

## **Series Job**

### **This Message The Challenge**

#### **Scripture Job 1:6-2:10**

Last week we thought about some important background information and looked at the person of Job. We recognized that he was a very high quality man who sought to please God in every aspect of his life. It was necessary for us to have this understanding of him because the perplexing question in this book is why righteous people, like Job, must endure suffering.

There are several popular explanations that Christians give when suffering and trouble come their way. Some people feel that they must have done something to displease God, causing Him to punish them. These people have pangs of consciousness and go through soul-searching in their efforts to come up with an explanation.

Other people react to suffering by thinking that they are not worthy of God's attention and protection. They assume that God would answer their pleas and provide help and relief if He had a greater interest in them.

A third group of people believe that God is unable to control certain events on earth – that there are some circumstances even He cannot prevent. These people may concede that God has control in heaven, but that He does not have full authority on earth and therefore cannot prevent the harmful effects of the world from afflicting them. People who hold to this view often conclude that Satan is the real “prince of the power of the air” and the “god of this age” (these are both Biblical statements; see Ephesians 2:2 and II Corinthians 4:4) and therefore he has the power to afflict those who are followers of Jesus.

The most common reason given for suffering is that God does not treat people fairly. Many people are convinced that God is unjust because He allows some to be afflicted while showering benefits on others. These individuals become angry because, they think, God has singled them out to suffer.

All of these explanations are subjective and unprovable. It is impossible to determine direct links between our sufferings and our sins. As a result, we cannot come up with convincing answers for many of our “why” questions.

Of course, there are obvious connections between promiscuous behavior and STDs and HIV/AIDS, and between drinking and road accidents, and between guns and violence. There are many cause and effect relationships in our world, but cause and effect relationships are difficult to discern in many of the afflictions we suffer.

For example, what is the relationship when cancer is discovered in an otherwise healthy body? Or when an accident takes the life of a loved one? Or when a natural disaster strikes? Some problems intrude on our lives without obvious explanations — in ways in which we cannot connect our woes directly to some known behavior. At those times we ask the “why me?” question, and we are inclined to think that the afflictions are undeserved. Inwardly we cry, “What did I do to deserve this?” This reveals a sense of injustice — a feeling that our problem exceeds what we rightly deserve.

Very few of us would be able to handle the kind of unanticipated calamities which fell on Job. We already know that Job was a “blameless and upright” man. The sufferings that he experienced cannot be explained on the basis of cause and effect, as if he somehow deserved his afflictions and misery. Neither can the sufferings be explained on the basis of justice and fairness. Job was innocent of wrong-doing, yet made to suffer terribly. Was God a capricious despot who allowed Job’s world to be thrown into disorder and perplexity?

We will not discover answers to the “why” questions today, but we will learn the “behind-the-scenes” explanation for the calamities which fell on Job.

### **Read Job 1:6 – 2:10**

At the beginning of this reading the setting was in heaven. The text states that the “angels (literally “sons of God”) came to present themselves before the Lord.” We don’t have any other information about the reason for the gathering. For that matter, we don’t know how the writer, an earthling, learned about this occasion, unless it was revealed to him in some supernatural way. The text explains that Satan showed up along “with the sons of God.” Notice that the text is worded so that Satan is not specifically identified with the sons of God.

The name “Satan” means “the Accuser.” In the Hebrew language, the name has the definite article. The word “Satan” was originally a descriptive title which in later centuries became a proper name in Scripture.

When the LORD learned that the Accuser had been “roaming through the earth,” He initiated the dialogue concerning Job. The LORD cited Job as the supreme example of a righteous man on earth. He declared Job to be “blameless, upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” These terms were the same characteristics mentioned in the first verse of the book, which we thought about last week. The LORD also referred to Job as “my servant,” which, in Scripture, is the highest compliment that God gives to a person in recognition of that person’s faithful obedience.

The Accuser’s response to the LORD’s appreciative words about Job was to attack the motives of Job. The Accuser could not deny the LORD’s assessment of Job’s character, but he could question the reason for Job’s pious character. “Does Job fear God for nothing?” At issue was the place of God in Job’s heart. According to the Accuser, Job only followed God for materialistic reasons. In essence, the Accuser said, “His loyalty to you is a sham. He serves you only because of what he gets out of the relationship. Why wouldn’t he pretend to love you? He would be a fool not to do so. Just take his benefits away and you’ll see what he is really like. He’ll curse you to your face.”

One of the important lessons that comes out of this book concerns the motivation for devotion to and worship of God. The question is raised: would anyone serve God if there was no personal benefit in doing so? Does a person serve God to get blessings? Is there a fear that failure to worship will bring punishment? Is there a kind of contract or implied understanding between humans and God by which wealth can be gained and trouble avoided? The implication behind the question of the Accuser was that worship is essentially an act of selfishness.

We know that the passion of the Accuser is to drive an irreconcilable wedge between God and mankind. In order to accomplish this, the activities of Satan tend to be along two pathways: As the Tempter, Satan works to alienate people from God through their willful disobedience. The original example of this pathway was described in Genesis chapter 3 when Adam and Eve were guided into disobedience. As the Accuser, he seeks to separate God from man by undermining the genuineness of their love relationship.

In the exchange of words, the Accuser was not only discrediting Job but exposing God as a hypocrite. God was accused of rigging the rules of divine/human relationships. The Accuser stated that God manipulated His followers by showering blessings on them, so that people like Job are loyal only because there was a material benefit or advantage if they did so. In other words, love by man for God was not heart-felt and voluntary. According to the Accuser, Job practiced righteousness for selfish human reasons — only because it paid a good return. At the same time, God was accused of being spiritually dishonest, accused of a lack of integrity because He was offering incentives to attract the loyalty of people.

