

Job

1 Once upon a time, there lived a great man in the land of Uz, the area now known as Jordan. His name was Job and he was one of the great and wealthy men of his time, a noble who wielded great respect and influence. He was vastly wealthy, possessing over 11 000 animals, and commanding a small army of servants and employees. More importantly, he was a godly man, who loved and feared God. He is one of the only fathers in the Old Testament who showed a deep spiritual interest in his children, making sacrifices for them, in case they had sinned in their birthday celebrations.

But Job had no idea that the meaning of his life went far beyond his children and his possessions. He was actually a player in a cosmic drama. He was a soldier in a battle between good and evil that began long before he was born. Job's righteous life had caught the attention of God and His adversary, Satan. Job was living testimony to the wisdom of following God, of being God's child.

And on one time, in a way we barely understand, angelic beings presented themselves before God, and Satan, as a fallen angelic being was there too. God challenged Satan, the accuser, to consider Job, blameless and devoted. Satan disputed how blameless Job really was. He said, "Anyone would be good and obedient if they were spoiled the way you spoil Job. But take away his toys, take away what's dear to him, and we'll see how much of his devotion is left"

God accepted this challenge and gave permission for Job's devotion to be tested.

And in the land of Uz, the tragedies began to hit Job one by one. Four messengers brought news of great devastation. First, crime. Sabeans came, stole the thousands of oxen, and murdered his employees. Then a natural disaster: lightning caused a massive fire, wiped out the sheep, and the servants died as well. Third, more crime: the Chaldeans came and stole the camels and murdered the servants. In one day, he had lost 11 000 animals: every penny. But he still had his family, at least. But then the fourth messenger came to tell him that all his sons and daughters had all been gathered in one place at one time, and huge wind collapsed the house they were in, and in one moment all ten of his adult children gone.

Job tore his clothes, shaved himself, fell on his knees, crushed by the blow of providence. You could not be more devastated on one day. But in that place of kneeling, sobbing, Job still said< **Job 1:21** 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.

2 And then, on another time, in a way we barely understand, angelic beings presented themselves before God, and Satan, as a fallen angelic being was there too. God challenged Satan, the accuser, to consider Job, blameless and devoted even in spite of needless trials. Satan answered "As long as a man's suffering doesn't touch his own body, he'll secretly be glad the suffering happened to others. Touch him, and Job will curse you." God gave permission, and Job broke out in painful, festering boils from the crown of his head down to the soles of his feet. And now, in physical agony, his own wife called

on him to deny his faith, and end his pitiful life. "Curse God and die" Job told her that she was siding with fools, and said, "**Job 2:10** Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?"

But there was one more trial ahead of Job, and it came in the form of his three 'friends'. Three older men, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar travelled from their own towns to meet together to comfort Job. And along the way, they had each been formulating counsel, thinking of what they would say to Job. They had come up with their answers, their analyses of why this was happening to Job.

But when they saw him, they were shocked. To see his body covered in sores, pus oozing out, others bleeding, bleeding scratches from where Job had cut them open with a broken piece of pottery. To see him sitting there, resembling a beggar, an outcast from society, caused them to weep.

And then they sat down with him, and only taking water and necessary food, they said nothing to him for seven days, waiting for him to say the first word.

3 Finally, Job spoke up, speaking as much to himself as to those men with him, and into the ears of God. "My life is so painful, so filled with suffering, it would have been better had I never been born. Why should I keep on living, when my life is so miserable, when God has hedged up my way, filled my life with my worst fears, and made me long for death?

4-5 Eliphaz answered, with a feigned kindness. Job, you have been a teacher of many people, but now the lesson is one you must learn. Job, it is really very simple. Those who sow their sin must reap trouble and suffering. The sinful, the crafty are eventually dealt with by God. Come Job, we know how holy God is, even his choice servants are not blameless before him. Don't despise the punishment God is giving you. Simply repent of the sin you know you have, and God will be on your side again.

6-7 Job Oh that God would let me go into eternity, for my suffering has just increased. You, my friends, are as fickle as melting snow – you seem to offer help, but it soon melts away. I did not ask you to help me, but here you are reproving me for what I have not done.

O God, why am I so valuable to you that you extend my life of suffering? Why have you made me your target? Why not pardon me and let me die?

