



Old Testament Personalities

JOB

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Though there is much speculation about who the patriarch Job really was and where and when he lived, there are, fortunately, fewer questions about the central theme of his remarkable book (assuming he was the author).

It seems safe to say Job lived sometime between Abraham and the exodus. He was extremely wealthy — the richest man of the east.

He lived in the land of Uz, but where in the east was Uz? Most place it on the eastern edge of Palestine; somewhere between Damascus on the north and Petra on the south.

The outstanding characteristic of Job was his degree of piety. He knew the law of God and dutifully observed it. He even offered burnt offerings to God just in case his children had sinned (Job 1:5).

God calls a meeting

Now God actively governs the universe, and at a prearranged time the archangels came to report the progress of their activities (verse 6). Satan was among them, for he had been assigned the care of the earth before the creation of Adam.

God asked him what he had been doing, and he replied that he had been "going to and fro in the earth, and... walking up and down in it" (verse 7). He neglected to reveal the reason he was so busy — he was looking for humans he might antagonize against God (I Pet. 5:8).

And God said: "Have you seen Job? There's nobody like him in all the earth. He's perfect, upright, fears God and hates evil."

But Satan answered with sarcasm: "Why shouldn't he worship you? As long as you protect him and give him everything on a silver platter, he'll appear righteous. But just take a few blessings away and he'll curse you to your face!"

Satan was eager to prove his point, so God gave him authority over all that Job had, except he was not to lay a hand on Job.

The adversary departed to begin his evil work, not knowing that God was actually using him to chasten Job for a good reason — to further improve the man's exemplary character.

Attacked by Satan

Satan didn't waste time. He began a merciless barrage. First he caused the Sabeans to kill Job's field hands and take his 500 ox teams and 500 she asses.

While Job was receiving this distressing news, — another messenger came running to tell him a great fire had burned his sheep and shepherds. His trusted servants and more than 7,000 animals had been lost!

This messenger was just finishing his story when one of Job's camel drivers came bleeding and ragged to pour out his own story of terror. The Chaldeans had ambushed them and killed all but himself, stealing Job's 3,000 camels.

Job's mind was reeling! But before he could begin to sort out the turmoil in his brain, another servant came running with the most horrible news of all — Job's sons and daughters had been feasting at his eldest son's home when it was destroyed by a tornado — all were dead!

Job fell to the earth, totally broken. Satan had caused each succeeding calamity to be greater than the one before. Loss of his children was the crowning blow.

After a few moments he arose, tore his clothing in mourning, shaved his head and bowed down to worship God. He said, "Naked came out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Eternal gave, and the Eternal hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Eternal" (Job 1:21). And in spite of his great tragedy, Job didn't sin.

Another meeting in heaven

Following this, there was another meeting in heaven, and God inquired of Satan what he thought of Job now, "Doesn't he still hold to his integrity, even though you gained permission from me to persecute him without cause?" (see Job 2:3).

But Satan replied: "He's only interested in his own skin, and will give anything to save it. Just touch his bone and flesh, and he'll curse you to your face!"

Now God loved Job, and was confident that these trials would bring him to greater understanding and more perfect character. So he allowed Satan to return and strike Job's very body, but to refrain from taking his life.

Satan struck the man with boils, from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. And Job had to scrape his running sores with pieces of broken pottery. The pains were so severe on his posterior that he sought relief by sitting on a mound of soft ashes.

As if his agony wasn't enough, his wife began to chide him: "Do you still maintain your integrity? Curse God and die!"

But Job replied: "You're talking as a fool. Should we expect only good at the hand of the Eternal? He has the right to bring evil also." And Job did not sin with his lips.

Job's three friends

Three of Job's closest and wisest friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, heard of his calamity and set an appointed time to visit him. The trip was carefully planned, for they came considerable distances.

When they approached, they couldn't believe their eyes. Job's face was so covered with boils he wasn't recognizable. They wept, tore their coats and sprinkled dust on their heads in deep mourning. They were so stunned by the turn of events in Job's life and so dedicated to him as friends, that they sat with him on the ground and fasted seven days and nights without speaking.

Finally Job spoke. He condemned the day of his birth, saying if he had never been born — or had been privileged to die at birth — at least he would now have rest. He indicated that he feared calamity, but saw no reason for it when it came. For he had been doing nothing differently from what he had done before. He had continually obeyed God's laws.

What follows, in chapters 4 through 31, is an example of eloquent ignorance. Job's friends prepare and deliver long discourses as to why he is suffering, and he in turn refutes them. His friends, without specifically accusing him, insist he is guilty of some horrible sin by pointing to his calamity as evidence.

Eliphaz, the first speaker, mistakenly argues: "who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous ever cut off?... they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job 4:7-8). He went on to proudly repeat some erroneous thoughts that a spirit had given him in a vision — that no man can be accepted as pure in God's sight. Then he gently told Job to repent, to acknowledge his calamity as correction for his sin, and he would again be blessed.

But Job maintained his innocence before his friends and God. He told Eliphaz his eloquent speech had been wasted on a righteous man! He challenged his friends to show him his sin — if they could find an error.

