

INTRODUCTION

An elderly lady walked into the local Baptist Church. An usher recognized her as a newcomer and said, "Welcome, where would you like to sit?" She said, "On the front row, please." The usher said, "Oh, you don't want to do that. This preacher is really boring. You'd be happier sitting in the back." The lady said, "Do you know who I am?" The usher said, "No." She said, "I'm the preacher's mother." The usher said, "Well, do you know who I am?" She said, "No." "Good" he said.

Some people may think preaching from the book of Job is boring. But to me, the Job is one of the most interesting books in the Bible. Literary scholars claim Job is one of the oldest books in history. It is written in poetic form like Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations. Old Testament experts believe it was written as an epic drama, like Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. But that's not to suggest Job was a fictional character. We could write a drama based on the life of George Washington, who was a real person. In the same way, most scholars believe Job was a real person who lived about 2,000 B.C. Even outside its Biblical significance, Job is considered to be one of the most profound pieces of literature in all of history. The French writer Victor Hugo wrote: "If all the world's literary efforts were to be destroyed, and I could save but a solitary sample, it would be Job."

Most people are interested in Job because we can relate to the theme. The theme of the book is: "Why do the righteous suffer?" This week I was talking with a nurse in our church and she said, "I'm really looking forward to your teaching on Job. It's my favorite book in the Bible." She went on to say, "So many things have happened to me that my friends starting calling me Job-ette!" Well, if you've ever felt like Job or Job-ette, this book is for you.

Let's begin our study of Job by examining the first twelve verses. Job 1:1-12:

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he

has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

In order to appreciate the first message from Job, I want to give you a synopsis of the entire book of Job. In 1825, the English poet and artist, William Blake, prepared 21 engravings illustrating the book of Job. In the first scene, Job and his family are gathered together and everything is wonderful. They have each other, good health, and an abundance of wealth. In the next scene, God can be seen on His throne with all the angels, good, and bad gathered around Him. After God's conversation with Satan, the devil sets out to prove Job only fears God because he has been so blessed. In the next scene, Satan is seen striking Job's children with a catastrophic storm in which all of them perish. In the next scene, Satan attacks Job's health. He is seen afflicting him with painful skin sores. All of that action occurs in the first two chapters of Job.

In the next scene, Job's wife and three friends can be seen pointing their fingers at him as if to taunt him. Most people know of the first and last part of the story, but the largest portion of the book is devoted to the rounds of conversation between Job and his friends. Their names were Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite (the shortest man in the Bible, because he was only "shoe height.") and Zophar the Naamathite (Just remember "Zophar zo good.").

These guys believed Job was suffering because he had done something bad. They tried to persuade him to come clean and reveal his deep dark sin. With friends like these, who needs enemies?

Then in the next scene, which is the climax of the story, God speaks to Job out of a whirlwind. To summarize, God asks Job, "What makes you think you're smart enough to figure out why I do anything?" In the final scene of the story, Job prays for his friends, and God restores to Job more than he ever had before. In this amazing book, there are many things we're going to learn about God and about ourselves. Let's begin by considering four insights we gain from this book.

INSIGHT #1: THERE IS MORE GOING ON AROUND YOU THAN YOU CAN SEE

Job could see his happy family. But he couldn't see the meeting in heaven. He could hear his cattle lowing and his sheep bleating, but he couldn't hear the conversation going on between God and Satan. But as readers of the book, we are allowed to see what is happening in heaven.

Job 1:6. "One day the angels ("sons of Eloihim") came to present themselves ("to stand and report") before the Lord and Satan ("the adversary") also came with them."

Who were these "sons of Eloihim?" Throughout the Old Testament there are references to other gods. The Hebrew word for God is "El" and "Eloihim" is simply the plural, or "gods." But there is only one, true, Almighty God. He is Yahweh in Hebrew, or our anglicized "Jehovah" in English. A god can be anything or anyone to whom a person gives ultimate allegiance. That's why our God says, "You shall have no other gods (eloihim) before me." (Exodus 20:3)

It would be the pinnacle of presumption for us to think we are the only beings in God's creation.

We are human beings, but the Bible teaches there are an innumerable host of heavenly beings God has created. These are generally called angels, but there are good angels and bad angels. There are many different kinds of angels, or heavenly creatures.

Do you remember the first Star Wars movie when Luke and Obi-Wan Kenobi go into a bar on Tatooine? It’s not quite that far out, but when you read the Bible, you discover there is a fantastic variety in God’s heavenly beings. For instance, in Revelation 4, there are four “creatures” that worship God continually—the KJV translated the word “beasts.” There are seraphim and cherubim as well. If you’re interested in this, in a few months, I’m publishing a sequel to my book *Do Angels Really Exist?* The new title is *Angels Really Do Exist!* In that book, I have expanded the information about good and bad angels. If this sounds like a sales pitch, you’re right. But the main point of this is reinforce the fact there is an entire invisible world, populated by heavenly creatures we cannot see.

It’s like a movie director investigating a location for a film scene. He puts his hands out with his thumbs together to make a model of a screen. He knows he can put an image in that box and you won’t see anything else. When you’re watching a movie or TV show, you only see a small slice of reality. The director doesn’t want you to see the lights, the studio, the set, or the assistants holding microphones.

