

JOB AND HIS PROBLEMS

Study 1

JOB, SATAN AND GOD

Read

Job 1: 1-12;

Many students of the Bible reckon that the story of Job is the oldest in the book. There is no doubt that he lived in ancient times. The tone of the narrative suggests that the events were associated with days before Moses. Yet it is not the actual story that is so important although all that is said is built upon this. That which is really vital is the discussion which took place and the approach to God and to life that came out of it. A simple summing up of the matter in one short sentence is that the book of Job describes the **patience** (perseverance) of Job and the **purpose** of the Lord. Read **James 5: 10-11**, and see if you would agree.

JOB is the central character of the narrative. His family comes into it both at the beginning and the end. In the development of the drama as Job suffers, we meet his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Can we call them friends? They did not minister much comfort to him in his suffering, neither did they give much effective help at all in solving his problems. In fact, for all they said, they left him pretty well where they found him. The other character in the story is Elihu - a younger man - who seeks to add his ideas to the pattern of argument, but condemns Job and his friends completely. In these eight studies we can only just touch on the main teaching points, but I suggest that you read carefully the various 'speeches' that are recorded. The book reaches a dramatic climax with a revelation by the Lord Himself as He speaks to Job out of the whirlwind.

Place in the Bible. The book of Job is placed among the Wisdom books in the Old Testament with **Psalms**, **Proverbs** and **Ecclesiastes**, and expresses many of the wise sayings of the Hebrew nation. **Chapter 28** is one of the finest descriptions we have of the incomparable worth of wisdom and the search for it. It is finally found in the **"fear"** (or reverence) **"of the Lord"**. The book of Proverbs gives the same conclusion.

The Character of Job. Do you find the opening of the story strange to read? Our passage literally describes an encounter between God and Satan concerning Job. **Verses 1-5** outline the character of Job, who in himself, was perfect (blameless) and upright. Towards God his life was right, **"he feared God"**. He avoided evil and turned away from it. It is clear that he was a family man and was prosperous in his ways. To the Jews, this was a sign of the rewards of righteousness. We notice that he was not only careful about sin in his own life, but also made provision, as far as he could, for the sins of his family. **"It may be that my sons have sinned,"** he says in **verse 5**. What better standard of behaviour could you want than this. Always bear the

character of Job in mind as you consider the dialogue of the book. It will pose the question often: if Job was such a good man, why did he suffer? This opening picture of Job's purity of life is given to us for a purpose. God wants people like Job in the world today. He wants us to have like characteristics, and through the Lord Jesus, and the power of His Spirit, we certainly can. Because we see good people suffer, we should never lower the standards in our lives, but should always seek to please God.

The Challenge of Satan. The curtain is drawn back for us to look into the very presence of God and here Satan appears. Look at **verses 6-12** carefully; they describe a strange encounter. Satan comes with the **"sons of God"** before Jehovah. Notice his movements throughout the earth. (**verse 7**) There is clear evidence here of Satan's involvement in human lives. Today, as in Job's day, he is an **active agent** of evil, so never under-estimate his power. Satan is real - the foe of God and of everything that is good. Thus, with the purpose of beginning an evil work in the life of Job, he presents himself before the Lord.

The Commendation of God. God now appeals to Satan to consider His servant Job. It is obvious that God valued the righteous ways of Job very highly. Remember this! Whatever may appear to the contrary, this is what God thought of His servant. **"There is none like him on the earth"**. (**verse 8**) Would you like God to think this of you? I am sure that you would. It is vital that we should be right with God, and **Romans, chapters 1-5** tells us how this can be. Yet as soon as we have God's **assessment** of Job we get Satan's **accusation**. This is just what the name Satan means - the **accuser** or **adversary**. When the sinner is determined to be right with God through faith in the Lord Jesus - immediately Satan endeavours to frustrate that purpose. The struggling believer, too, must be wary of the Adversary who attempts to deface his image before God. **1 Peter 5: 8 & 9** emphasises this. Watch his tactics here. He said in effect, that because Job was wealthy, comfortable and secure, he served God. Touch these things or take them away and Job would fall.

