

## The Message of Job

April 26, 2020

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Why do bad things happen? That's a question some of us wrestle with. Why do bad things happen *to me*? That's a question all of us wrestle with. We may never know why certain things happen, but that doesn't mean there are no reasons. But it's important to know that when bad things happen, it's not because they are beyond God's control, and it's not because God doesn't love us. That's something to keep in mind in the age of the coronavirus.

Today, we are going to look at a very interesting book of the Old Testament, the book of Job, because it answers some of these questions. (Yes, the title of the book looks like it's pronounced "job," but it's named after a man whose name is pronounced Job. On Kanye West's last album, *Jesus Is King*, he refers to a time when he "thought the book of Job was a job.") As we will see, this book doesn't answer all our questions. But it does answer some. This is going to be an overview sermon of the whole book, so I won't be able to address all the book's content. I preached through the book three years ago, and if you want to know more, visit <https://wbcommunity.org/job>. Today, I want us to see the major points, which I think will be helpful for us. Job is a neglected book because it is unique. It's filled with long speeches that are set as poetry, so sometimes it's hard to follow. It's the kind of book that makes sense only if you look at it all at once. If you don't read the whole thing, you won't understand what is happening in it. And since Job is one of the longer books in the Bible, I'm afraid it's not one that we study enough. My hope is that after today, you will go and read the whole book, and it will make more sense to you.

I would invite you to turn in your Bible to the book of Job. It's right before the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. This is how the book begins. Here is Job, chapter 1, verses 1–5:

<sup>1</sup> There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. <sup>2</sup> There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. <sup>3</sup> He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. <sup>4</sup> His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. <sup>5</sup> And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number

of them all. For Job said, “It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” Thus Job did continually.<sup>1</sup>

Job lived in a place called Uz, which was somewhere east of the Jordan River. Beyond that, we don’t know a lot about Job. He does not appear to be an Israelite and we don’t know exactly when he lived. Most people think he lived in the time of the patriarchs, perhaps around the same time as Abraham. Instead of speculating on what we don’t know, let’s take a look at the Bible tells us.

It’s important to see that Job is a righteous man who feared God. He was also blessed with a large family and he was wealthy, possessing thousands of animals. When it says he was blameless, it doesn’t mean he was sinless. No, all humans after Adam, even Job, are sinners, people who have failed to love God and live life perfectly on his terms. But Job was a man of faith who obeyed God and even offered up sacrifices. In that way, Job acts as a priest. We even see him offering up sacrifices for his children, just in case they had sinned by cursing God in their hearts. (That shows that sin is an internal disposition, not just the actions we perform.)

The next passage shows us something very interesting. The scene moves from earth to heaven, and we are told about what is happening in God’s heavenly courtroom. Here are verses 6–12:

<sup>6</sup> Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. <sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” <sup>8</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” <sup>9</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason? <sup>10</sup> Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. <sup>11</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” <sup>12</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Here, we see God, the “sons of God,” who are angels, and someone we don’t expect to see: Satan. What is Satan doing in heaven? We don’t know. In fact, Satan is a very shadowy figure in the Bible, and we’re never told much about him. Most people assume he is a fallen angel who

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

fell from heaven at some point prior to the creation of the world. But the Bible doesn't say that. The fact is, the Bible says Satan is thrown down from heaven at the time of Jesus' death and resurrection (Rev. 12:7–12). Most of what people *think* they know about Satan comes from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* or other legends, and also from reading Satan into other passages of the Bible, like Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. The truth is, we don't know much about his origins.

But we do know that God initiates a conversation with Satan. All that happens in this book starts with God. God is the one who first mentions Job. In verse 8, God asks Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Satan replies by suggesting that Job fears God only because he has been blessed. In other words, "Job doesn't worship you and love you for you, but only because you have given him good things. If you take away those blessings, he will curse you to your face." So, God gives him permission to do that, as long as Satan doesn't touch Job. Notice that Satan can't do anything without God's permission.

