

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #85: JOB'S PERFECT STORM

By John Temples

Job is one of the most fascinating persons we read of in God's word. He lived thousands of years ago, but as we will soon see, he was just like us in many ways. Great tragedy came into his life, as it does in our lives; and we can learn much from his experiences.

JOB WAS A WEALTHY MAN

We have always been fascinated by the rich and famous. Some folks just can't get enough of the Kardashians. For some reason, we keep reading magazines with pictures of houses we can never hope to live in, filled with furniture we will never sit on.

How wealthy was Job? "His possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East" (Job 1:3). Yet in spite of his great wealth...

JOB WAS A RIGHTEOUS, GOD-FEARING MAN

He worshipped God regularly. Job 1:1 says he was "blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil." Even God took special note of Job, affirming that "there was none like him in all the earth" (Job 1:8).

JOB WAS A FAMILY MAN

He had a large, close-knit, and evidently happy family. He had a wife and ten children--seven sons and three daughters (Job 1:2). And the kids evidently stayed close to one another. Job 1:4 says, "His sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them."

Job's kids don't sound too different from many kids today. They seem to have had strong family bonds and good character, except that the Bible says they liked to feast and drink a lot "on their appointed days" (possibly their birthdays). Job may have had some concerns about this, because he would habitually offer burnt offerings and sacrifices for them in case they had sinned and cursed God (Job 1:4).

Job's wife--Mrs. Job--was an especially interesting member of the family. More on her later.

So, we might say that Job had it all: money, possessions, God's favor, and a loving family. But all that came crashing down in a short time. The Bible says that Satan came to God one day and slandered Job. He in essence told God, "No wonder Job is such a good man--look at all You have blessed him with. If You take all his stuff away, he will curse you to your face." Incredibly, God accepted the devil's challenge, saying, "All right--you may test him" (Job 1:12). The only limitation was that Satan could not touch Job personally.

Satan proceeded to attack Job's possessions and people in two massive onslaughts. In the first wave, Sabeian and Chaldean raiders came and took most of his livestock and killed his servants. Then a lightning storm came and killed the rest of his animals and his servants. The same day, a great wind--a tornado--destroyed the house where his children were and killed them all.

What was Job's reaction? "Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshipped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord'" (Job 1:20-21).

Sadly, there was more to come. In the second wave sometime later, God allowed Satan to attack Job directly. He immediately inflicted Job's body with painful boils and sores. Job was so miserable that he--once the wealthiest man in the East--spent his days on top of a trash heap (he was no longer welcome in polite company), scraping his sores with broken pottery.

JOB WAS A MAN WHO SUFFERED

To put his experience in perspective, just imagine how you would feel if what happened to him happened to you:

- In one day, you lose all your possessions--car, house, everything.
- All your money is gone--poof--in one day.
- The same day, every one of your children dies.
- Then, you yourself become deathly sick.

And on top of it all, every person in your life who should be encouraging you turns against you. Job had three “friends” who came to visit him, supposedly to cheer him up; but they only added to his misery by accusing him of suffering because of sin. Even his wife turned against him.

We might say Job experienced the perfect storm.

It was a storm of emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions. In fact, the book of Job begins with a storm and ends with a storm. Satan was in the first storm, God was in the second storm. In these two storms, we see what the book is all about, and what God was about when He let all this happen to Job.

Job finally won the victory and stayed faithful to God, but it was an agonizing journey and a severe test of faith.

THE BOOK OF JOB AND HUMAN SUFFERING

The theme of Job is suffering, and most people assume it was written to explain why people suffer; but it never does. Why, then, was it written and put in God’s holy Book? To answer the question, *How should God’s people deal with suffering?* The real lesson of the book of Job is that when tragedy strikes, the question we should be asking is not “How can I get out of this?” but rather, “What can I get out of this?”

Here are two important lessons Job learned and that we should learn:

First: God is worthy to be praised and served because of who He is, not just because He gives us good things. Satan suggested (and many people agree) that God is worthy to be worshipped only as long as he gives us stuff. They say that God is not worthy of worship and service based solely on His holy nature. They cynically imply that people obey God only when and if there's something in it for them. The book of Job shows that to be a lie. We worship God because He is our Creator and because He is holy.

