

The Job Experiment

Job 1:13-2:10

Tonight we are going to look at the major action presented in the book of Job. If you asked someone what they know of the book, the material that we are going to cover tonight is where most of the answers you would hear come from. People like and remember the action.

I prefer to think of this section as the Job experiment. Satan wants God to put Job to the test and God accepts. It's a challenge of sorts to see who is right, Satan who thinks Job will fail the experiment, and God who knows he will pass.

Before we get to the text, we must remember what we have already covered – what has set the stage?

Throughout all the various eras of time, each one has had a remnant of God-fearing men and women, that regardless of what surrounds them, continue to believe in the one true God and trust in his Word, including the promise of a coming redeemer. Job is one of these men.

Job was described as the greatest of all the men of the east having been known for his wisdom and God-honoring righteousness. Three times in the first two chapters he is described as being blameless and upright. God even tells Satan that there is no other man like Job on all the Earth. Being both immensely favored and righteous makes Job the greatest example of the innocent sufferer. Something that is key to this story.

Prior to this, we have also been made privy to Satan's plan. Satan has been walking up and down the Earth observing men. He has noticed Job and is aware of his godly characteristics. Satan's ultimate plan is to usurp God's purpose in creation and to draw men away from worshiping God. It is conceivable that Satan held Job in disregard for being a stumbling block to that plan.

It's important that we remember who Satan is. He is a mere creature and ultimately is puny compared to the Lord. We must not give him too much credit or place too much emphasis on him. Although he has a definite impact, he is merely a small part of this story. After Job 2:7, Satan doesn't appear again – at least directly. Job doesn't have any knowledge of his actions behind the scenes nor does his friends that we will meet later. Therefore, while Satan can cause suffering, if allowed, the point of this book cannot be that Satan causes all the suffering of this world.

God calls Satan's attention to Job and Satan begins to mock and insult God. This is further proof that he doesn't belong in the company he finds himself in.

He challenges God to a test – a test of Job – with the full belief that he can get Job to denounce God. His first argument is that nothing is good (v.9-10) and that Job will easily denounce God once all of his blessings have been taken away. After all, according to Satan, these blessings are the only reason he worships and reveres God.

Immediately, both God and Job's character are put on trial and attacked.

- Can God be loved for Himself – simply for who He is?
- Can a man hold on to God when no apparent benefits are present?

Satan argues that the answer to both questions is no. Also, it appears that he believes if he can get such a righteous man as Job to reject God the domino effect will be great. Then he can thwart God's plan of redemption.

In Job 1:12, the experiment of Job is set as God grants Satan the ability to afflict Job by means of those around him and his possessions.

I. The First Test (1:13-22)

A. Job's losses in a single day

Verse 13 begins with the phrase "one day." This tells us that all of the calamity that is to fall upon Job took place in a short period of time. Most of us struggle to handle one tragic event in a day, let alone four. In addition, some scholars believe that this day was the beginning of the weekly cycle, the day that Job would have offered the sacrifices to God on behalf of his family that we saw earlier in Chapter one. Whether he offered sacrifices at the beginning of the week or daily, chances are he would have offered one just prior to these tragedies. Being struck with such bad news immediately following his attempt to make peace with God would have been an additional shock to Job.

In verses 14-15 we read that the Sabeans swooped down killing servants and taking his oxen. Remember, he had many servants and if these oxen represent all that he had, we are talking about 1,000 oxen. This alone is a big event.

In verse 16 another messenger comes and tells Job that the fire of God fell from heaven burning and killing his sheep and more of his servants. Again, losing 7,000 sheep and a large number of servants is a big deal. In Scripture, the "fire of God is usually thought to be lightning. Whatever it was, it was powerful.

In verse 17 another group of foreigners, the Chaldeans raided some of Job's property and took his camels while killing even more servants. Notice here that a messenger relays this message of disaster to Job while the previous messenger is still speaking. The hits are coming in rapid-fire. Job doesn't even have time to process all of this.

In verse 18, when surely Job thought it couldn't get any worse, another messenger appears and informs him that a great wind (perhaps a tornado due to specific damage) struck the house that his children were feasting causing it to collapse and kill the children.

It is very possible that these four messages of disaster were being told to Job simultaneously. A compounding immense loss that one can't even really grasp in a substantial amount of time, let alone in a period of 24 hours. In 1:3, Job is described as the wealthiest man in the east and all of that wealth has now been taken away in an instant.

B. Job's Response

Despite the sequence of terrible tragedies, what we find is a model response from Job. He immediately acts in a deliberate and dignified fashion.