In the rest of chapter 1, we see the results. Verses 13–19:

<sup>13</sup> Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, <sup>14</sup> and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, <sup>15</sup> and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." <sup>16</sup> While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." <sup>17</sup> While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." <sup>18</sup> While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, <sup>19</sup> and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

Four messengers come and tell Job that his animals have been stolen or burned up by fire, his servants have been killed, and worst of all, his ten children are all dead. Notice that Satan's work is described in generally naturalistic terms. All of this reminds us that behind every natural thing we experience, there are supernatural realities. God is at work sustaining all of creation, every little bit of life. Here, we are told that Satan was behind all these tragedies. Though we can't see God or Satan, we see their work every day. It's also important to point out that neither Job nor

any other human in this story knows what is happening behind the scenes. We are given this information about God and Satan, but Job and his friends are not.

How does Job respond to this news? Verses 20 and 21 show us:

<sup>20</sup> Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. <sup>21</sup> And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

<sup>22</sup> In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

I think Job’s response here is right. He realizes that God is ultimately behind these things. Some people question that, but that is what the Bible says. Simply compare 1 Chronicles 21:1, which says that Satan incited David to do something, with 2 Samuel 24:1, which says God incited David. Both are true. God incited David *through* Satan. God took things away from Job, at least for a time, through Satan. But Job doesn’t respond with bitterness towards God. No, even in the midst of his mourning, he worships. Satan was wrong. Job did not curse God.

The second chapter of Job is somewhat similar to the first. There’s another heavenly scene that features God and Satan. Again, God asks Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job . . . ? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason” (Job 2:3). This time, Satan suggests that Job didn’t curse God because God didn’t affect Job’s body. Satan says, “All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face” (2:4b–5). Again, God gives Satan permission, but he forbids him to kill Job.

This time, Satan strikes Job with sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. We don’t know what kind of sores these were, but they were bad. Later, Job will say, “My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh” (Job 7:5), and, “My skin turns black and falls from me, and my bones burn with heat” (Job 30:30). Job ends up sitting among ashes, probably outside the city among the burnt garbage, with only a piece of pottery with which to scratch his sores. He apparently became an outcast, like a piece of human trash. Even his wife tells him, “Curse God and die” (Job 2:9). Yet Job says she is speaking like “the foolish women.” He asks, “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” Still, Job does not curse God. Satan was wrong.

Chapter 2 ends with some important information. Three of Job’s friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—come to show him sympathy and to comfort him (Job 2:11). When they see

how bad Job looks, they cry and weep and tear their garments. In other words, they mourn with Job. Then they sit with him for a week. No one says anything.

Before we move on, I want to say one more thing about Satan. We don't hear his name for the rest of the book of Job. But that doesn't mean he's not at work. The rest of the Bible tells us that Satan is the father of lies. All lies originate with Satan. He is also called the accuser. "Satan" literally means adversary. He is an adversary to God and God's people. The word "devil" is based on a Greek word that means "slanderer" or "accuser." We don't have time to look at this today, but in Zechariah 3:1–5, Satan tries to accuse Joshua, the high priest. He tries to point out Joshua's sin. But God rebukes Satan and clothes Joshua in pure garments, symbolizing his righteous status before God. Usually, Satan works through people in indirect ways. So, when Job's wife tells him to curse God, we can see that this is Satan at work. What does Job do? He rebukes her. It's similar to what happened when Jesus told his disciples he was going to die. Peter tried to correct Jesus and Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Matt. 16:23).

Soon, we will see that Job's friends, like the Pharisees and scribes in Jesus' day, do the work of Satan by accusing Job of some secret sin. But before that happens, Job ends the silence with a lament in chapter 3. He wishes he was never born. We can feel his pain when he says, in verse 11, "Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire?" He wants to die. He is groaning. He has no rest.