Second: Tragedies and bad experiences do not mean that God has abandoned us or is angry with us. Our instinct might be (and this was the viewpoint of Job's three friends), "If I am faithful to God, I will not suffer." But remember: Here was a man who had it all, who was doing everything right, and still his whole world fell apart.

Job did not suffer because God was angry with him; actually, God permitted suffering in Job's life as a compliment to him! We might even say that if we are suffering, God is honoring our faith. He trusts us to pass the test. Hebrews 12:5-6 reads, "Do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

Our first reaction when tragedy strikes is often to cry out, "God, why?" We demand an explanation from God. But true happiness, peace, and spiritual maturity come not from insisting that God explain everything He is doing or allowing, but from resolving to serve God whether we understand His ways or not. God has His reasons for allowing suffering to come to us, and He is under no obligation to tell us what those reasons are. (As far as we know, He never told Job.)

So perhaps the greatest lesson from Job for us is: *Stop trying to find all the answers to the questions you have about why bad things happen, and just live so close to God that you don't need the answers.*

But now let us look at...

JOB'S WIFE

Mrs. Job came to Job as he was sitting on the ash heap scraping his sores. Probably Job expected some commiseration and encouragement from her visit. But he was devastated when she said, “Do you still hold to your integrity? Curse God and die.’ But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and not adversity?’ In all this, Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:9-10). What are some lessons we can learn from Mrs. Job?

First: She failed her husband when he needed her the most. Ladies, you need to understand that you have the power to either build a man up or destroy him. When you marry, you make vows before God to “stand by your man.” God expects you to keep those vows. You have the power to put your husband “on cloud nine” or send him into the depths of despair with a look or a word. Use that power carefully and prayerfully.

Second, she spoke of integrity as a contemptible or worthless thing. What is integrity? The dictionary defines it as “uprightness of character, honesty, moral incorruptibility.” The word is related to *integer*, which means a whole number, an undivided number, unsullied and uncompromised. God’s Old Testament word says, “The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him” (Proverbs 20:7). And Paul told Titus to “[show] yourself in all things to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility” (Titus 2:7). God loves and honors people of integrity!

Unlike his wife, Job considered his integrity as something precious. He said, “If I have walked with falsehood, or if my foot has hastened to deceit, let me be weighed in a just balance, that God may know my integrity” (Job 31:5-6).

Third, Mrs. Job teaches us that Satan can work through people who are near and dear to us, even family members. The fact that we love them so much makes the temptation worse and harder to resist. “Curse God and die” was exactly what Satan wanted and expected Job to do, and he used the one closest to his heart to deliver that message to him. (By the way--have you noticed that Mrs. Job was the

only member of Job's family to survive? Evidently Satan saw her as his greatest ally!)

Fourth, Mrs. Job teaches us about something a lot of pseudo-sophisticated people are advocating today: euthanasia or suicide as a solution to suffering. When you think about it, Job was a candidate for suicide or euthanasia if there ever was one. He was experiencing intense physical suffering; he had lost all reason to live; and there was no hope in sight. But Job resisted his wife's suggestion, and the false reasoning of his friends; resulting in God's blessing him with twice as much as he had before. Job 42:12-17 tells us, "Now the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters.... After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days."

What is the Bible's answer to people like Mrs. Job who say that all suffering is bad, and that suicide and euthanasia are noble and courageous solutions to suffering? The answer is, Yes, suffering is bad in its effects; but the *results* of suffering can be good. We might say that suffering is the only medicine whose effects are unpleasant, but the side effects are good! What are some of those side effects?

- Suffering builds character, perseverance, and patience.
- Suffering brings out the best qualities in people, such as heroism, generosity, and empathy.
- People who endure suffering are best qualified to help others who are suffering.

When we suffer patiently and do not lose our trust in God, and when we accept suffering as the will of God without questioning, we are following the example of Job and walking in the footsteps of Jesus. That's pretty good company. --John Temples