are determined to always have our own way and to manipulate things so that we get what we want. That is the root. Jesus said it: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly" (Mark 7:21-22). All the evil things of life come from the root of pride. What we learn in this book is that pride, in its terrible, vicious character, is equally expressed not only in terms of murder, thievery and robbery, but also it can

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come out as bigotry and pompousness, as self-righteous legalism, as critical, judgmental attitudes and condemnation of others, as harsh, sarcastic words and vengeful, vindictive actions against someone else. That is wickedness, just as much. So we learn that human evil is not something confined to the criminals of the land. It is present in every heart, without exception, and it takes various forms. We are only deceiving ourselves when we say that their form is wrong and ours is right. Pride is the root of all sin, and it can express itself in these various ways.

The Nature of Faith

Now, coupled with this is what the book teaches us about the nature of faith. Job thought he was exercising faith when he obeyed God and did what was right, when it was clearly to his best interest to do so. We find that many people think like that today. They think they are exercising great faith when they believe that God is there, they live their lives day by day with the recognition that God is watching and is present in their affairs, and they do the right thing because they know that if they do not, they will get into trouble. They call this living the Christian life,

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exercising faith. It is a form of exercising faith, I grant you that. It is believing, at least, in the invisible presence of God; but it is a weak faith. Those who live that way are serving God only when it is in their best interest to do so.

This was the accusation that Satan hurled at God when Job was discussed before Him. Satan said, in effect, "Job serves You only because You take care of him. If You remove Your hand of blessing from him, he'll curse You to Your face" (see Job 1:11). Many people are living like this. They are really only serving God as long as He blesses them. The moment the blessing ceases, or difficulty or trial comes, they want to quit serving Him. We learn from this book that great faith, the kind that makes the world sit up and take notice, is revealed only when we serve God when it is difficult to do so, when serving Him is the hardest thing we can do.

The New Testament shows us the picture of Jesus suffering in Gethsemane, when He faced that hour in the garden with the recognition that He was afraid of what was coming. He confessed to His own disciples that His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, and He asked three

of them to pray for Him and uphold Him through a time of deep and terrible pressure upon Him. Yet, in that hour of anguish, though He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me," reflecting His true humanity, how He shrank from the hour of anguish and pain, nevertheless, by faith, He added the words, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

Now that is great faith. That is what you will finally see exhibited in Job himself. Though he trembles, though he falters, though he fails, the last thing he does is cling in helplessness to God and ask Him to do something to explain his perplexity. That is why Job becomes an example of faith. Great faith is probably being exercised most when you feel like you are being the least faithful, when you are so weak that you cannot do anything but cling. In that moment, heaven is looking over and wondering at the greatness of faith. That is what this book teaches us.

The Nature of Fallen Man

All this adds up to the true view, then, of the nature of fallen man. Man appears at his best in the person of Job. When this book opens, you have a very beautiful picture of a highly re-

spected and greatly honored man, a sincere, moral, devoted, selfless, godly man who spends his time in deeds of good and help to many people, obviously intent upon doing what God wants. Therefore, we would call him a deserving man, infinitely deserving of God's blessing, because he so faithfully served and followed Him. There are many people like that in the world who are not even Christian who live on those terms. They are, in a sense, godly people, in that they recognize that there is a God and try to follow Him. They are devoted and selfless people, and that is fallen man at his very best.

But what this book is designed to do is strip away all the outward appearances from that and show us Job as he really is. He finally came to see himself as he really was: a self-deceived man. He imagined he had resources in himself to handle life and problems, resources that he really did not have. This is one of the tremendous lessons of this book.

We too imagine that we have power to stand and be true to what we believe, like boastful, blustering Peter, who said to the LORD Jesus, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" (Mark 14:31). And he meant

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every word of it. Yet, when the hour of temptation struck, he found himself as weak as putty, and so do we until we come to realize, as Job did, that he had no resources to stand in himself, that God had to hold him, or he would never be held. Out of his weakness came his strength.

This book shows us that Job discovered he was a lover of status and prestige. When God took away his position in the community, he began to harken back to it and to think longingly of those days when he had a position of high honor and dignity, when he could walk out into the community and people bowed before him and respected him. Job discovered that he liked that. It was what made him keep on serving God, because he had that kind of honor and prestige accorded to him. When all that disappeared, he found himself angry and upset because he had been denied what he thought was his right.