In chapter 4, there begins a series of speeches. There are three cycles of speeches. In each cycle, Job's friends take turns speaking, and Job responds to them. His friends accuse Job of committing some sin which is worthy of punishment. They know that all sin is punished, but they make the mistake of thinking that because Job looks like he is being punished, he must have sinned. We can see their basic theology in what Eliphaz says in chapter 4, verses 7–9: "Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed." In other words, "Hey, Job, we all know you must have done something bad to deserve this." Eliphaz basically says, "Confess your sins, repent, and God will heal you." (See Job 5:17–27).

I don't have time to cover all of these speeches, but a sampling of what Job's friends say will tell you all that you need to know about the way they "comfort" Job. In chapter 8, verse 4,

Bildad says, “If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression.” In other words: “Job, your children are dead because they were sinners!” In his second speech, in chapter 15, Eliphaz accuses Job of lying: “For your iniquity teaches your mouth, and you choose the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; your own lips testify against you” (Job 15:5–6). In chapter 22, Eliphaz falsely accuses Job of oppressing the poor.

A lot of what the three friends say is somewhat true. But their mistake is they think Job must deserve what he’s going through. They continue to insist that Job must repent of some sin. They can’t imagine that a righteous man would suffer for some other reason.

In the face of their accusations, Job maintains his righteousness. He says, in chapter 6, verse 10, “I have not denied the words of the Holy One.” In chapter 23, he says of God, “When he has tried me, I shall come out as gold” (23:10) and, “I have kept his way and have not turned aside” (23:11).

Job also rebukes his friends. He says, “Miserable comforters are you all” (16:2).

Job realizes something very important. At one point he says, “My vindication is at stake” (Job 6:29). If he confesses some sin that he hasn’t committed, he cannot be vindicated; he would be lying. But only God knows that he is righteous. If Job is going to be vindicated on earth, he needs God to declare his righteousness. So, Job says he needs someone to arbitrate or mediate between him and God. He laments, “There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both” Job (9:33). And yet he seems to know that there is such a person, because he says later, “my witness is in heaven” (Job 16:19). Most famously, Job says this in chapter 19:

<sup>23</sup> “Oh that my words were written!  
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!  
<sup>24</sup> Oh that with an iron pen and lead  
they were engraved in the rock forever!  
<sup>25</sup> For I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.  
<sup>26</sup> And after my skin has been thus destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I shall see God,  
<sup>27</sup> whom I shall see for myself,  
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.  
My heart faints within me! (Job 19:23–27)

From our perspective, we know who this Redeemer and mediator is. But Job didn't have a Bible to turn to. His words are written down now, but now one could say to him then, "Just turn to the book of Job and see how it all turns out."

Job says that God is the one who is responsible for his condition. In chapter 6, verse 4, he says, "For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me." In several of his speeches, Job says similar things. In chapter 16, he says, "He has torn me in his wrath and hated me; he has gnashed his teeth at me; my adversary sharpens his eyes against me" (Job 16:9). In chapter 19, he says, "God has put me in the wrong and closed his net about me" (Job 19:6). It's hard not to come to the conclusion that Job is blaming God.

There is an issue of justice at stake—not just Job's righteousness, but also the righteousness of God. Job claims that the wicked seem to prosper (21:7–16). He seems to think that God is not doing his job by judging the wicked (24:1–12).

Because Job is questioning God's justice, Job wants an audience with God. "I desire to argue my case with God," he says (13:3). (See also Job 23:2–7).

These three cycles of speeches by Job and his friends seem to go nowhere. They accuse him, he states his innocence, and he appeals to God. Things get quite heated before Job's friends stop speaking. After those speeches, Job has an interesting reflection on wisdom in chapter 28. He asks, "Where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12). "God understands the way to it, and he knows its place" (Job 28:23). "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28). The clear implication is that none of these people are wise. Instead of speculating about what Job did wrong, they should fear God, the source of wisdom.

After Job defends himself, a proud young man named Elihu comes on the scene (Job 32–27). He doesn't really add much to the conversation. While much of what he says about God is true, he, too, accuses Job of rebelling against God. He says, "Would that Job were tried to the end, because he answers like wicked men. For he adds rebellion to his sin; he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God" (34:36–37). He ends his speeches with some great words about God (in chapter 37), and he says of God, "He does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit" (37:24).