8 Bildad cleared his throat. Eliphaz had not convinced Job, so Bildad would be more forceful. "Job, how long will you say these empty things? Is God not always right in what He does? Do you think your children died because they were sinless? It is the godless who are forsaken, and judged! God does not reject the blameless. Come Job, admit your secret sins. Seek God, plead for God's mercy. Evil things happen to evil people. Come right, and God will bring you all the rewards of the righteous.

9-10 Job shook his head. “I know, I know, but how can I prove my innocence before a God like Him? He moves mountains, shakes the earth, commands the sun, stretches out the heavens, does what He wills. How can I stop Him in His tracks, demand an answer from him. I know I am blameless, though God has truly brought this upon me. I am righteous and yet suffering. I need some arbiter who will place his hand on both of us, and mediate between us, for I have not done wrong, but yet He treats me as if I have. No, Bildad, God destroys both the blameless and the wicked – they all die together. It is not as you say.

Oh God, you made me, you fashioned me, you gave me life and loved me. Why then does it seem as if you are hunting me, laying siege to my life? God, let me go into the rest and the darkness of death.

11 Zophar was grinding his teeth while Job was speaking. Finally, it was his turn. “Job, you are babbling and mocking. You are a self-righteous sinner. Know that you are getting less than your guilt deserves. God knows everything, his understanding is unsearchable. He knows worthless men, he sees sin. Stop covering your sin. Put away your sin. Come clean about your injustice. All will come right when you do. It is very simple, Job: put off your sin, put on righteousness, and things will come right.

12-14 Job gave an ironic laugh. “No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you. I know your simplistic view of reality. But life is more complex than your black and white view of life. Criminals live in peace, those who provoke God often live secure lives. And yes, God is in control of it all! He is sovereign, I agree. No one can oppose him, he sets up and takes down, opens up and shuts, takes down kings and sets them up, overthrows the mighty. He can do what he wants. And though he slay me, yet will I serve Him. But often evil people prosper and the righteous suffer. Be careful, you three, of speaking falsely for God, because what happens if He searches you out? You are worthless physicians.

God, if I have sinned – show me what it is! Why count me like an enemy, why bring to bear on me all your strength and power. I am nothing, my life is wasting away. Why keep emptying me and destroying me? Let me go, let me go to the grave and meet you, and understand.

15 Eliphaz was becoming more impatient. “Do wise men speak the empty, useless words you do? You have chosen to not fear God, and every word you speak just proves how guilty you really are. We are older and wiser than you, and if you only understood that we are God's method of teaching you, and comforting you. How ungrateful you are! Listen again: it is not complicated. Wicked men are punished by a sovereign God. Wickedness is repaid with pain, distress, anguish. The man who defied God, who lived in luxury, who used bribery, he will come to poverty, and emptiness. Does it sound familiar, Job?

16-17. Job smiled. “Miserable comforters are you all. Yes, I could use these clichés and platitudes if I were in your shoes. But would not. I would comfort you, I would seek to

strengthen you.

But my life, oh, my life. God has worn me out, shrivelled me up, torn me, broken me, seized me by the neck and dashed me. My life is perpetual mourning. People mock me, my name has become a word for calamity and judgement Oh, that my case would come before God. And if I should die, what then? Where is my vindication? Where is my hope if I die?

As for you lot, I shall not find a wise man among you.

18 Bildad could barely contain his fury. “Why do you call us stupid? Are you so important? Let me tell you what happens to wicked men, and you compare it to your life. He gets caught in his own net, trapped, snared, while terrors seize him on every side, his skin is consumed, his place gets burnt up, he loses his reputation, he has no children to survive him, his lamp is put out.

19 “How long will you torture me and break me with your words? Even if I have erred, the error is mine, not yours. And if you mean to make my disgrace an argument against me, then remember it is God who has sovereignly controlled this circumstance. God has walled me in, laid siege against me, broken me on every side, children and servants abhor me. My friends, have mercy on me! Why do you pursue me, like God? O that my words could be written in a book. But I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the end He will stand upon the earth. And even when this body is destroyed, yet I will be raised to see God in my flesh.

20 Zophar spoke one more time. “I have been insulted, but I will still speak words of great understanding. Don't you know what happens to the wicked, Job? Look in the mirror! A wicked man might enjoy prosperity for a season, but then it comes crashing down in a moment. Because he crushed the poor, and stole, and consumed, and lived in luxury. But now judgement is coming at the pointed end of spear. Heaven will reveal his wickedness.”

