



Reflections From Job



***Making Sense of Suffering
When it Makes No Sense***

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REFLECTIONS FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

Making Sense of Suffering When it Makes No Sense

My goal in writing reflections from the life of Job are the following: First, *to encourage you* the reader that if you will pay attention to the words on the page and listen carefully you will mine a lot of truth for life without the need of a commentary or any secondary source. That is, “take up and read” to enrich your soul Christian.

Second, I write *to give you a model* of how observations can be done in scripture that do not read into the text something foreign to the author’s intent. This will help you experience the joy of discovery and increase your confidence in your ability to comprehend God’s word.

Third, by doing the above my hope is that *you will be able to hear God’s voice* all the more clearly because it is the word of God that is forever settled in heaven, and not our subjective impressions however valid they may be. That is, we have a more sure word of prophecy according to Peter—meaning the inscripturated word of God—then a glorious experience we may claim to have (2 Peter 1:16-21). Too often we Christians have bizarre ideas of what “God” is supposedly speaking to us and when it contradicts the Bible, be assured we are not hearing his voice.

JOB 1-3: “THE LIFE OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN INTRODUCED”

The first three chapters of Job set the stage for most of the book. In it we see a historical account of Job who was from the land of Uz. His character is described as one who feared God and turned away from evil (1:1). He is also very prosperous with sons, daughters, land, livestock etc. He was a rich man who loved God (1:2-3), he spent time with his family celebrating their bounty (1:4), but Job also interceded on behalf of his children knowing the occasion for rebellion was ever real and present before them (1:5).

This resume is impressively daunting. Wealthy people tend not to be God fearers, not because they aren’t precious to God, but because God is not precious to them—they don’t see their need for Him (E.g., parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man). In Job’s case however, God was his true wealth to which the rest of this book attests. His prosperity included a family—a fact many today don’t enjoy, but it also included land with livestock—kind of like the “Ponderosa” but ever more.

Job’s loyalty to God however is questioned by Satan accusing this God-fearer of only serving God because of the prosperity God bestowed on him (1:9-12, 13-19). Prosperity can ultimately destroy God’s people and send them into the abyss of idolatry—remember Israel?

But in Job’s case, that was a boldface lie (1:20-22). Again, the accusation came from Satan; Job only fears You God because he has his health, take this away and he’ll curse You God (2:1-10). Both times the accusations are leveled against Job and on both occasions it’s recorded that “in all this Job did not sin with his lips” (1:22; 2:10). Jobs wealth, children and health were taken from him by Satan...but only because God allowed it. Now while God does work through many causes, this text doesn’t reveal His weakness but strength in dictating *what* Satan is allowed to do. How could a loving God do such a thing? Christian, have you ever asked

yourself the question, “How could God send his unique Son to Calvary’s cross?” That is even more troublesome, but we know that love for us was worth the gruesome pain for Him.

The pain Job expresses in terms of wishing he were never born and the longing for death is deeply sobering in light of human suffering and its’ reality (3). Job’s suffering is an endurance most of us will never experience. Job is nonetheless a God fearing man and an example of what it means to be righteous regardless of the circumstances. When the flood gates of pain and suffering come our way, not if believer, understand that God is there, He has not abandoned you.

The fact is that to be human is to suffer—because of the Fall—but to suffer as a believer has eternal ramifications that for many of us are not immediately, if ever, discerned or understood. For those in pain—physical or emotional—may God’s grace in Christ bring you comfort this day.

(SDG)

JOB 4-6: “AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN FRIENDS—The Innocent Don’t Suffer?”

I’ve never heard of friends who would sit silently for days with a sick loved one, but Job’s friends did (2:13). So when Eliphaz the Temanite hears Job’s complaint, he’s had seven days to consider how to respond. We tend to lack such patience. Instead, we tend to rush to fix the “problem” without giving serious contemplation to the matter. When it comes to human suffering, we have here a sober example of patience. This is one of the good things Job’s friends did for him.

We must understand that Job is a man who strengthened and consoled many with his wisdom (4:1-4), but Job’s fear of God and integrity are suspect because of his remark:

“Remember now, whoever perished being innocent? or where were the upright destroyed?” (4:7)

“...according to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity and those who sow trouble harvest it...” (4:8)

The fact is Eliphaz is telling Job, “You must have sin in your life because the innocent don’t ever suffer”. Many in Christendom think this way, I used to be among those, but it’s a shame because it is false. Remember that twice we are reminded that Job did not sin with his lips (1:22; 2:10)? This means he spoke in accordance with the truth. It’s true that suffering results from wrongdoing (either our own or someone else’s), but sometimes there’s no wrongdoing, it’s a conundrum to us. It was to Job.

Now much of what Eliphaz says is true (5:1-27), but in Job’s case, it doesn’t apply because that’s not why he was afflicted. Job’s response to Eliphaz is heart wrenching:

“Oh that my grief were actually weighed and laid in the balances together with my calamity! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the seas; therefore my words have been rash” (6:2-3)

The poetry helps us glimpse into his unbearable suffering where he attributes his bitter reality to God (6:2-3). But is this wrong? After all, God gave Satan permission to do this to Job. This is much to consider for those of us who have all of our categories about God neatly in their place. Too often past wounds and a narrow view of God's love make this reality difficult to accept that God is ultimately responsible for our suffering, but it seems there's no way around it here. Job continues:

"...consolation and I rejoice in unsparing pain, that I have not denied the words of the Holy One" (6:10)

Job understands that his request for God to kill him was not sinful (6:8-9). He also knows that his troubles are beyond self-remedy or any human assistance (6:11-13). Yet, Job's anger (understandably so) is with friends whose words only aggravate his condition and discourage him to be Godward (6:14-23). So Job challenges his friends:

"Teach me and I will be silent and show me how I have erred. How painful are honest words! But what does your argument prove?"

This is a fascinating account of the sufferer and those witnessing the crucible of suffering trying to understand this type of human existence. This is serious thought, not for children, but for grown-ups (6:26-30). In spite of Job's friend's words, he maintains his innocence. The saying, "with friends like these who needs enemies" is appropriate.

In the book of James the apostle shares a bit of wisdom that Job and his friends could have benefitted from: "be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath". But his friends actually sat seven days before him not uttering one word. So maybe that text doesn't apply to them.

What would become of me or of you if we were in Job's place? Many people have endured horrific injustices done to them for Christ's sake. But sadly many have shipwrecked the faith as well. May we learn from both and prepare our souls for such occasions so if it comes, we might endure with integrity and truth just as Job endured.

BTW, God wants us to share in His holiness and suffering is sometimes the only path to reach this destiny (Heb.12:1-13)
(SDG)

JOB 7-10: "THE CONVERSATION OF A VEXED JOB CONTINUES WITH HIS FRIENDS"

Job's misery continues to be revealed as a hired slave waiting for wages (7:1-2) whose flesh is grossly wasting away without rest, *"My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt, my skin hardens and runs."* Job is like a man whose existence will be forgotten (7:7-10), even though he can't see any sin which merits his suffering:

²⁰ *“Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men? Why have You set me as Your target, So that I am a burden to myself?” (7:11-21).*

Then Bildad the Shuhite like Eliphaz speaks up—eventually comes to “God’s defense”—and asks, *“Does God pervert justice...”* (8:3-4), no! so if his sons were not blameless, then their calamity was on them and the same is true of Job! (8:5-22). Job agrees with the content of Bildad’s theology, but disagrees with his premise because it’s faulty according to Job—he’s not guilty! Of particular impact is the description of those who trust in everything but God:

*“Can the papyrus grow up without a marsh? Can the rushes grow without water?
¹² “While it is still green and not cut down, Yet it withers before any other plant.
¹³ “So are the paths of all who forget God; And the hope of the godless will perish,
¹⁴ Whose confidence is fragile, And whose trust a spider’s web.” (Job 8:11-14)*

That’s an amazing metaphor describing the futility of recalcitrant human beings who will not acknowledge their Creator. Job here is pegged as one such creature. He understands that before God Almighty he can’t stand and is utterly at His mercy (9:1-12), even though he can’t see his own guilt. Worse still is that Job doesn’t have a lawyer who can represent him before God (9:33) and his experience sees that “the scourge kills suddenly.” Again Job declares:

“It is all one; therefore I say, ‘He destroys the guiltless and the wicked.’ ²³ “If the scourge kills suddenly, He mocks the despair of the innocent. ²⁴ “The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; He covers the faces of its judges. If it is not He, then who is it?” (9:22-24)

Job seems to be complaining that in God’s might and in the affairs of man, God is ultimately behind said events, but why does He allow injustice to flourish? Why Job’s misery? It’s a puzzle to him. Why do the wicked seem to flourish and the righteous become downtrodden? This wrestling of the soul is especially vexing to the one undergoing trial. Job continues his protest of God’s dealings with him:

*‘According to Your knowledge I am indeed not guilty,
Yet there is no deliverance from Your hand.’ (10:7)*

He’s utterly flummoxed with this life and desires he had never existed:

*“Why then have You brought me out of the womb?
Would that I had died and no eye had seen me! ¹⁹ ‘I should have been as though I had not been, Carried from womb to tomb.” (10:18-19)*

I’m overwhelmed with Job’s situation, there’s no hand to save from God’s power, there’s no words to confound His wisdom, there’s only the casting of the self on His mercy and grace for any hope in this life or the one to come. In a very detailed way, God’s ways are not ours. He is God and we...are not! (SDG)

JOB 11-16: “JOB’S VEXED LIFE CONTINUED”

This book is relentless with descriptions of a deeply troubled soul who instead of being comforted by his friends is increasingly aggravated by them. Zophar the Naamathite chimes in on the conversation and describes Job as a “talkative man...” (11:2) who while claiming to be innocent is not able to fathom how these calamities have fallen on Job (11:7-20) and thus there must be sin in his life.

Job responds with aggressive words like; *“I am a joke to my friends...the just man is a joke”* (12:4) but the enemies of God prosper (12:6). How can this be? It seems that in God’s might, wisdom, counsel, understanding and power none can contend (12:7-25) and says:

*“He makes the nations great, then destroys them, He enlarges the nations,
Then leads them away”* (12:23).

What’s Job’s point? That the righteous man suffers, the wicked man flourishes and is at ease from calamity and while that baffles Job, he is nevertheless in real utter misery, maintains his innocence and his friends counsel is faulty. Not because the content of what they are saying is false, but because it does not apply to Job’s situation.

Job continues and reminds his friends; *“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him”* (13:15), nevertheless Job will continue to make his case and will be vindicated by God (13:15-28). Such horrific circumstances move Job to consider his own death and to recognize God’s sovereignty:

*“Since his days are determined, the number of his months is with You;
And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass”* (14:5)

That’s a daunting reality and one that I should always consider, for one day my pen will cease to describe the ruminations from my soul, for my days are also numbered. Thus, teach me to number my days Lord—this I fail to do well—and always help me trust in Your steadfast love, which is better than life, to bring me home.

I’m a burdened soul but nothing compared to this man Job, nevertheless my sin and struggle is real. I hate my lack of steadfastness, o God, come rescue me!
(SDG)

JOB 17-19: “JOB IS THE BYWORD HIS FRIENDS DON’T UNDERSTAND”

Never have I heard of or known the devastation Job lived. Grant it, throughout human history atrocities against people have been recorded; the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Barbarians all the way into the 20th century Blood Baths under Nazi Germany, Russia’s Stalin, China’s Mao, Vietnam’s Pol Pot, Iraq’s Saddam Hussein, and America’s abortion mills. Human beings can be heinous without grace.

But Job’s misery is not because of the creature, but rather because of the Creator. Truly, Satan is the agent of destruction but God gave the permission. This is difficult for me to comprehend. Job, the righteous servant of God has become the “byword” known for tremendous suffering but the reasons are hidden from everyone except God (17:1-7). Job is

nonetheless an amazing fighter, for while being in such pain, he is relentlessly presenting his case before his foolish friends (17:10-18:3) who add insult to injury with their words (18:4-19:3) to a man who has everyone and everything going against him (19:4-29).

What anguish of soul and body to have a society consider you truly wicked, but actually you are innocent. This reminds me of Jesus how in one moment the people shouted, "*Hosanna to the son of David*" and the following days clamoring, "*Crucify him!*" Those events in Christ's life were also hidden from not only man but also from satanic forces.

God's hidden providences while often painful are nevertheless ultimately good. Although on the one hand I deeply hate the pain, on the other hand, God's plans seem to blossom in and through the fires of affliction, not the holidays at the sea. In fact all of life seems to come as a result of hardship, constant toil and even death. My ways are not God's ways. May I trust Him even though He slay me.

(SDG)

JOB 20-24: "JOB CONTINUES HIS ARGUMENTATION"

According to Zophar the Naamathite, the reason all these terrible things have fallen on Job is because he is wicked (20:4-29). He, like Job, feels insulted by his friend's speech (20:3) and as the flow of this account unfolds we see that both parties are insulted by each other's words, both understand why the wicked seem to flourish, but the application to Job's life just does not obtain.

Nevertheless, the back and forth discloses a rich theology on suffering, God's incomparableness, and man's limited understanding concerning the hidden counsels of God:

*"Why do the wicked still live, Continue on, also become very powerful?
8 "Their descendants are established with them in their sight, And their offspring
before their eyes, 9 Their houses are safe from fear, And the rod of God is not on
them. 10 "His ox mates without fail; His cow calves and does not abort. 11 "They
send forth their little ones like the flock, And their children skip about.
12 "They sing to the timbrel and harp And rejoice at the sound of the flute.
13 "They spend their days in prosperity, And suddenly they go down to Sheol.
14 "They say to God, 'Depart from us! We do not even desire the knowledge of
Your ways. 15 'Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him, And what would
we gain if we entreat Him?' (21:7-15)*

These texts are a small sample describing the disposition of the wicked; that do not see gain, but rather loss by acknowledging God's ways, God's truth, and God's character. In short, the wicked are twisted thinkers and sojourners when it comes to Almighty God. Sadly, their memory will perish with them, the day of calamity is reserved for them (21:30), men will oversee their tombs (21:32) and to associate Job to the wicked is utter falsehood:

*"How then will you vainly comfort me,
For your answers remain full of falsehood?" (21:34)*

Eliphaz again weighs in and doubts Job's righteousness, *"Yield now and be at peace with Him; Thereby good will come to you."* (22:21). What a weighty encounter of thought and pain, what a miserable way to exist being grossly misunderstood and thereby falsely accused as a result.

LORD, this exchange is difficult to bear. Both Job's anguish and his friends "help" are troublesome to consider. May I never be so insensitive, may I never be so obtuse, but may I with your compassion and love come alongside the suffering with words that are true and appropriate for them.

(SDG)

JOB 25-29: "JOB CONTINUES HIS ARGUMENTATION"

Bildad's words (25) are hardly helpful again, and Job's response is sarcasm:

"What a help you are to the weak! How you have saved the arm without strength!"³ "What counsel you have given to one without wisdom! What helpful insight you have abundantly provided!"⁴ "To whom have you uttered words? And whose spirit was expressed through you? (26:2-4)

Job continues in the following chapters talking about the wicked and their inheritance, God's wisdom revealed in the creation and nevertheless it is hidden from us (26:6-14; 27:13-23). Moreover, Job reiterates his blamelessness, *"My lips certainly will not speak unjustly, Nor will my tongue mutter deceit."*⁵ *"Far be it from me that I should declare you right; Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. (27:4-5)*

Job is contending for his righteousness and his friend's lack of wisdom and judgment in the way they have dealt with him is exposed. Moreover, this earth and its' treasures can't compare to the value of the wisdom required to understand and to create the heavens (28:1-22). It's this very wisdom the LORD gives to those who fear him, "...to depart from evil is understanding". (28:28)

The point seems to be that Bildad's words reveals that he neither fears the LORD nor has turned away from evil or else he would have the wisdom and the understanding to judge Job's plight rightly. But Bildad lacks these qualities (28:12-13). Job recounts a description of his righteousness as one who delivered the poor and orphaned, as one who helped widows become joyful, as one who combatted the wicked, as one deemed considerably wise among the people and one who was part of the warrior class (29). This is an exceptional man through and through!

