



"The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word 'love.'"

—C.S. Lewis

17-Apr-09

## Another Look at the Book of Job

The story of Job has long been a place of inquiry for those enduring severe trials. In it we see a righteous man somberly reflecting on his life, trying to reconcile his miserable circumstances with his exemplary existence. It is easy to identify with Job as he begs [God](#) for answers to what seems to be a grave injustice. Job wrestles with age-old questions: Why do bad things happen to good people? How can God apparently reward righteousness with destruction? Why does He allow—or even cause—seemingly undeserved calamity?

[Sin](#) is not the issue in the book of Job, nor the reason for his trials. The very first verse establishes that Job "was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil." In God's conversations with [Satan](#), He holds Job up as perhaps the epitome of human righteousness: "Have you considered My servant Job, that *there is none like him on the earth*, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" (Job 1:8; 2:3; emphasis our throughout) God further commends Job's integrity after Satan is allowed to destroy Job's family and wealth, and after Job's trial God accepted Job's friends only because of Job (Job 42:7-8). Through the prophet

Ezekiel, God again points out Job's righteousness, and implies that if he had lived in the land of Israel, he would have been spared from God's judgment on Jerusalem. Job is noted as one of the three most righteous men in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 14:14, 20).

Job's friends—in the loosest sense of the word—offered no real consolation or help. From chapter 3 through chapter 31, these three—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite—participate in a debate with Job, arguing from a very narrow perspective that Job's disastrous circumstances could *only* be as a result of something he had done to provoke the Almighty. As Job protested his innocence, they moved from insinuation of wickedness to outright accusation. They had a very constricted view of God, God's justice, God's works, and God's fundamental nature. Though they played on different instruments, the one essential note in their three-person symphony was that Job must be a secret sinner, and he had received what he deserved.

Even as Job was parrying their verbal jabs and defending his uprightness, he begged God for an explanation. He greatly desired to have his day in court, as it were, in order to hear the charges against him and be able to present his case. He was absolutely convinced that he had done nothing which warranted such an act of God, and all he wanted was to be able to talk it out so that God might hear *his* side of the story—or, at the very least, be able to hear the reason why something so horrible had occurred to him. He was searching for answers for the cause of his hardship, and knew that only God could supply them—clearly his three acquaintances had nothing worthwhile to say on the subject. Repeatedly, he sought a venue wherein everything would be explained to him. Much to his later abhorrence, he received what he sought.

Prior to God answering Job from the whirlwind though, Elihu—a fourth companion who remained silent throughout the exchange because of his youth—set Job and his other companions straight: "[Elihu's] wrath was aroused because [Job] justified himself rather than God. Also against his three friends his wrath was aroused, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job." (Job 32:2-3) Elihu criticizes Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar for not being able to effectively refute Job. He rebukes Job for so easily comparing God with a man, and for asserting that God is unfair—that

He is somehow unrighteous in His dealings with His creation, and that He was being unjust with Job. God is not required to give account to anyone or anything! Yet, Elihu points out, even though He is not required to, God *does* give answers—though not in the way that a man might expect.

After Elihu defends God and extols His justice, greatness, majesty, and unsurpassed position, God Himself answers Job. His response, which spans chapters 38-41, is similar in approach and effect to Jesus' many responses recorded in the New Testament. His responses there frequently had the effect of putting the questioner in his place, and in most cases His responses at first did not seem to have anything to do with the questions being asked. In reality, His responses *did* answer the questions, but they did so at a much higher level than the questioner was thinking.

Perhaps the strongest theme of God's answer is His sovereignty. As He says near the end, "Who has preceded Me, that I should pay him? *Everything under heaven is Mine.*" (Job 41:11) He created everything with which man interacts, as well as man himself—who has the right to demand an explanation from Him? Who has the wisdom or the skill to bring to pass even the slightest fraction of what God has done and continues to do? As Paul says elsewhere, "But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?'" (Romans 9:20) Job was not and never could be on equal footing with God; to demand anything of a Being so vastly superior was sheer foolishness.

Yet God's words were not simply intended to overwhelm Job—though they certainly did that. God was not merely stating His legal position that He was sovereign and He clearly had the right to do with His creation whatever He saw fit—though that certainly was true. God was doing more than just pointing out His sovereignty. All of His examples draw attention to the fact that He is the Creator. He points to laying the foundation of the earth and setting the boundaries of the oceans. He highlights the fact that the weather patterns have their genesis in Him, and even now respond to Him. He reminds Job of the stars and constellations, and the interstellar distances and forces. He showcases the beauty of the animals, not only in form but also in function—why they behave the way that they do. In short, everything is the way it is because *He* has made it that way.

What about Job?

God Himself says that Job was righteous. Where did Job's righteousness come from? Was his character simply a product of evolution, or was it *intelligently formed* out of essentially nothingness like the physical creation? Was Job a self-made righteous man, or was he so exemplary because of what *God* had done—because God had known Him since before the foundation of [the world](#) (see Ephesians 1:4) and was able to guide all things pertaining to his life? In essence, Job was boasting about something he had received (I Corinthians 4:7). Who protected Job from the Leviathan—a symbol for Satan—every second since birth? Who was [merciful](#) to Job in not blotting him out on the occasions when he sinned? Who provided the environment in which Job's character was formed and set? Who created the circumstances for Job to learn self-control, to develop empathy and pity, and to learn true justice?

The creation of mankind in the [image of God](#) is God's work. Mankind cannot make himself into God's image; he not only lacks the power, he also cannot even clearly see the end product! A clay pot is beautiful because of what the Potter does, not because of what the clay does. The clay simply yields. Likewise, the righteousness in Job can only be attributed to the work that God had done—not what Job had done! Job simply yielded to God's creative work. Job would not have even been aware of God's standard of righteousness unless God had revealed it to him!

God's answer to Job was a reminder that His creative efforts did not stop when Job was born. As impressive as Job was, he could not truly take credit for it—all that he was depended upon what God did first, and continued to do throughout his life. This also gives a basic answer to Job's burning question: why? Because God was *still* creating Job—still fashioning him for the future, beyond the resurrection. The Potter knew what further preparation the clay needed in order to be a vessel of honor. God was not simply exercising His sovereignty; He was sovereignly continuing His creation of Job. God was not punishing Job because of wickedness; He was preparing Job to eventually fit his place in God's spiritual creation.

- David C. Grabbe

## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Keeping the Truth Pure](#)**

by Charles Whitaker

Charles Whitaker cautions that although God's Church has correct or right doctrine, we need to know more than right doctrine. We must be able to use right reason (supported by scripture and God's Holy Spirit) to support and defend right doctrine. If keeping or understanding doctrine comes from wrong, distorted, or questionable sources or wrong motives, the doctrine may be contaminated or defiled. If we allow doctrine to be contaminated with man's flawed, syncretistic reason, it will contaminate, defile, or profane the truth. One of Job's 'counselors,' Eliphaz, derived his hopeless, pessimistic and non-edifying advice (not from Biblical sources) from demonically inspired Gnosticism, putting himself at variance with God's Word. Bildad also encourages Job to look to non-biblical secular, Gnostic teachings of a mysterious, shadowy "fathers of fathers" - based upon the teachings of Satan rather than God's Word. We need to be careful of modern Gnostic syncretism found on television evangelists and commentaries.

---

## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Faith to Face Our Trials](#)**

by Pat Higgins

Life sometimes seems to be one trial after another. However, Pat Higgins asserts that God has revealed an astounding facet of our relationship with Him that should give us the faith to soldier on despite our many trials.

---

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G.  
Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email  
Subscriptions page](#).

---