21 Job said, “listen to me a little longer, and then carry on with your mocking. Look around you at the reality of the world: wicked people live easy lives. Their children are spoilt. Their money increases every day. They reject and ignore god, live in safety, die in security, while others die in deep poverty. Your words my friends, are empty nothings, and pure falsehood.

22. Eliphaz spoke one more time. Job, your evil is abundant, and there is no end to your iniquities. You impoverished people, did not help the poor or the destitute, ignored the orphan and the widow, and that is why snares are all around you. Return to the Almighty, Job, and you will be built up again.

23-24. Job seemed to just ignore Eliphaz. “How I wish I could have an audience with God. I cannot find him, but He knows the way I take, and when I have been tried, I shall come forth as gold. I have kept his ways, I have treasured the words of His mouth more

than my portion of food.

I don't understand why evildoers go unpunished. Why do thieves, murderers, adulterers, oppressors go on? God preserves their lives, and they keep doing evil. I cannot figure out why the righteous suffer, and why the evil prosper.”

25. Bildad tried one more time. “How can you think of yourself as blameless? Even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in his eyes, how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm. Stop claiming to be blameless. It's not true.”

26-31. Job could not resist using sarcasm. “How you have helped the powerless man. How you have counselled one without wisdom, and plentifully declared sound wisdom! God is sovereign over life and death, ocean and galaxies – and these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him.

One more time, I will take my stand: I am not lying. Far be it from me to say you are right, till I die I will not put away my integrity. The wicked will be punished, yes, but it still does not make sense. What is needed to understand this mystery of why the righteous suffer, and why the wicked prosper is wisdom. Men dig in the earth for all manner of gold and precious stones, but where can you dig for wisdom? God alone has this wisdom and this understanding. Only in knowing Him, fearing Him, loving Him, can we begin to understand these things.

Oh, my life. Just months ago, I was in my prime, with my children around me. People held me in awe, and I was known for the help I gave to the poor, the orphan, the widow, the blind, the lame. I fought against the unrighteous. People came to me for counsel. But now, men younger than I, the outcasts of society, laugh at me. I am ruined, my soul is poured out within me, I cry to You, god, and you do not answer me. I hoped for good and evil came. But I tell you all again, let my life be weighed in God's scales. If I have been adulterous, if I have neglected the needs of my workers, if I withheld from the poor and needy, and refused help to those who needed it, if I have trusted in my wealth, if I have rejoiced in the ruin of my enemies, if I have truly hidden my iniquities, then let me be punished accordingly.

Oh, that I had one to answer me. Here is my signature on this oath. Let the Almighty hear me! Let me see the indictment against me by my adversary! Oh for an audience with God! I would give him an account of all my steps; like a prince I would approach him.”

With that, Job fell silent. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had exhausted all they could say.

32-37. Sitting silently there was a younger man, named Elihu. Out of respect, he had kept quiet while the older spoke first. But now silence settled in the air. Elihu was disturbed. Job's three friends had no real answers, they had simply declared Job wrong. And Job had been declaring his innocence, and not declaring God's righteousness.

Finally he spoke, “I may be young, but my spirit constrains me to speak. Job, I am not here to afflict you or add to your burden. But you are wrong to say that God counts you as His enemy.

God works in so many ways to humble men. Job, God cannot pervert justice. Job, you may be blameless of what these men are accusing you of, but you are speaking without wisdom and insight, and adding rebellion to your problems. You are accusing God of mistreating you, of being unfair to you. It is true that God brings punishment on all. Sometimes it makes sense, when the people are wicked, and sometimes it doesn't – because God has other purposes for that trial. But God's greatness is unsearchable, and no one can fully search out all his purposes.”

After Elihu had finished, the four men sat silently. And then the rustling of fallen leaves began to pick up, and they noticed a cold wind causing their cloaks to flap. No one had seen a storm approaching that day, and it soon became clear that this whirlwind was no natural whirlwind. From the wind came more than whistling and rustling: a voice came. It was the voice of the Lord Himself.