Then Bildad gave his speech, condemning Job for arrogance toward God. He insisted that as long as Job denied his affliction was punishment for sin, he was, by his actions, accusing God of perverted justice. But Job maintained that God had a right to do whatever He wanted to do, and He had evidently chosen to afflict Job without a cause. He implied he was perfect, but openly saying so would be an improper thing to do (Job 9:20-22).

Zophar mainly argued along the same lines, more forcefully accusing Job of dodging the good advice of his "friends" on the pretext of being innocent. In effect, he called Job a liar. And the discussion became a bit heated.

Job retorted: "When you three die, no doubt all wisdom will perish with you! Give me some credit for having brains of my own!" (see Job 12:1-2). He challenged them to quit accusing and show him his errors if they were so wise. If he saw the sin, he would willingly repent. Otherwise, he insisted, they should behave like true friends and comfort him.

The great debate about Job's infirmity continued. His friends insisted he was somehow guilty of incurring God's wrath, and God would show him no mercy as long as he maintained his false righteousness. This, of course, made them more righteous in their own conceit than Job. He, meanwhile, condemned them as disloyal friends and maintained that if God took his life today, he would be worthy of immortality (Job 19:26).

Job went on to show his great knowledge about God's spiritual and physical laws. He gave a discourse on the depth and breadth of God's power and infinite wisdom — he certainly respected God and knew how to refrain from sin. Then he reminded them how great he had been before his troubles — highly respected for his wisdom, righteousness and wealth. He was righteous then and righteous now!

His friends had nothing more to say, for Job was adamant about his righteousness.

A new voice

This great debate, which had lasted several days, had drawn quite a group of observers. Among them was a young man named Elihu. And seeing that Job had declared he was through talking, and his friends were through arguing, the young man unexpectedly arose and took the floor.

He was angry at Job for justifying himself rather than God; And he was angry at his friends for accusing Job without understanding his error. He told them he had remained quiet out of respect for their ages, but now he would speak — filled with the inspiration of God (Job 32:1-20).

Elihu recounted their reasonings and began to explain their fallacies. He told Job that God was dealing with him, not as an enemy, but as a friend — that God was merciful, not cruel, and that God doesn't punish without a cause.

He went on to explain that God will often correct a man to save him from destroying himself, pointing out, in effect, that even one who is righteous according to the law needs refinement from a loving God.

He spared no words in telling Job his turmoil was caused by his own vanity. He held his righteousness in higher esteem than God's righteousness (Job 35:2). All of his words were vain, and God doesn't waste His time listening to vanity (verses 13-16). Elihu went on to say that Job might know the letter of the law, but fell far short in knowing the magnificence of the Creator God. "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict. Men do therefore fear him: he respecteth not any that are wise of heart" (Job 37:23-24).

God Himself speaks

There followed a discourse by the Creator Himself. He expanded on Elihu's speech, addressing Job as the one who "darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge" (Job 38:2). Then He told him to start acting like a man, for He had some questions for him!

God, through a series of wonderful questions impossible for Job to answer, pointedly illustrated the great gulf between puny man and the awesome mind of the Creator God. He challenged Job to answer the unsearchable questions of the universe:

Where was Job when the foundations of earth were laid? Who determined the size? Who fastened it in space? Who controls life and death or light and darkness? Who designed the nature of man and animals and the beauty of creation? Who created all in perfect balance?

Then God asked Job:

"Shall he [Job] that contendeth with the Almighty instruct Him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it" (Job 40:2).

And Job said: "Behold I am vile; what can I answer you? I lay my hand to my mouth."

God continued: "Will you also disannul my judgment? Will you condemn Me so you can be righteous? Can you search out the proud and humble him?" (This was exactly -what God was doing to Job, and Job knew it!) And then God said, "If you can do all these things, surely you can save yourself by your own efforts!" (see Job 40:14).

Job sees himself

Then Job answered God, admitting he had spoken without wisdom and that his words were vain. He confessed he hadn't really known God, but now he understood what God was really like for the first time. He was guilty of the sin of self-righteousness and vain pride. He understood his chastening. He saw the foolishness of setting limits on divine wisdom and purpose and humbled himself before his Maker.

He said, in Job 42:6, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Then God corrected Job's three friends, for they had pictured Him as a harsh God, without mercy and compassion. And they had foolishly pretended to understand the mind of God better than Job had.

God told Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar to sacrifice seven bullocks and seven rams for a burnt offering, and ask Job to pray for them. For God said He would accept Job's prayer.

When this was done, God "turned the captivity of Job" (verse 10) — meaning when Job had repented and also forgiven his friends, God took him out of Satan's tormenting hands. He had learned a lesson about how God mercifully works with men to bring them to repentance, as well as the true meaning of righteousness and humility. This is probably where Job got his name, for Job means repentant.

Then God restored Job's health and wealth, giving him twice as much as he had before. The respect of his relatives and friends was restored also. God even gave him seven sons and three beautiful daughters to replace those Satan had killed.

To these blessings was added a long and full life. For God gave Job 140 more years to walk with Him on the earth.