At this point, the reader of Job is probably tired of a lot of theological speculation. No human knows why Job is suffering, nor do they seem to understand how God relates to Job's trials. So, who shows up to speak? God himself. At the beginning of chapter 38, we read: "Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me'" (38:1–3). God rebukes Elihu, and perhaps Job's friends and even Job, for speaking without knowledge. Then God asks a series of rhetorical questions, which seem to put everyone in their place.

God asks Job, "Where were you when I created the earth?" We see this in verses 4–7:

- 4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?  
Tell me, if you have understanding.  
5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know!  
Or who stretched the line upon it?  
6 On what were its bases sunk,  
or who laid its cornerstone,  
7 when the morning stars sang together  
and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4–7)

It's interesting that God uses the language of a temple—foundations, bases, a cornerstone—to describe the earth. That's because God made the earth to be his temple, the place where he is glorified. The world is a theater in which God demonstrates his greatness. That means that all of reality, whether we know it or not, is God-centered. This is what David Jackson writes in his book about Job: "God does not commit idolatry and worship us. He is not there for us. Quite the contrary, we are here for him—put here for his glory. Even his enemies are created to glorify him. Having emphasized the grace of God but ignored everything else about God, Christians now face a community of people who are convinced that God, like everyone else, owes us."<sup>2</sup> But God does not owe us. And God never answers Job's questions. Which is to say that God doesn't answer all of our questions. He doesn't tell Job why he is suffering. He simply reminds Job of how great he is.

Throughout chapter 38, God asks Job if he created this or that. The answer, of course, is no. Only God can create these things. In verses 8–11, he asks Job who made the sea and established its boundaries. In Hebrew thought, the sea represented chaos, evil, and human pride.

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<sup>2</sup> David R. Jackson, *Crying Out for Vindication: The Gospel according to Job* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 27–28.



God is telling Job that he has established boundaries for evil. God told the sea, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed” (Job 38:11). God also created the sun and he controls its movements (Job 38:12–15). God alone know the extent of all creation (Job 38:16–18). He is the one who separated darkness and light (Job 38:19–21). God is even sarcastic here. After asking Job about the creation of darkness and light, he says, “You know for you were born then, and the number of your days is great!” (Job 38:21). God controls the weather and the stars (Job 38: 22–38), as well as all animals (Job 38:39–39:30).

After God’s first speech, in chapters 38 and 39, he asks Job one more question, at the beginning of chapter 40: “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it” (Job 40:2). Of course, Job cannot answer God. He says, “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further” (Job 38:2–5).

But God is not done. He continues. Again, he says, “Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?” (Job 40:7–9). Of course, no one can condemn God, and that is his point. We are not in a position to judge God. Some people think they can. Even Christians try to determine what God should be like based on their own feelings or opinions. It’s interesting that when Paul talks about election—the idea that God chooses his people, whom he will save and whom he will not—he anticipates an objection. In Romans 9:18, he writes, “So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.” Then, he writes, “You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (Romans 9:19–20). The answer, again, is no. We are in no position to judge God because we are not omniscient—we don’t know everything—and we are not righteous and holy. We don’t have the knowledge, the power, or the character to make any judgments on God and his ways.

Back to Job. God then brings up two mysterious beasts. The first one is Behemoth, whom he describes in chapter 40, verses 15–24. Now, some people have assumed that Behemoth is a certain type of animal. I don’t think that’s the case. I think a theologian named Robert Fyall may

be right when he says that Behemoth is the embodiment of death.<sup>3</sup> He provides evidence that the description of Behemoth might have reminded people in the Ancient Near East of the mythology surrounding Mot, the god of death. If that is the case, then God is saying that he has power over death. Death is a created thing (Job 40:15). God introduced death as a partial judgment against sinners; God cannot allow rebels against him to live forever. Though no human being can destroy death, the implication is that God can. God asks, “Can one take him by his eyes, or pierce his nose with a snare?” (Job 40:24). The answer is, “Yes, God can.”

Chapter 41 is devoted to another beast, named Leviathan. I am more certain of the identity of Leviathan. Leviathan was the name of a seven-headed dragon in the mythology of ancient Canaan.<sup>4</sup> The Bible talks about a seven-headed dragon. Revelation 12:3 says, “Behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.” In case we don’t understand who that is, we are told in verse 9, “And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him” (Rev. 12:9). So, it seems that Leviathan is none other than Satan. We might also mention Isaiah 27:1, which says, “In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.” If Leviathan and Satan are serpents and dragons and have seven heads, it seems that they must be one and the same.

What does God say of Leviathan, who is Satan? In the first few verses of chapter 41, God asks Job,

- 1 “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook  
or press down his tongue with a cord?
- 2 Can you put a rope in his nose  
or pierce his jaw with a hook?
- 3 Will he make many pleas to you?  
Will he speak to you soft words?
- 4 Will he make a covenant with you  
to take him for your servant forever?
- 5 Will you play with him as with a bird,

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<sup>3</sup> See Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 312.

or will you put him on a leash for your girls? (Job 41:1–5)

Again, the answers are no. No, Job cannot control Satan. No, Satan will not make a covenant with Job. No, Job cannot put Satan on a leash. But Satan is God’s pet on a leash. Satan is a created being. He is not equal to God. He doesn’t have God’s power. Even though Satan is real and we should be wary of him and his ways, he can do nothing apart from God. His power is not greater than God’s. We cannot defeat Satan, but God can. Consider God’s words in Job 41:7–11:

- 7 Can you fill his skin with harpoons  
or his head with fishing spears?  
8 Lay your hands on him;  
remember the battle—you will not do it again!  
9 Behold, the hope of a man is false;  
he is laid low even at the sight of him.  
10 No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.  
Who then is he who can stand before me?  
11 Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?  
Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.

No human weapons of war can defeat evil. No swords, spears, darts, javelins, arrows, or stones, all of which are mentioned in this chapter, will defeat Leviathan. But God can. No one can stand before him. Everything is his, and he controls all things, even Satan.

Job understood the implications of what God said. So, he answers God:

- 2 “I know that you can do all things,  
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.  
3 ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’  
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,  
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.  
4 ‘Hear, and I will speak;  
I will question you, and you make it known to me.’  
5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,  
but now my eye sees you;  
6 therefore I despise myself,  
and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:2–6)

Job finally understood that God has his purposes, and he doesn’t owe us an explanation for what he is doing. No plan of God’s can be thwarted. His knowledge is too wonderful for us. Job finally saw God, and he understood.

In the rest of the book, God rebukes Job’s friends for not speaking rightly of him. Their accusations were false. And, moreover, they seemed to claim that God was so transcendent, so

above all things on earth, that he doesn't care. Yet God does care. He cares so much that he restores Job's fortunes, but not after telling Job to offer sacrifices for his friends and to pray for his friends. Again, Job is acting as a priest.

God gives to Job twice as many animals as he had before. So, God restores his wealth. And God gives Job ten more children. Some people think his ten children were brought back to life, but we don't know that. Job's brothers and sisters, who we haven't heard about before this point, come to eat bread with him in his house, and to show him sympathy and comfort "for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him" (Job 42:11). Job lives a very long life and dies an old man, leaving an inheritance to all his children.

How do we understand this story of Job and what it means for our lives? I would point out that the story of Job is really the story of the Bible, the story of the universe. At the beginning of the book, we are told about a peaceful situation which is interrupted by Satan's work. We still aren't told why Satan exists or why God allowed him to do anything. This is true of Satan's work in Genesis 3. For the rest of the book of Job, we hear Job groaning, much like all of creation groans from the bondage and corruption that sin has brought to it (Rom. 8:20–22). There are cries for an arbiter, a mediator, who will make things right between God and man. And in the end, God appears. His servant sees him and his servant is restored. The end of Job is a foreshadowing of the end of all human history, when the Lord returns and makes all things new, removing all sin and death and pain from this world.