Three things are outlined in verse 20

- He tore his robe
- He shaved his head
- He worshiped

The act of tearing a robe was an act of deep grief that was symbolic of his torn heart. The act of shaving his head was common during the day and has been understood by some as a sign of humility and submission before God. Job understood that he was under the hand of God and recognized where he stood in his presence as he fell to the ground and began to worship.

It is somewhat fascinating that Job's heart immediately recognizes the sovereignty of God in all that has just happened. There is no mention of chance, no mention of what he could have done better to prevent such tragedy, nor is there any mention of Satan or any evil spirit. Job fully attributes all of these events as the result of God's hand.

Job's brief statement in verse 21:

Tells us that he recognized God as the author of all. It was God that blessed Job with all of the wealth and abundance he had and it was God alone who had the right to take it away as He saw fit.

In such a circumstance, it would be quite understandable for Job to curse God. That is what Satan hedged his bet on – Satan told God that would be the result of this experiment but Job remarkably stood strong in his faith. Not only did he fail to curse God, but he did the complete opposite – he worshiped God – “Blessed be the name of the Lord.” Not only were Satan's efforts defeated – they were soundly defeated.

II. The Second Test (Job 2:1-10)

A. Job's physical loss

At the beginning of chapter two, we see yet another meeting of the heavenly host. This passage is nearly parallel to the description of the earlier meeting in Ch. 1. The only difference is God's jab at Satan – a reminder of Satan's defeat in his test of Job – “he still retains his integrity.”

Notice that Satan doesn't take this lying down – he is persistent and demands another test. He is like a losing child on the school playground who demands a change in the rules as he perceives that such a change will work out better for him.

Satan declares “Skin for Skin.” This is an interesting phrase that appears to argue that the first test of Job didn't go far enough – it wasn't a true test. Satan argues that a man will sacrifice the

skin of another in order to keep his own skin. In other words, Job didn't curse God at the loss of his livestock or the death of his servants and children only because he wanted to preserve his own life. It is one thing to lose possessions but it is another to lose your very own life. Therefore, if God will allow Satan to physically harm Job then Job most assuredly will curse God.

Once again, God welcomes the challenge of Satan and grants him permission to afflict Job physically with one stipulation – Satan cannot kill Job.

In verses 7-8 we are given a picture of Job's condition. Satan leaves the presence of God and inflicts Job with boils and sores all over his body. While not enough information is given for an accurate medical diagnosis to be made, the common thought is Job was dealing with some type of serious skin disease such as leprosy. In verse 8 Job is shown in agony, attempting to relieve himself by scraping himself with broken pottery in the middle of a garbage dump.

“sat among the ashes” appears to indicate that Job is what we could think of as the landfill. More than likely this is on the outside the city and would appear to indicate that Job was an outcast or at the very least in some sort of quarantine. It's possible that this was the action of society or the action of Job himself. In his own personal reflection, he may now view himself as nothing more than garbage and that it was best for him to be among other garbage.

B. Job's relational loss

In this situation, it would appear that Job's life could not be broken anymore and yet in verse 9, we read that Job's greatest remaining human relationship is now broken as well.

Job's wife calls upon him to curse God as a result of all of his loss. It is interesting that she describes Job just as God did – a man of integrity. However, she is of the notion that after all he has endured, his integrity is not worth much. She feels that Job has been mistreated by God – All hope is lost – she sees no chance of restoration and deems that the only thing left to do is to curse God with the hope that he will take Job's life and it will all be over. Whether intended or not, her words come across as a taunt to Job. Unbeknownst to her, she is enticing Job to do exactly what Satan desires. It appears that Job is by himself in the midst of the greatest difficulty of his life.

C. Job's response

Job's response after this second test is not as eloquent as his response after the first, but it is just as righteous. He quickly rejects the counsel of his wife and labels it foolish. Maybe she is simply acting emotionally but Job rebukes her council as one lacking in discernment – she is thinking as a fool thinks.

While she sees the tragedies that have befallen both her and Job as an unjust act from God, Job sees nothing wrong with them. He argues, “Should we accept only good from God and not adversity?” While Job doesn't know what is going on behind the scenes, his argument runs directly counter to the argument that Satan has made. A man cannot be fickle with God – he is

in no position to be. Job holds high regard for the sovereignty of God and makes it clear through both of these tests. Remarkably he has passed both tests with flying colors as Scripture makes it clear that in neither of them did he sin by cursing God.