Sometimes when you’re watching a cheap movie or television show you can see a microphone accidentally slip in from the top of the screen. Or you may catch a glimpse of electric poles in a western. When you see something like that it reminds you what you’re seeing is only a sliver of reality. There’s more there than meets the eye.

The same is true of this world. The Bible says, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (II Corinthians 4:18) We can only see a sliver of reality. There is a huge amount of spiritual warfare, and spiritual activity going on around us that we cannot see. Occasionally, God allows a spiritual microphone or power line to slip into the screen to remind us that we aren’t alone in this world or the next world. So, whenever you want to pull out your hair and ask, “What in the world is going on?” Remember—it’s not what in THIS WORLD that’s going on. It’s what’s in THAT WORLD that’s really going on!

INSIGHT #2: GOD WANTS TO HAVE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU

The current hot scientific debate is between the theories of evolution versus intelligent design. I’ll be saying much more about that when I get toward the end of the book of Job. But for now, let me say that simply believing there is some higher intelligence out there is not a Biblical teaching. That belief is called Deism, and while it may be a good starting point, it is a faulty conclusion. If there is a God, then you must discover to know what *kind* of God He is. That’s where the Bible comes in. The Bible teaches us the mighty Creator of the universe wants to have a personal relationship with His creatures. To put it another way, the message of the Bible is not to teach *how* God created the heavens and the earth, instead it teaches *why* God created the heavens and earth. He created you to love Him and to enjoy Him forever.

In our text, I love the fact that God brings up the subject of Job. He asks Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." (Job 1:8) Why did God do that? Because He loved Job and He was proud of Him. It's like when one of you asks me, "Have you seen a picture of my grandchild?" You want to show off that grandbaby for the exact same reason God was showing off Job. One guy recently asked me, "Have I showed you a picture of my new grandson?" And I said, "No, and I appreciate it." My friend, God really does love you so much that if He had a refrigerator, your picture would be stuck on it.

God knows the same things about you that He knew about Job. He said, "Have you considered my servant Job." God knew Job's name, and He knew that Job had a servant's heart. God knows your name, and He looks on your heart. With God, you're not some taxpayer identification number or serial number: He knows your name. He knows your character. Of Job He said, "He is blameless." That doesn't mean perfect, it means he had a good reputation. "He is upright." That means Job was a straight-talking guy. "He fears God and shuns evil." God knew Job's heart better than Job knew himself. God knows everything about you, and He still desires to have a personal relationship with you.

INSIGHT #3: SATAN ACTIVELY ASSAULTS GOD'S SERVANTS

The name "Satan" literally means "adversary." He opposes God and every potential servant of God. He wants to make your life miserable. That's why Satan said: "Stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." (Job 1:11)

Satan is not some comic character dressed in red flannel underwear with horns shoveling coal down in hell. In fact, we see again in Job 1 that Satan isn't in hell. He is roaming throughout the earth. As we learned in our study of I Peter last year, "Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (I Peter 5:8) Satan is actively, aggressively, continually working to try to make people curse God to His face. And all you have to do is to turn on your televisions and radios to find he is finding great success in America.

INSIGHT #4: GENUINE FAITH WILL SUSTAIN YOU THROUGH TROUBLE

The Bible says when you go through trials and tribulations; it is a testing of your faith. You may think God is testing your faith, but that's not right. God knows all things, and He already knows the quality of your faith. The testing of your faith is to show YOU what kind of faith you have. Only real, genuine faith will sustain you when you have to endure suffering. What kind of faith do you have? Let me share with you three different kinds of faith.

(1) Fair weather faith

There is a kind of faith that operates when the sun is shining. The profession of fair weather faith says, "As long as things are going well, I'll praise the Lord!" That's what Satan accused Job of having. Satan said to God, "Job is being blessed, but if you take away his blessings, He'll curse you." Satan was wrong about Job, but he was right about many people—that's the kind of faith they have.

Some people approach religion like a business deal. It's like they enter into a contract with God and as long as He keeps up His end of deal—blessing, peace, joy etc, they will keep up their part of the deal—worship, service, offerings etc. They never say it, but what they think is, "God, if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." The problem is, God doesn't have a back and He never itches!

Through the years I've known people who were outwardly faithful to God and to attend and serve in their church. But when they meet a crisis, like a divorce, or an illness, or somebody mistreats them at church, they're gone. It's as if they decide to boycott God because they think they deserve better treatment. That's fair weather faith.

(2) Foul weather faith

These are the opposite of "fair weather fathers." Their profession is: "When my life is in a mess, I'll call upon the Lord!" That's a great thing to do. In fact the Bible says, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in You." (Psalm 56:3) But these people only call upon the Lord when they're afraid, and once things settle down they forget about Him. They think the Lord is for emergency use only. They're like a soldier going into combat. That's why we have the saying, "There's no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole."

The person with this kind of faith bargains with God. They say, "God if you will only help me through this mess, then I will serve you faithfully." And then, they survive the crisis, and before long, they have forgotten their promise to God—until the next crisis arises.