But we also can see that the story of Job is the story of Jesus. Jesus is the true suffering servant, the true blameless one. He is the Redeemer of chapter 19. Throughout the book of Job, the question is asked, "How can mortal man be in the right before God" (Job 4:17; also Job 9:2; 25:4). The answer, of course, is Jesus. We need one who is righteous for us, and one who, though innocent, endures pain and suffering so he can bear the punishment for our sin. Jesus is our great high priest. He is the one who will be joined by many brothers and sisters to a great feast.

Like Job's suffering, Jesus' suffering is due to God's plans and Satan's schemes. In the Bible, we read that Jesus is "the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8 NIV; 1 Pet. 1:20). On the day of Pentecost, Peter said that Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Yet it was also Satan's plan to kill Jesus. Satan "put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot . . . to betray" Jesus (John 13:2) and Satan entered into Judas (Luke 22:3; 13:27). But Jesus was also "crucified and killed by the hands of

lawless men” (Acts 2:23). All of this was under God’s control. Satan and wicked people are responsible for their actions, but their actions are not outside of God’s plans.

When we are suffering, we need to think about a few things. One, all suffering is somehow part of God’s plan. This means that our pain and suffering will somehow be limited. We will all die—and we may die painful deaths—but for those of us who have a right relationship with God through Jesus, that will be the end of our pain. We don’t know why any particular person suffers at any given time, so we shouldn’t speculate. But we can be assured that no pain is meaningless. Everything will work out according to God’s plan. And he will give us the grace to get through our pain. This should give us some comfort, because we know that things won’t ultimately be out of control. Though we don’t understand all of God’s plans—and even in spite of the fact that we may not like what is happening right now—we can be certain that his will is going to be done.

We should also think about Jesus. He suffered even though he was innocent. He is our example for how to suffer well. All who follow in Jesus’ footsteps will face persecution, tribulation, and suffering. We need to look to him who “was despised and rejected by men’ a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). This, too, should give us some comfort. We have a great high priest who can sympathize with us (Heb. 4:15). He knows what we are going through. And he is our advocate (1 John 2:1), our mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), the one who is interceding for us in heaven (Rom. 8:34).

We should realize that in our suffering, God has not abandoned us. Though Job couldn’t see God and though he didn’t hear from him for a while, God was still there, sustaining Job’s life along with the rest of creation. The Puritan John Flavel, who lived in the seventeenth century, knew something of pain: his first three wives died. Yet he wrote: “For alas! we judge by sense and appearance, and do not consider that God’s heart may be towards us while the hand of His providence seems to be against us.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, there are times when God seems to be against us, but that is not the case. His heart is really toward us, even in our struggles.

We should also realize that, in the end, all things will work out for the good of those who love God, those who are called according to God’s purposes (Rom. 8:28). We may not see this now, before our physical deaths, but in the new creation, everything will be made right. In the

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<sup>5</sup> John Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence* (1678; repr. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2009), 139.

new creation, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

We should also learn from Job how to deal with other people who are suffering. Job’s friends had it right at first. We should spend time with people who are mourning, and we should be quiet. We are told to “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). We shouldn’t speculate about things we don’t know, claiming to speak for God. We shouldn’t be wise in our own sight. We shouldn’t assume that since someone is suffering, they are being punished by God. God does judge people for sin, and he even disciplines those he loves, but there are times when people suffer for other reasons. I think of the example of the apostle Paul, who suffered in his ministry. In 2 Corinthians, he says that his suffering occurred to make him rely on God (2 Cor. 1:9), and that God’s power would be displayed in his weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). I’m sure that Job’s sufferings brought him closer to God. The same is true for us.

I have found that the best commentary on Job is 1 Peter 5:6–11. I’ll close with these words:

<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup> Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. <sup>10</sup> And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. <sup>11</sup> To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.