It seems as if his friends had forgotten who he was prior to these horrific ordeals. Regardless, Job will continue to contend for his righteousness even though all the voices around him clamor to the contrary. This is a weighty account indeed. The fact that Job is still able to intellectually joust with his friends after such physical and mental anguish is astounding. The psychological weightiness of his plight alone would have driven most mortals mad. But not Job, it's as if the more difficult the task became the more he flourished. His patience is exemplary

and worthy of note, for it's a window into the power of holiness to withstand horrific circumstances (E.g., The Cross?).
(SDG)

JOB 32-42: "THE CONCLUSION TO ONE LONG SERIES OF ARGUMENTS"

After Job's three friends stopped responding to him because he was righteous in his own eyes and justified himself before God (32:1-3), a young man spoke up. There's much anger in this context between Job and his friends and now Elihu comes against Job's three friends because they neither solved Job's problem nor consoled him in suffering. Elihu claimed to be God's mouth piece for several chapters (32-34) and reproves Job with, "*So Job opens his mouth empty; He multiplies words without knowledge.*" (35:16)

Elihu uses the mysteries of the created order to point out that God's ways really are past searching out after certain borders have been crossed (36-37). Then God speaks up and lets Job have it; "*Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge?*" (38:2). To speak from ignorance is to perpetuate falsehoods which misdiagnose a state of affairs. God proceeds to ask Job epistemological questions that are daunting:

*"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell Me, if you have understanding, ⁵ Who set its measurements? Since you know,
Or who stretched the line on it? ⁶ "On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its
cornerstone, ⁷ When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God
shouted for joy? (38:4-7)*

*"Or who enclosed the sea with doors When, bursting forth, it went out from the
womb; ⁹ When I made a cloud its garment And thick darkness its swaddling band,
¹⁰ And I placed boundaries on it And set a bolt and doors, ¹¹ And I said, 'Thus far
you shall come, but no farther; And here shall your proud waves stop'? (38:8-11)*

*"Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth?
Do you observe the calving of the deer? (39:1)*

*"Do you give the horse his might?
Do you clothe his neck with a mane? (39:19)*

*"Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars,
Stretching his wings toward the south? (39:26)*

After an exhausting litany of questions, job is humbled and in response essentially tells God: "You are right, I have no right to speak because my knowledge of the created order and it's creatures is beyond me". But God was not done with Job, and continued to ask him more questions of the same nature:

“No one is so fierce that he dares to arouse him; Who then is he that can stand before Me? Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine. (41:10-11)

If no man dares to approach Leviathan, the fiercest creature on earth, who is Job who dares to approach God—Leviathan’s master—in this manner? This is very weighty and Job’s response is appropriate:

*“I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.
³ ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”⁴ ‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.’⁵ “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You;
⁶ Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.” (42:2-6)*

Job encountered God. Oh how we need to encounter Him in this way! Job repents! He repents from his misdiagnoses of God’s purposes, goodness, justice and wisdom and his twisted words. His three friends however aroused God’s wrath, but Job God’s servant interceded for them (42:10) and God’s favor was restored to them and to Job. Interestingly the text points out that now his friends could console Job (42:10-11) from the adversities *the LORD* had brought upon him. Only when we are right with God, can we be in a position to rightly comfort those suffering in word and in deed.

After considering the end of this book silence seems to be the appropriate response. God is sovereign, we are not. Nevertheless, this account is deeply perplexing and difficult to grasp as creatures. The text is clear that it was God the LORD, not Satan who brought all these calamities onto Job.

At the end of the day, we creatures have to ultimately decide who we will trust when in the mysteries of life we are ruthlessly knocked down. As His people we are called to follow regardless of where He leads us because He after all owns us. As new covenant believers Job is instructive. We learn through his life that sometimes the reasons for our sufferings have nothing to do with us and everything to do with God and His purposes. Much to consider! (SDG)