As we close our study, we are faced with this fact, that God **allowed** Satan to test Job. We shall be looking at the tragedies that occurred later, but just here we notice that all that happened was permitted by God. Of course, Satan does not know everything, but God does, for He is **Omniscient**. Satan cannot exercise unlimited power, but God can, for He is **Omnipotent**. Thus Satan is limited, but it still means that in the lives of many Christians God allows trials and testings, sorrows and sadness. We shall study this problem in more detail later, but sufficient to say here, that suffering in Christians' lives does not indicate that it is the result of sin, neither does it ever mean that God has forgotten those that suffer. He will never do that.

Study 2

CALAMITY

Read

Job 1: 13 - 2: 13

Job experienced calamity with a capital 'C'. If you read these verses carefully you will agree that it was a deluge of trouble that overtook him. The main argument of the book is built around attempts to explain why such troubles were allowed. Because Job served his God and served Him well, it did not mean that he escaped suffering. The ideas behind Godly living are not expressed by saying, 'Obey God and all the troubles of life will vanish.' It is clear then that to be a Christian does not mean that you hold an insurance policy against all the ills of life. Things just do not work that way. A more God-like man than Job could not be found yet he felt the keen blast of the winds of trouble. Let us see where it all began.

Satan Permitted. The business begins in God's presence with a conversation about Job. God draws the attention of Satan to the goodness of His servant. God said that Job was good and nothing altered that. This was a true estimate of character and at the highest level. Yet in the eyes of Satan, Job only acted righteously because of the blessings he received from God. He was saying in effect, that prosperity and well-being made Job a good man. Take away the 'props' of security and material possessions, and he would renounce God to His face. What a terrible accusation! It is amazing that Satan was allowed to make it and that God was ready to listen. Job's troubles began when God gave Satan the permission to afflict him. The way was open now for Job's goodness to be tested.

Two Estimates of Life. The conversation in God's presence opens up the great question at issue. Which estimate of life is worthy of a man - God's or Satan's? How wrong was the approach of Satan to the goodness of Job. He was prepared to set the lowest value on the best that was in him. Yet, how wonderful, God knew His man and was willing to hand him over to Satan. **"All that he has is in your power."** (1: 12) We can learn from this that God knows our lives through and through - see also **John 2: 24, 25** - and if He does allow troubles He knows just what He is doing. Satan wanted to destroy Job and prove that his goodness was false. God's purpose was much higher - to show that Job's goodness was as a result of his faith in God.

Taken Away! Look now at the troubles. The first stage removes the dearest possessions of Job. First his oxen, then his sheep; his servants and his camels are taken. Finally his children die in the great wind from the wilderness. **(verses 18-19)** So Job, in a series of calamities, is stripped of all his possessions and his family is taken. There was no warning given and the tragedy was shattering. This situation no doubt forced him to ask just how much the things that he had lost meant in his life. The goods which he possessed; the family which he loved - whatever was God doing? Remember as you study, that it is at times like this, when we lose material things, things which we really love, that we begin to understand what is truly important in life. What really does come first? **1: 20-22** give us Job's reaction to the first waves of affliction. Notice that he falls to the ground and worships. His goods and his children were precious to him but he does not in any sense sin against God. **"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord", verse 21.** Two great

facts emerge from this attitude. First, Job showed that possessions and family were not his priorities. He kept them in their proper place. Life was not over because they had disappeared. To him, **"one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses", Luke 12: 15.** Secondly, he held fast to his loyalty to God. What a blow to Satan. At least, Job did not serve God for what he got out of it. We can learn here that now every believer has access to the power and help of God in every time of need, **1 Corinthians 10: 12-13.**