III. Personal Implications

1. Satan's Control

It is clearly seen from these two tests that Satan has the authority to influence a few things, namely:

- Natural events (lightning and a tornado)
- The minds of ungodly men (Sabeans and Chaldeans)
- Physical Illness

In Ephesians 2:2, Satan is called the prince of the power of the air and in John 12:31 Jesus references Satan as the ruler of this world.

Satan is described in Scripture as having “great wisdom” and such wisdom can be used to control the natural processes of Earth such as the lightning or “fire from God” and the wind that brought great loss to Job’s livestock and the death of his children.

Satan is also a great influencer and can coerce men into doing his bidding as seen by the actions of the Sabeans and Chaldeans. We don’t have to look very far in our culture today to see a similar effect. While Satan may not be directly speaking to individuals, he most certainly can use the things of this world to distract individuals from godly things.

While these tests of Job showcase the influence that Satan can have, we must not be quick to credit him with too much influence. First and foremost, Satan can do nothing without God’s approval. Also, in a fallen world natural phenomenon can certainly be catastrophic without Satan’s help. Lastly, we must remember that as individuals, we are responsible for our own behavior and choices. Certainly, the Sabeans and Chaldeans were not let off the hook for their actions simply because Satan influenced them.

2. The Hand of God

Perhaps one of the greatest takeaways for us from these tests is the fact that it all came as a result of God’s hand. Job had no understanding of Satan’s influence behind the scenes and his comments in 1:21 and 2:10 prove that point. Job saw only the hand of God. This concept cannot be quickly dismissed because God Himself affirms that Job is correct in 2:3. Look carefully at God’s statement, “even though you incited me against him, to destroy him for no good reason.”

God is making the point here that all of the destruction and calamity that Job experienced came at His hand. Satan was only a tool that God was using – the extension of His hand so to speak. Without His authority and approval, Satan’s attacks could have never happened.

Through these two tests, Job reminds us that God is completely sovereign and in control of all things. It is God alone that gives and takes away. When we begin to see God as the giver of only what is deemed good in our own eyes, then we weaken our understanding of who God is while elevation our own perception of ourselves.

3. Our Position

Job's reaction reminds us of our true position in life. While many act otherwise, we are in no position to barter with God. Bad things can and do happen to righteous people. Satan himself is the one who makes the claim that the righteous behavior of mankind is only an effort to gain or maintain the favor of God. May we not live to confirm Satan's argument.

We are not in a position to define good, make deals with, or demand expectations from God. He is the Creator and we are the Created. Our position is one of submission. To take up any other position is to actively reject the words of Paul in Romans 12:3.

4. Are We Prepared To Stand and Worship

Job's reaction to his losses is a model example of how a believer should handle trials and travesty in their own life. He was broken and he mourned, but he continued to trust and worship God – even if he had to do so alone. Job lost everything. Even the relationship with His wife was broken. Everything around him was an influence to curse God and yet he remained steadfast.

This should be a reminder to us about the individuality of our faith. The Christian life is designed to be lived in community and yet my own salvation is determined by my response to Christ. The faith or lack thereof of others in my life will ultimately have no bearing on my eternal fate. As individuals are we prepared to stand and worship along just as Job did? As families are we preparing our children as best as possible and equipping them to be able to do the same. That day may be approaching and we would do well to recognize the example of Job.

5. True Blessing

Job did not worship God for the side effects of prosperity. Although he was most certainly grateful for the life that God had blessed him with, he understood where his true blessing lied. Luke 12:15 tells us that “a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” While he was most certainly distraught over the heartbreak and pain of his losses, he understood where that his relationship with God was the true blessing in his life.

All things belong to God, to be given and taken back without wrong. He is the sovereign ruler overall and not only did Job recognize this but he rejoiced in it as well. Job's faith was so strong that both the bad and the good in his life were received as the hand of God. As such, every experience of his life was an occasion for blessing. This is the epitome of Trust.

As believers, do we recognize Christ as our only true blessing and all that is worthy of our worship? Certainly, we should be grateful to God for the favor that he has shown to us, but we must be careful to not redirect our worship to the “things” he provides as opposed to the

provider. We would do good to heed the words of Paul in Philippians 3:8 and to recognize Christ as our only true blessing.

Ultimately, can we stand as Job did and realize that a man may stand before God stripped of everything that life has given him, and still lack nothing?

These two tests of Job proposed two central questions:

- Can God be loved for Himself – simply for who He is?
- Can a man hold on to God when no apparent benefits are present?

Satan argued strongly that the answers to both were no.

The life of Job proved that the answers can and should be yes.

May our life resemble the same.