What this book teaches us is that our hearts, more than we understand, long to share the glory of God. We really do not want to serve God unless we get some glory for ourselves out of it. That is often the reason why we do things—because we are motivated by a desire for status and prestige in

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the eyes of others. All this is stripped away from Job. As you read this book you discover that God seems to come across as someone somewhat smaller than Job himself does, that Job's self-vindication and self-justification makes God look less than He is. That is the terrible evil of that attitude; it robs God of His glory. This is what we find in our own lives very frequently. How this book reveals this to us.

The Reason for Suffering

The great theme of the book of Job—and the one for which it is world famous—is its treatment of the reason for suffering in the Christian life. None of us struggles when we are told that suffering is sent by God to punish wrongdoers. We have a long list of names that we could present to God of people who deserve this kind of thing. It is eminently just for God to punish wrongdoers with suffering, we think. People who hurt others and are vicious, cruel, and wicked ought to be made to suffer for what they do.

We can even handle what the Bible teaches about suffering, that it is sent to awaken us when we are tending to go astray. Even though we are saints, suffering is sometimes sent to wake

us up and get our attention. We have all had experience of it when we were drifting away and thought everything was going fine. We are doing OK, we think, when suddenly some catastrophe strikes, some terrible trouble comes. At first we resent it, and complain bitterly, and ask why should this happen. But it keeps on, and finally we begin to listen to what God is saying. When we listen, we see things that are wrong. Now this is happening in Job; we understand that.

But that is not all that the book of Job teaches us about suffering. There is something far greater than that. This book teaches us something that should have been obvious to us from our reading of the Gospels, and that is the fact that Jesus suffered. Now, obviously, Jesus did not suffer because He was a wrongdoer, nor did He suffer because He needed to have His attention captured by God. He was always sensitively responsive to the Father's will, and always did that which was pleasing in His sight. Yet His life was filled with suffering from beginning to end—rejection, misunderstanding, disappointment, cruelty, harsh words, and unjust treatment.

Why did He suffer? He suffered because suffering, in a Christian, is a way of allowing God to demonstrate that Satan is a liar and a cheat. That is what is going on in the book of Job. Satan had proclaimed before all the universe that men served God only because God blesses them, and that if you remove the blessing, men would curse God to His face; that man does not see any intrinsic value in God Himself, but it is only his own self-interest that makes him serve God.

Now, far too often believers have confirmed that lie of Satan. But here in the case of Job, and, as frequently happens in our own experience, suffering is sent to prove that Satan is wrong, that God will be served even when He does not bless any longer, because He is God, and He is worthy of the praise and the honor and service of men. That is why Jesus suffered. He suffered as a demonstration to all mankind that God was still God and was worthy of service no matter what happened. That is why death meant nothing to the LORD. He, we are told, "for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

Job teaches us that suffering is a means by which evil is answered, and

God vindicated. Therefore, it is a high and holy and glorious privilege that is granted to some Christians, more than others, to uphold the glory of God in the midst of the accusations of the devil in this world. I hope we will learn to see suffering in that way. Sometimes we deserve it. Sometimes it comes because of our misdeeds; it comes to awaken us. But sometimes it is granted to us because it is a high and holy privilege

Some years ago I was introduced to a woman who had just lost her husband and her son in an auto accident. Her heart was broken; she was devastated by this double loss that had suddenly come into her life. When I went to see her she was weeping, torn-up, hardly even able to speak because she was so overcome by her grief. Somebody had asked me to try to comfort her, but I wondered what to say to her. Looking to God in prayer, I laid my hand on her shoulder and said, "You have been given a very high and holy honor." Glancing up through her tears, she said to me, "What do you mean?" I sat down with her and went through some of the Scriptures, pointing out to her that we are given the privilege of suffering for Christ. Paul puts it that way in Philippi-

ans. "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him" (Philippians 1:29).

I pointed out to her that God had given her the privilege of bearing difficulty and trial, given her an opportunity to demonstrate that His strength and His love and His grace will continue, despite all the outward circumstances, even the worst of things that life can throw at us. As we talked together, a new look came on her face. She said to me, "I see what you mean." We prayed together and I left her. Later, I heard that her life was such a radiant testimony throughout all that time of struggle that hundreds of people were touched and saw their own sufferings in a different light as a result.

The Character of God

Then, of course, the greatest theme of all in this book of Job, and the one that I hope we will remember more than anything else, is that it reveals to us the character of God Himself. God often appears to us as a cold, impersonal Being, distant from us, uncaring, even ruthless and vindictive, demanding many things from us; a powerful Being, but without compassion.

But what this book shows is that behind that appearance (and even Job saw Him that way for a while), God is always exactly what He is, not ruthless and cold, but actually deeply aware of our problems. He is deeply concerned about us, carefully controlling everything that touches us, limiting the power of Satan and allowing certain expressions, according to His knowledge of how much we can bear. He is patient, forgiving, and ultimately responsible for everything that happens.

In the beginning of this book you have God and Satan and Job. By the end of the book, Satan has faded into the background, completely disappeared. All you have left is God standing before Job, with His arms akimbo, saying to him, "All right, Job, I'm responsible. Any questions?" When Job begins to see what God is working out in His vast, cosmic purpose, and what He is making possible by means of the sufferings of Job, he has no questions to ask whatsoever. The final view of God in this book is of a Being of incredible wisdom who puts things together far beyond the dreams and imaginations of man, who is working out incredible purposes of infinite delight and joy that

He will give to us if we wait for His purposes to be worked out fully.

This book mentions a time when "the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy" (Job 38:7) at the creation of the world, but other Scriptures tell us about a time when all creation will shout in a greater glory than was ever hailed at creation, in the new creation, the new thing that God has brought into being by means of the sufferings, the trials, and the tribulations of this present scene. That is why Scripture speaks in numerous passages about the fact that "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17), and that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

When that day breaks, the one thing for which we will be infinitely thankful, the one thing above all others that will thrill us and cheer us and cause us to glory, is the fact that out of all the created universe we were chosen to be the ones who bore the name of God in the hour of danger and affliction, problem and trial. There is no higher honor than that. That is what Jesus means when He says, "Blessed are you when

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people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12).

Now, the sufferings of Christ involve more than just reproach for His name’s sake. They involve illness, affliction, accident, the handicaps with which people are born— all this becomes part of sharing the sufferings of Christ, if we take them as a privilege, and not as a reproach. If we view life as God sees it, we will see that this is only a temporary time when we have a great opportunity to bear honor for Christ. Never again in all our eternity will we have the privilege of bearing suffering for His name’s sake.

So, as we are called to that, I hope and pray that this book of Job will help us to understand the realities of life, the greatness of the privilege that has been accorded to us, and the richness of glory God heaps upon us when He allows us to suffer for His name’s sake.

Prayer

Our Father, words fail us to express what we feel in our hearts. We

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do count it indeed a mighty privilege to bear reproach for Your name’s sake. We know that the day is coming when that will be our chief joy, that will be the treasure that we have laid up in heaven. We hope, LORD, that it will be a rich treasure indeed, that we will stop our complaining and stop our grieving and stop our griping about what You send, and count it a great joy and privilege to bear suffering and reproach for Your name’s sake, sharing the sufferings of Christ, that we may also share in the glory which is to follow. We ask in His name, Amen.

Study Questions

Before you begin each day:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the Introduction to Job.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the Introduction to Job, or from your teacher’s lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down and post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read Job 1, concentrating on verse 1.

1. a. Where did Job live?

b. Challenge: Job was a real man (see Ezekiel 14:13,14,20) and he lived in a real place (see Jeremiah 25:20, Lamentations 4:21). Read Genesis 10:1,22,23. Who was Uz?

2. How is Job described in Job 1:1?

3. a. *Blameless* means not being held responsible for something deserving censure. It does not mean sinless. We know that all mankind is sinful (see Romans 3:23). Read Ephesians 1:3-7. What are those in Christ chosen to be? (Ephesians 1:4)

b. How do we have forgiveness of sin? (Ephesians 1:7)

4. Job was also described as “upright.” Webster’s Dictionary defines *upright* as “morally correct.” It also says, “*Upright* implies a strict adherence to moral principles.” Job also “shunned evil”. *Shun* means “to avoid deliberately and habitually.” Read Titus 2:11-14. How does verse 12 help you understand how to shun evil and verse 14 how to live an upright life? By what power does verse 11 say we can do this?