38-41 “Who is this who turns counsel into confusion with words without knowledge. Job, you demanded an audience with me. You wanted a confrontation, you've now got one. You wanted to have it out, here we are. Stand up, look me in the eye, and listen. Job, you have summoned me and demanded that I answer your questions. But I have one answer to your questions, and it is another question: How good is Job at being God? Where were you at the very moment of creation, when the angels sang for joy as I laid the foundations of the Earth? Did you have a part in that? This ground that supports you – did you make it? How often have you kept day and night going? Surely, since you have demanded that I answer to you, we must be equals, Job. Tell me then about the springs of the sea, where I can walk, or the storehouses of snow and rain, and thunder, and lightning, and frost? Since I must answer to you, you surely will be able to answer these elementary questions? Since you are my equal, you can bind the constellation Pleiades, or Orion, or generally shepherd the stars, Come, since I must answer to you, tell me about providing food for the young lions, for the ravens. Tell me how you oversee the birth of young animals on the tips of mountains – because I'm sure your gaze reaches there, as mine does. Let's compare notes, as fellow-gods, Job – you can control the wild ox, right? You gave the warhorse, his strength, the eagle his lofty wings, you made the laws that make hawks fly, didn't you?

“Job, the answers to the questions I am asking you are simpler than the answers to the questions you asked me. If you cannot begin to explain my ways with the sea, and the snow, and the stars, and the animals how do you think you'd be able to understand my ways with the crown of my creation – you?”

“Job, you feel that I have failed you, overlooked you, mistreated you. Do you see any mismanagement in my ways with the sea, the winds, the rain, the stars, the land animals, the birds, great sea creatures? As you see my ways with these things, is there any sign of wisdom? Is there any sign of goodness? Is there any sign of power mixed with gentleness, majesty mixed with meekness? If so, do you think it would be different when I deal with the crown of my creation, man? Do you think I would be less good, less

gentle, less careful, less wise when dealing with my children?”

Job swallowed hard. “God, I have spoken too much already, I have nothing more to say.”

God answered, “No, no shrinking back now. Job, you have demanded that I appear and give an account to you of my actions. Here it is, so stand up and listen.

Am I wrong, and you are right? Are you so blameless, that I am sinful?

How are you doing on this God-exam, Job? Can you thunder with your voice? Can you adorn yourself with majesty and dignity, and clothe yourself with splendour and glory? Can you humble the proud at will?

Take one of the largest creatures I ever made, Behemoth. I made him with you. With a tail like a cedar, bones like bronze, limbs like iron. Can you even tame him, Job? Forget about having Me submit to you, can you get the other creatures you share this world with to submit to you?

Or Leviathan. Can you tame him, persuade him, play with him, harpoon him? His skin is like armour, his mouth kindles coals, swords and arrows are useless on him. No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me? Who has first given to me, that I should repay Him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.

Job, you want explanations. You want to know *why* this is happening. But far more important than the *why*, is the *who*. Who is in charge of it, who orders it, who uses it. What is He like? Can He be trusted? Is He good? Is He wise? Is He loving? Are His ways above your ways? And does He have the sovereign right to order his whole creation, including you, for His wise purposes?”

42 Job looked up. “I know you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. I uttered what I did not understand. I peered into things far more wondrous than I could ever comprehend. Up to now, I knew of you with the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you. And I repent of my attitude and my words.

Then God turned to Job's three friends. “I am very displeased with you three, because you did not speak of me correctly. Though in this trial Job did not do all things right, he did not misrepresent me the way you did. Now seek Job's forgiveness, and ask him to present a sacrifice on your behalf.” They did so.

And in the months and years that followed, God restored to Job what he had lost, and doubled it, so that Job then had 22 000 animals. He had ten more children: seven sons and three daughters, and no daughters were more beautiful than his. And those who had forsaken him came to him and blessed him. And God added long life to Job, and he lived beyond the average span of life of his day.

But that was not the truly happy ending. The truly happy ending was that now Job knew God in ways he had not. What had been head knowledge was now known to him by deep,

personal, painful experience. God can be trusted. God is good and loving. God is loyal and faithful. God's ways are deeper than we could understand.

You only find that out when you suffer without an explanation. You only learn to delve into the goodness of God when you don't have the whys. If God had told Job what went on between Satan and Himself, it would have short-circuited the whole purifying process in Job's life. The apparent meaninglessness of the suffering, the suffering coming to him when he was blameless – this was what Job needed. God allows the righteous to suffer partly for cosmic reasons we will not know until we are in heaven, and partly to force us to wrestle with who God is. Is He sovereign? Is He good? Is He faithful? Even when it all seems to go wrong?

When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. What does Peter tell us emerges as more precious than gold? Our faith. Our love and trust in God is grown. We know Him and love Him through testing in ways we couldn't know Him otherwise.