Touch his Body. The second stage in the tragedy in Job's life was deep and severe. **"Touch his bone and his flesh,"** said Satan, **"and he will surely curse You to Your face."** **(2: 5)** Satan was given permission to touch Job's body with sickness. Notice the cruelty of Satan, he smote Job with sore boils from his feet to his head. The hurt was deep, not only to his body but to his mind as well. Added to this came perhaps the most cruel cut of all. His wife urged him to **"curse God and die!"** Try to get in your mind the darkness that must have descended upon Job as he suffered these terrible things. Did he feel that God had forgotten him? In his later reasonings he expressed many sad things but at this point he stood firm. **"shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" "In all this Job did not sin with his lips". (2: 10)**

Challenge! The steadfastness of Job is a challenge to us. Read **chapter 3** and you will find just how bitterly the suffering entered into his life. Why was he born? **verse 3.** Why did he not die at birth? **verse 11.** Why was he left to suffer such misery? No doubt we would have asked the same questions and many more. Notice **chapter 2: 11-13.** The effect of Job's misery on his friends was to stun them to silence. For seven days they sat in silent sympathy. Remember that, when you visit your friends who suffer; silence is sometimes more eloquent than our words. It was so with Job's three friends, even though afterwards they said many things which certainly did not help. Yet above all else shines the courage of a man who refused to deny his God, even in the bitterest suffering. We need to pray that when trouble comes our way, we shall accept it without grumbling and remain steadfast in our loyalty to God, asking ourselves the question, **'What is God teaching me in this?'**

Study 3

MORE JUST THAN GOD?

Read

Job chapters 4 & 5

It is necessary for you to read the book of Job carefully. The more of it you are able to read, the better you will understand. No doubt you will find difficulties in concentration as there is much detail in it. Yet there is a depth of feeling in the conversations recorded. With Job there is a deep sense of injustice as his circumstances increasingly baffle him. He is quite willing to suffer; this he accepts as the common lot of humanity. **"Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble."** **(14: 1)** He recognises that human weakness brings its store of pain and suffering. But as he looks at his disfigured body and the waste of time and energy, he is bereft of understanding, and longs for the good days of the past.

Sin and Suffering. We must remember that Job believed the traditional teachings concerning sin and suffering.

These taught that if a man sinned he would pay for it in material and bodily loss and suffering. If you read **Deuteronomy 28: 15-35**, you will see what this meant to those who disobeyed God's Word and went away from Him. **Verse 22** tells how the Lord will smite them with consumption and fever, while **verse 35** comes even nearer to Job's condition and is terrible to imagine. So it was with the Jewish people - this idea that sickness and sin were linked together was ingrained in them, and explains somewhat, why Job was so mentally tortured by his condition. What had he done to deserve it? He asks God to show him his transgressions. In **chapter 10** he gives vent to his conviction that whatever he does, whatever wrong exists, God who made him knows all. **"If I sin, then you mark me and will not acquit me of my iniquity". (verse 14)** Here was a man cornered without an explanation.

Words without Comfort. Job's three friends gave no comfort in what they said. Each in turn said quite clearly that there must be some wrong in his life; maybe some deep sin unconfessed, for which he was paying the penalty. Bildad in **8: 6** tells him that if he were pure, God would awake to his need and make him prosperous again. **"Behold, God will not cast away the blameless,"** he says in **8: 20**. Zophar is cruel in his accusations suggesting that Job is lying (**11: 3**), and that **"God exacts from you less than your iniquity deserves."** (**11: 6**) He suggests that he **"put iniquity far away"**. (**11: 14**) In our reading today we have the first speech of Eliphaz. It is a harsh speech, making Job the transgressor who deserves what he gets. **"Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off?"** (**4: 7**) This man backs his declaration with a vision or dream, designed to show how pure God is, so pure that He does not trust His servants and charges His angels with folly. What chance then does a mortal stand of being right with Him? (**4: 17&18**) Thinking over the things that Eliphaz said, there is much truth in them, but they leave Job in a hopeless state. There is no comfort for him in the words of his friends.