Every Sunday we count how many people attend Green Acres. We count people because people count. Church attendance isn't the only indicator of seeking God, but it is one you can measure. Something happened four years ago to support my proposition that many people have a foul weather faith. As you know, we were all deeply affected by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. On the Sunday before the 9/11 attacks there were 3,834 people who gathered to worship here at Green Acres. Then, on Tuesday of that week, the terrorists attacked. It was a time of national crisis and great fear. On the Sunday following the attacks, there were 5,171 people who gathered here. So, it might have led you to believe that many people were seeking God's strength and peace in the aftermath of this attack. For a few weeks, attendance continued to be high, but six months later, things had settled down. Our attendance six months after 9/11 was 3,816—almost identical to the Sunday before the attacks. What do those numbers show? Perhaps there were over a 1,000 people living locally who sought the Lord for a while when we went through a time of crisis, but then when the fear subsided, they didn't feel the need to attend worship. By the way, the exact same thing happened in America on the Sunday after Pearl Harbor, but the difference is church attendance remained high throughout WWII.

I hate to say it, but our next really big crowd may be on the Sunday after the next terrorist attack on America. That's because many people only have a foul weather faith.

(3) All-weather faith

A person who possesses an all-weather faith says, "Whatever happens, I will trust the Lord." All weather faith says, "Come rain or shine, hell or high water, pain or pleasure, good or bad, I'm going to praise the name of the Lord."

That's the kind of faith Job had. In Job 1:21 we read what Job said after he learned of the death of his children. "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." Later in the book, when he was suffering physically and being scorned by his friends he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him." (Job 13:15)

Remember, Satan's accusation about Job was that if he was subjected to enough pain, he would curse God to His face. I'm sure there were times when Job was tempted to do that. Satan was constantly whispering in his ear, "Curse God. Surely God doesn't love you if He's letting all this happen to you. Go ahead, curse Him and get it over with." Even Job's wife counseled him to "curse God and die." Later in the book, we'll see that Job asked God some pretty blunt questions, but never once did he ever curse God. His faith carried him through to the other side of his suffering.

What kind of faith do you have? Is it a fair weather faith? As long as things are good, you're okay with God? Or do you have a foul weather faith—when a crisis comes you go running to the Lord? Jesus said that the Heavenly Father makes it rain on the just and the unjust alike, so make sure you have an all-weather faith.

CONCLUSION

It was a few days before Christmas in 1978, and I was a 25-year-old pastor serving my first full time church in central Alabama. A couple in our church was waiting for their daughter, son-in-law and two grandchildren to arrive for a holiday dinner, but the family never arrived. On the way to their house, the car ran off the road and rolled over several times. The father and two young children were killed, and only this couple's daughter survived.

When I got the phone call, my heart sank as I heard the news. I learned that the family had gathered at the hospital where their daughter had been taken. I'll never forget walking into the ER waiting room. The grandfather was sitting there with his head buried in his hands. I walked over and hugged the grief-stricken grandmother and she looked into my eyes and started asking, "Why did God take my babies?" She repeated the question over and over again. "Why did God take my babies? Oh, why did God take my babies?" All the other family members looked at me to answer the question. I was on the spot.

In the past 30 years I've since learned that in that setting when a grieving family member asks a question like they don't really expect an answer—they're just expressing their grief. But as a 25-year-old pastor, I had the misconception that I should be able to supply all the answers to tough questions. I thought my job was to fill every uncomfortable silence with a few religious words. I took a deep breath and gave a made a few attempts to make some consoling theological observations. To be honest with you, I don't even remember what I said, but the words seemed hollow. And my theological observations did not instantly transform their anguish in to peace. When I finished, nobody said, "Oh, thank you, pastor, we're okay now that we have heard your

explanation." No, the devastated mother continued to weep and say, "Why did God take my babies?"

Months later, I recall visiting with that same lady and we talked about that night in the ER. I asked her if she remembered what I said to her. She told me she didn't remember a thing I said. She remembered I was there and that I prayed for them, but my theological observations were completely forgotten.

In one sense, we're all like Job and that lady. In the middle of our suffering and anguish we want to ask "Why?" We feel that we deserve some reasonable, rational explanation to explain what's happening. But the truth is, there is no answer—there's just an assurance that God doesn't stop loving us when we suffer.

If you look closely at the graphic for this series, Turning Tears into Telescopes you can see a cross inside the tear. In the middle of Job's suffering, long before he had his fortune and family restored, he looked through his tears as if they were telescopes and he saw something in the future. In the graphic for this series there is a tear on a person's face, and if you look closely, you'll see a cross in that tear. That's what Job saw. He saw Jesus. He didn't use the name Jesus, He simply used one of Jesus' titles. In Job 19:25 he said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth." Tears can either obscure your vision, or they can magnify your sight. Through his tears, Job saw his Redeemer. Today we know that our Redeemer's name is Jesus. If you look to Him, He can forgive your sins and give you grace to endure all the trials of life. When you invite Him into your life, then you're ready to live and you're ready to die.

OUTLINE

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INSIGHT #3: SATAN ACTIVELY ASSAULTS GOD'S SERVANTS

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes