

Job Sight

UNIT 2: JOB'S TRAGEDY

Job 1:1–2:13

The Place of the Passage

The first section of Job introduces the issue that drives the entire book: why did God allow such horrifying suffering to befall someone who was so loyal to him, who seemed to “deserve” so much better? In these brief chapters, we learn of God’s sovereignty over everything in creation, and we gain insight into a great contest that is being fought in heaven over the saints. We see how much God cares for his own glory and for the purity of our relationship with him. And we see a great saint suffer greatly, yet worship in the most costly, beautiful way possible.

The Big Picture

Job 1–2 reveals a dramatic struggle in heaven over the saints and, by extension, over the glory of God. The great question driving these chapters is whether Job will persevere in faith in God when it costs him every earthly blessing.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Job 1:1–2:13. Then review the questions below concerning this introductory section to Job’s story and write your notes on them.

1. Job’s First Test (1:1–22)

The first five verses of Job 1 show us Job’s wonderfully blessed life. In verses 1–3, what aspect of Job’s life is described first, and why is it important that we are told of this before anything else? What do we learn about Job’s family life and his deepest concerns for his family in verses 4–5?

Job was richly blessed in his relationship with the Lord. What blessings do you enjoy in your relationship with God, even if they are not identical to Job’s?

In verses 6–12, the scene shifts to the throne room of heaven. Although ancient Israelites might not have known everything that the New Testament reveals about Satan, what do we learn about him, his intentions and plans, and his relationship to God? What do we learn about God’s sovereignty?

Satan’s question in 1:9, “Does Job fear God for no reason?” is most significant. What is Satan implying about Job’s motives and the basis of his relationship with God? If Satan is right, how

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should God treat Job? Why might it be important for God to allow a terrible test of Job's devotion to him?

Like clockwork, in 1:13–19 Job loses every secondary blessing that was listed in 1:2–3. Some elements of Job's tragedy have naturalistic causes (e.g., the Sabeans in v. 15), while some are supernatural (the fire from heaven in v. 16). We know that Satan is the one at work behind the scenes, but what would Job have concluded about the cause of these losses? (In the worldview of Job's day, such events were interpreted not as random tragedies but as signs of divine wrath.)

Job's response to his losses is as poignant as it is noble (1:20–21). How does he express his grief as well as his devotion to God? How does his worship prove that Satan's claim in 1:9 was false? How does Job's worship guide our own in instances when God allows some great or tragic loss?

2. Job's Second Test (2:1–13)

The Lord's statement in 2:3 that Satan "incited" him against Job "without reason" is clear at one level—the Lord is acknowledging that the test was needless and that Job did not deserve this treatment. But this statement can also be troubling, since it might appear that God is admitting that he was tricked or manipulated. But how do we see God continuing to defend his servant against Satan? And does the echoing phrase "for no reason" (1:9) and "without reason" (2:3) imply a deeper reason behind God's actions?

Satan responds to the Lord by implying that Job's first test was not deep enough. What is Satan's second proposal, and why does he think this will break Job's devotion to God?

Reflect on the short speech of Job's wife in 2:9. Would she have passed Satan's test in 1:9? What do we learn about the quality of Job's loyalty to God from his response to his wife (v. 10)?

Job's three friends arrive in 2:11. What is their motive in traveling to see Job? What does their shock and grief imply about their expectations for what they would find? What might we expect the friends to say to Job in the following chapters, given their intentions?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

GOD'S GRACE. Job lives out his faith in beautiful and costly ways (see 29:11–17), but when God takes from him his family and wealth, Job speaks only of what God had *given* him (1:21). Job considers his deeply blessed life a gift, not something he was owed in return for his good behavior. When he loses everything, he is not angry with God for betraying him but worships God just as

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sincerely as when he enjoyed all of his blessings. Job's relationship with God is clearly based on grace, not reward or merit. What Job loves most deeply in life is his deep friendship with God (see 29:4); for him, everything else is a gift. We also see God's grace in his enthusiastic recommendation of Job. Although Job was a sinner (see 31:33–34), God had only positive things to say about "his servant," a term that puts Job in the exalted company of Abraham (Gen. 26:24), Moses (Ex. 14:31), and David (2 Sam. 7:5). As we will see, everyone will turn on Job except God. No one defends him as enthusiastically as God does, all on terms of grace, not merit.

CHRIST PREFIGURED. Job is not an "everyman." Of how many of us would God say, "There is none like him on the earth" (Job 1:8)? And even though God does allow Job-like suffering in our lives, none of us will suffer in so extreme and total a way as Job did. In both Job's deep piety and his suffering, he prefigures that greater man, Jesus Christ, who innocently suffers the wrath of God in order to refute the accusations of the Devil and to glorify God.

Whole-Bible Connections

RETRIBUTION AND REWARD. Both Testaments clearly teach that faithful obedience to God, even when imperfect, is rewarded with blessing even in this life (Eliphaz neatly defines it in 4:7–8; see also Mark 10:29–30; Gal. 6:7). The book of Job does not contradict this teaching, because Job finishes the book twice as blessed as he was before (Job 42:10). But Job will nuance our understanding of the doctrine of retribution: sometimes God interrupts his normal policy of blessing our obedience in order to allow the kind of suffering we would expect to fall on someone openly defiant of God and hurtful toward others. Although the book of Job teaches us that these experiences are temporary, it also insists that God sometimes allows them in order to seal us in our relationship with him.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF SUFFERING. Suffering is diagnosed in different ways in the Bible: sometimes, it is the direct result of sin (see Ps. 38:3–5); at other times, God allows pain in order for us to mature as Christians (see Rom. 5:3–5). But neither of these explanations is applicable to Job. The first two chapters of Job go out of their way to show that it is for no sin in Job's life that he is suffering—not even Satan can find fault with him! Furthermore, God is not trying to grow Job spiritually. Job is already a mature saint—and if Job did receive some spiritual virtue from his ordeal, Satan could have repeated his accusation that Job loved God only for the secondary benefits, this time pointing to spiritual benefits instead of material ones. The book of Job teaches that saints who imperfectly but sincerely serve God will sometimes suffer for no reason they can explain in relation to past sin, and will perhaps not seem to grow spiritually from the ordeal. Job's suffering is of a kind that will lead only to a deeper vision of God himself (Job 42:5).

Theological Soundings

THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE TESTING OF THE SAINTS. "Does Job fear God for no reason?" (Job 1:9) is a question that should make every Christian nervous. It is easy to drift unconsciously from honoring the Lord as our only real treasure and great joy, to viewing him as a business partner or Santa Claus. This is clearly not true for Job: Job loves and fears God for God's sake alone, irrespective of what secondary blessings Job gains or loses in the relationship. But do we? It is beneficial to use Job's worship in 1:5 as a guide for our own when we are in good health,

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surrounded by our family. But would we be just as enthusiastic in worship if we were at death's door or had lost a child in a car accident? If God loves us, he will at some point put us in a position where we must worship him for his own sake, in the midst of agony. The book of Job teaches us that God must sometimes allow this kind of suffering if he is going to save us, because a relationship with God for God's sake, not merely viewing him as a dispenser of blessing, is the only kind of relationship that will save us. If we love God only for what he gives us in this life and not for himself, we are serving ourselves, not him. When God allows Job-like suffering in our lives, his greater purpose is to deliver us from our trivializing of him.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY. The book of Job gives us a nuanced understanding of God's rule over all things. Sometimes Christians speak of God as the sole immediate cause behind every occurrence in their lives, but Job shows that other hostile forces are sometimes also at work when we suffer. At the same time, it is clear that Satan can attack Job's family, property, and health only with God's permission and within the boundaries God has set (1:12; 2:6). Furthermore, when God finally speaks to Job, he does not shift the blame for Job's suffering to Satan. Although the Lord is not the direct cause behind Job's suffering, he is ultimately responsible for it (see 42:11). This helps us understand the complex nature of God's rule. Regardless of what we as believers might suffer, we are always in the hands of a loving God.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Job 1–2 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. **Gospel Glimpses**

2. **Whole-Bible Connections**

3. **Theological Soundings**

4. **Job 1–2**

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Job. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.