God at a Distance. Job was sure that he was not unrighteous. He was convinced of his integrity. He admitted there were wrongs in his life but not such as demanded the severity of his troubles. It was so very sad that the things which happened to him made him feel that God was remote. One of the saddest features of this book is that it presents a God who is afar off. In his longing to be vindicated Job said, **"But I would speak to the Almighty and I desire to reason with God."** (**13: 3**) Yet Job cried out of deep sadness, **"Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, That I might come to His seat! I would present my case before Him."** (**23: 3-4**) This sounds terribly sad! To suffer without hope of God's comfort was a bitterness which Job found difficult to endure. It was in this dilemma that we find Job crying out for someone to intercede. His sin separated him from God. **"Oh! That one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleads for his neighbour!"** (**16: 21**) This was his earnest desire. It seems as if Job felt utterly forsaken and alone. He confesses in **9: 32-33** that God is not a man as he is and there is no Daysman or Mediator to come between that he might lay his hand on both. Try to appreciate something of the loneliness of Job.

Who can Stand Between? The real problem seems to lie in a question that is asked several times in the book: **"Can a man be more pure than his Maker?"** (**4: 17, 9: 2, 25: 4**) It would have been a great comfort if Job could have felt that before his God - the highest Judge he knew - he was right. Although the accusations of his friends were totally unjustified, Job could have borne them all had there been

some response from Heaven. Finally before the Lord he has to confess that he is 'vile'. He is both mystified and speechless. (**40: 4**) Clearly the truth emerges; unless there is a Mediator - One to plead man's cause - he stands before God condemned and without hope.

Christ The Answer. How good it is to find in the New Testament that a sufficient answer has been found to all Job's problems. The Lord Jesus Christ is the One who stands between God and man as the true Daysman or Mediator. (**1 Timothy 2: 5-6**) We can be right with God because the Lord Jesus stood between us and God at Calvary when He died. He paid the penalty for our sins so that we could be free. Paul puts it this way in **Romans 5: 1** **"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."** Justified means being treated, 'just as if I'd never sinned'. Job arrived at this glorious truth through much suffering.

Study 4 FAILURE OF FRIENDS

 **Job 6: 14-30, 13: 1-22, 16: 1-6**

To have friends is one of the greatest blessings of life. There is something in each one of us that longs to be shared. There are very few people who prefer to live in isolation, without some involvement with others. We talk of 'loners' and 'introverts', but in times of trouble everyone needs a friend. Looking at Job and the failure of his friends, perhaps we are forced to consider again what the qualities of friendship should be. We could sum these up with three ideas, especially when we think of proving the worth of friendship in times of trouble. There is **compassion** - the willingness to care about, and for, our friends. This is more than just pity. It means deep concern and a desire to give help of the right kind. Then there is **comfort** - the readiness to stand by those who suffer. This does not always mean saying things that console or encourage. Sometimes the best help we can give to our friends in need is to just let them know we are there. There is also **companionship** - the willingness to draw alongside those whose troubles isolate them. To be alone in trouble is tragic. If the word 'friendship' means anything at all, it means spending time with those who suffer.

Friendship Needed. Looking at these ideas we are bound to feel that they were just the qualities Job needed. He felt an increasing sense of isolation in his sorrow. Perhaps his deepest sadness was because he felt that God had betrayed his trust - that God had abandoned him. If you read **10: 1-3** you can feel the atmosphere of hopelessness that surrounded Job as he pleads with God not to condemn him. Why should God treat him so without an explanation? **Chapter 16** contains some of the darkest verses in the Bible. If you read them carefully you will sense just how desperate Job felt. He was utterly without power to argue with the God whom he trusted but could not see. These verses always remind me of the cry of the Lord Jesus in **Matthew 27: 46, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"** Yet Job could have expected consolation from his friends. They had visited him and were prepared to sit with him. Let us try to understand the situation more clearly.