According to the Accuser, if the link between Job's behavior and God's blessing would be broken, the reality of both the sinfulness of Job and the hypocrisy of God would be exposed for what they were, and God would lose His right to be followed and obeyed.

I think you can recognize the comprehensive nature of this challenge. The Accuser wanted to prove that the godliness of righteous people was, in actuality, the worst of sins, and that love for God and obedience to His commands was insincere and hypocritical. It would also be evident that God, through His incentive program, had not really given free will and choice to humanity.

The Accuser knew that if all this could be proven, then there would be no method of redemption sufficient to bring together fallen mankind and a holy God. Without pure motives on the part of both God and His human creation, it would be impossible to bridge the alienation gap between them caused by sin, and without redemption, God would have no options except to finally destroy everyone in judgment because there would be no basis of salvation.

This was the kind of accusation which, once raised, could not be ignored by God. Therefore, God gave permission for the Accuser to take away "everything Job had." From the LORD's perspective, a successful outcome would be a vindication of both Himself and His servant Job, and the Accuser would be silenced for eternity.

Note in verse 12 that God established the limits of the testing. The Accuser was not to harm Job personally. The Accuser had to yield to the superior authority of the LORD.

In verses 13 through 19 we have a description of the sequence of devastating news about the loss of all of Job's possessions and family members. Within a few minutes time he learned that his wealth, honor, and happiness were gone. One messenger after another arrived with shocking information. After hearing all the bad news, Job "tore his robe" and "shaved his head" — these were culturally appropriate ways to indicate inner turmoil and grief, and then he "fell to the ground in worship," acknowledging the sovereignty of God.

Verses 20 through 22 establish the tone and the tension of the book. For Job, his love for and allegiance to the LORD was a stronger factor than his possessions and his family members. He recognized that his circumstances were not unlike the time of his birth. He had been naked, without possessions, at birth, and he would be naked, without possessions, at death. Job accepted the sovereign rights of the LORD: "the LORD gave and the LORD has taken away." Job "praised the name of the LORD."

In the face of such incredible misfortunes, how many of us would react as Job did? He responded to adversity with adoration; to wretchedness with worship. He maintained his faith. According to verse 22, he "did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."

The Accuser totally lost round one of the challenge with God. Job's behavior at the moment of extreme loss and intense grief verified the words and ways of the LORD. Unfortunately, the Accuser was persistent. Once again the context shifts back to heaven. Once again there was a gathering of "the sons of God," and once again the Accuser was among them. Once again the LORD asked, "Have you considered my servant Job?" And then He added, "He still maintains his integrity."

The Accuser had one more argument to present. According to the Accuser, the previous test had not been strategic enough. He said, "It is one thing to suffer the loss of wealth and even the death of loved ones, but people won't understand what real suffering is until it strikes their bodies." He insinuated that a man would give up everything he had in order to preserve his own life, that the man would worship God only as long as God protected him, but if God would strike his body with disease and pain, the man would have no further reason to be loyal to God, and that he would curse God.

Once again the LORD obliged the Accuser by giving permission for Job to be afflicted, this time with painful sores. Note that the Accuser was still limited by the superior authority of the LORD; the Accuser was not permitted to kill Job.

In the aftermath of this second assault on Job, there were three significant outcomes. First, Job “sat among the ashes.” This would be a place at some distance from where people lived. It would be the place where people dumped garbage and refuse. The only people to be associated with the “ash heap” would be beggars and people with infectious diseases — people who would not be permitted to have close contact with others. Job had to relocate from the highest to the lowest level of society. In this isolated location, Job had to deal with his sores himself as best he could.

Second, Job’s wife urged him “to abandon his integrity, to curse God, and die.” We don’t know if the wife said this because she was knowingly or unknowingly cooperating with the Accuser, or whether she was genuinely speaking out of compassion for the man she loved, urging Job to hasten the end of his sufferings. In response, Job rebuked his wife. He had no intention of cursing God or taking control of his own destiny. In his response, Job, said, in essence, “God is the ultimate authority, the One who determines life and death. Whatever God chooses to bring upon me, I will accept, whether it is something good or evil.” Job’s willingness to receive adversity as well as blessing from God was proof that he did not serve God for personal gain.

The third outcome was stated at the end of verse 10: “In all this,” that is, in all his misfortune, “Job did not sin in what he said.” The Accuser’s predictions that Job would curse God proved to be incorrect, and God’s original assessment of Job was validated.

The first two chapters are the prologue to the book. Already it is abundantly clear to us that Job did not deserve the suffering to which he was subjected. Job did not know the backstory information that we know. This prologue ends with Job sitting in grief, pain, and silence, alone with his memories of the past. There is no relief in sight.

There were undoubtedly many “why” questions racing through Job’s mind at this time. Why had so many bad things happened to him so quickly? He had been faithful to God. He could not come up with any reasons for his current situation. He assumed he was an innocent victim.

The remainder of the book is an examination of the battles Job fought in his mind. On the one hand he had beliefs which enabled him to respond positively and trustingly to God. On the other hand he agonized over the perplexities of his circumstances. He found it impossible to resolve the tension between his faith commitment to his omnipotent sovereign God and the reality of his experience in life. He could not make his faith expectations line up. It is the same dilemma believers can have today.

We leave the story dangling here, but there are some conclusions we can draw from our study so far:

- \*God is aware of the spiritual conditions of His followers.
- \*Believers may be unaware of the spiritual conflicts which occur in the heavens.
- \*God has the ultimate authority over the powers of evil.
- \*God must be more important to us than any of His gifts and benefits.
- \*Believers must not lose their spiritual integrity in times of affliction.