5. Personal: Look at your own life and attitude. Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior to take away your sin and make you blameless before God? Would you describe yourself as one who “shuns evil” and is “upright”? What are some areas in your life that you need to work on by God’s grace?

Third Day: Review Job 1, concentrating on verses 2-5.

1. How many children did Job have? (Job 1:2)

2. How is Job described in Job 1:3?

3. What did Job’s sons do on a regular basis? (Job 1:4)

4. a. What was Job’s concern about his children? (Job 1:5b)

b. What did Job do about this? (Job 1:5a)

5.a. Personal: Do you pray for your children (or those you love) on a regular basis? What does James 5:16 say about the prayer of a righteous man? Remember, you are counted as righteous if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ to take away your sin (see Romans 4:5).

b. Personal: Does James 5:16 encourage you to continue to pray for your loved ones even if you don't see immediate answers? How does it encourage you?

Fourth Day: Review Job 1, concentrating on verses 6-12.

1. When the angels came to present themselves before God who was with them? (Job 1:6)

2. a. *Satan* means "enemy." Read Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-17. Many Bible scholars believe these verses refer to Satan. What was Satan like before "wickedness was found in him"? (Ezekiel 28:12-15)

b. Why did Satan become proud? (Ezekiel 28:17a)

c. What did Satan say he would do? (Isaiah 14:13-14)

d. What was the result? (Isaiah 14:12,15 and Ezekiel 28:16b,17b)

3. a. Where does Satan have access? (Job 1:6-7)

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- b. Read Revelation 12:10b. What is one of Satan's activities in the presence of God?
- c. Read 1 Peter 5:8 and John 10:10. What are some of Satan's (the devil's) activities as he roams to and fro on the earth?
4. a. Who does God use to challenge Satan? (Job 1:8a)
- b. What does God say about Job? (Job 1:8b)
5. a. Why does Satan think Job serves the LORD? (Job 1:9-10)
- b. Challenge: How do you think Satan knows there is a hedge around Job?
- c. What does Satan believe will make Job curse God? (Job 1:11)
6. Sometimes people think the book of Job is the record of a great battle between God and Satan but it is not a battle, it is a *test*. Satan can only do what God permits. What limits does God put on Satan regarding Job's testing? (Job 1:12)
7. Personal: It is important to note that Satan is not equal to God—Satan is not all powerful (omnipotent), all knowing (omniscient) or present everywhere (omnipresent). God is in control of all things; nothing goes beyond His word and His will, including Satan. How does this make you feel? Personalize Romans 8:31b by inserting your own name.

Fifth Day: Review Job 1, concentrating on verses 13-19.

1. What happened to Job's oxen and to the servants taking care of them? (Job 1:14-15)

2. What happened to Job's sheep and to the servants taking care of them? (Job 1:16)

3. What happened to Job's camels and to the servants taking care of them? (Job 1:17)

4. Finally, what happened to Job's children? (Job 1:18-19)

5. a. From Job 1:15,16,17,19, list what forces Satan used to rob Job of all he had.

b. Re-read Job 1:10,12. Who did Satan have to get permission from to use these forces against Job?

6. a. Personal: Do these truths make your faith tremble, or perhaps make you feel that you must make excuses for God?

b. As we continue to study the book of Job we will see there is a far deeper reason why God permits tragedy than the reasons and excuses people often make up. Will you choose to trust that God is loving and compassionate even if you don't understand everything He allows? Personalize Psalm 103:13 by inserting your name in it.

Sixth Day: Review Job 1, concentrating on verses 20-22.

1. Did Satan give Job a moment's respite between tragedies? (see Job 1:13-19)

2. How did Job express his grief? (Job 1:20a)

3. What did he do next? (Job 1:20b)

4. a. What was Job's verbal response to what had happened? (Job 1:21)

b. Job acknowledged that God had given him all the blessings he had experienced. Did Job believe that God had the right to take the blessings away?

5. a. You may fear what Satan is saying about you, what's going on behind the scenes in the heavenly realms. Don't worry. Live today and trust God's protecting hand. Write in your own words what the following promises say.

Matthew 6:34

Romans 8:28

1 Corinthians 10:13

2 Corinthians 12:9

Philippians 4:13

- b. Personal: What verse has encouraged or comforted you the most this week and why?