"Job's Comforters." Job tells us quite plainly what his friends did to him. **"To him who is afflicted, kindness**

should be shown by his friend.” (6: 14) This was expected, yet he has to say: **“You overwhelm the fatherless and you undermine your friend.” (6: 27)** He expected sympathy but they cast him down in his sorrow. We can feel the bitterness in his words as he says, **“but you are forgers of lies, you are all worthless physicians.” (13: 4)** Instead of administering healing in the things they said, they were false comforters and only added to his suffering. Thus he tells them to be quiet. Perhaps the most bitter condemnation of them comes when he says: **“I have heard many such things, miserable comforters are you all.” (16: 2)** and **“My friends scorn me.” (16: 20)** Because of this, the term ‘Job’s comforters’ has become a proverb. How terrible it was to look for the softening effect of kind words only to find the harsh whiplash of words that cut deeply into his mind. If you have time, look through all that Job said about his friends’ failure.

Opportunity Missed! Quite definitely then, Job’s friends failed him. They showed no feeling for his need, for in their minds they upheld the current belief of their day that sickness and suffering were the just rewards for sin. Job pointed out to them that the wicked often prospered and did very well for themselves. He compared his pure life with many that were sinful; they survived and prospered while he suffered. All the time it seems that they were trying to obtain from him a confession of sins that he was trying to hide. He had to say: **“these ten times you have reproached me.” (19: 2)** No compassion is found in their words, neither did they offer hope or comfort. An appeal is wrenched from him for pity, **“Have pity on me, have pity on me, you my friends, for the hand of God has struck me!” (19: 21)** So we have a very sad story of a golden opportunity that was missed, of comforting someone in trouble.

Christian Friendship Essential. There is a deep lesson for us to learn in all this. One of the great evidences of the fact that we are Christians is demonstrated in the kindness that we show to others. Perhaps we recoil in horror from the hardness with which Job’s friends dealt with him. ‘I would never act in this way,’ you say. Yet positive kindness is sadly lacking among Christians today. The Lord Jesus left us a wonderful example in this. He was known as the **“Friend of sinners”** and He showed kindness wherever He went. If we go back to the beginning of our lesson and notice again the ideas which make for true friendship we shall find them perfected in the Lord Jesus. It is so easy to remain aloof from those in trouble, as these men did and seek for reasons to criticise. You see, for them it was the easy way out, but the Lord Jesus said: **“By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13: 35)** In a world of unkindness, selfishness and neglect, Christians can show that their relationships are built on real love and care for one another. I am going to leave you to read three Scriptures as you finish. **Romans 13: 8-10, Ephesians 4: 31,32, 1 Peter 3: 8-12.**

Questions

Study 1 JOB, SATAN AND GOD

1. What brief statement sums up the story of Job?
2. Name the books which form the wisdom section of the Old Testament.
3. Give three of the things that are said about Job’s character in the first chapter.
4. What was Satan’s aim in coming before the Lord concerning Job?
5. What two differences between Satan and God have we noticed in our lesson?

Study 2 CALAMITY

1. Around what is the main argument of the book of Job built?
2. What reason did Satan give for Job’s righteous way of life?
3. What did God intend that Job’s suffering should prove?
4. What did Job say when God took away his goods and his children?
5. In his suffering what did Job’s wife tell him to do and what was his answer?

Study 3 MORE JUST THAN GOD?

1. What was the traditional Jewish belief about suffering?
2. What, in the opinion of Job’s friends, was the real cause of his suffering?
3. Why was Job so puzzled by all that happened to him?
4. As Job thought of God, what did he long for most of all?
5. What is the New Testament answer to the question, ‘How can a man be right with God?’

Study 4 FAILURE OF FRIENDS

1. Give the three ideas which lie behind true friendship.
2. What caused Job more sorrow than anything else?
3. Which words of the Lord Jesus might we recall when we think of the loneliness of Job, and where were they uttered?
4. Give three of the things Job said about his friends which prove their failure to comfort him.
5. What are some of the practical ways in which I can show to others the meaning of true Christian friendship?