

JOB

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY
IN SUFFERING

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*Dedicated to
all God's suffering saints*

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PREFACE



There have been many words written on what C. S. Lewis called “the problem of pain,”¹ the relationship between God and suffering. The answers to this problem, if indeed it is a problem, have also been many. Some use the existence of suffering to deny the existence of God. Others deny that God is in any way the originator of human suffering. Still others speak of a paradox.

The book of Job is different. Though it consists largely of speeches by Job and his friends, it is not a human response to suffering endured or observed. The book of Job is God’s own word concerning pain and suffering, especially the suffering of his people. This commentary will proceed, therefore, from the perspective that the book is inspired and infallible, given to us by God’s Spirit as an explanation of our own suffering and the suffering we witness.

To say that the book of Job is inspired and infallible is not to say that every word spoken by Job, by his friends, and by Satan is truth. Many things said in the book are wrong either in their content or in their application, but that is often the case in scripture. Nevertheless, the content of the book is the Holy Spirit’s infallible account of the interaction between Job and his friends as they contemplate suffering on a scale seldom seen. More, it is God’s final word on the matter.

1 C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: The Centenary Press, 1940).

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Nor is the poetic nature of the book of Job an objection to its inspiration and historicity. Either the characters in the book actually did speak in poetry—something not so strange, given the nature of Hebrew poetry—or the Holy Spirit in inspiring the book turned it into poetry. It would be difficult to imagine someone speaking in English poetry, since our poetry is very different with its meter and rhyme, but poetry in the Bible consists of parallel statements that say the same thing, more or less, or even say the opposite, thus explaining and expanding on each other. It is not so difficult to imagine people speaking in that manner. In any case, the poetic nature of the book only makes it more memorable and instructive.

This commentary also assumes that Job was a real historical figure. He is mentioned with other historical figures, Noah and Daniel, in Ezekiel 14:14, 20, and James assumes his historicity in James 5:11. The book of Job is not a parable or allegory or a retelling of ancient legends that have a universal message or moral to them. Though the events recorded in the book—Job's loss of everything, the appearances of Satan in heaven, God's appearance to Job in a whirlwind, and the restoration of Job's fortunes—are unusual, they are no more unusual than the rest of scripture and not unusual at all to one who believes in a sovereign and everywhere present God.

Through the suffering of Job, God speaks to all of us concerning our trials and the suffering that is so much a part of life. God's message is summed up in James 5:10–11: "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

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This commentary will not be a verse by verse explanation of Job. That would require too much space, would almost certainly be repetitious, and would obscure the main purpose of the book. This commentary shows how the book fits together and how the different speeches develop and build on one another. For that reason this commentary owes a great deal to the recently republished and long unavailable *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*.² Though I do not agree with some of that book's theology, it was most helpful in seeing the overall pattern of the book.

May God bless what is written here and use it for the comfort of his people until every tear is wiped away and there is no more sorrow or suffering. May he use the book to turn us to him who was touched with the feeling of our infirmities and who is able to help those who suffer. May the Redeemer whose coming and glory Job saw be our only comfort in life and in death.

2 William Henry Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded* (New York: Robert Carter and Bros., 1874). Republished as *Conflict and Triumph: The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999).

Part One

THE HISTORY OF JOB



INTRODUCTION

The author of the book of Job is unknown. Jewish tradition ascribes the book to Moses; other suggestions are Job himself or Job's friend Elihu, who comes on the scene in chapter 32. The Spirit has not seen fit to tell us who the human author is, and the question of human authorship is unimportant. The real author is the Holy Spirit, and the book is part of the inspired word of God. This is God's own word concerning our suffering.

The place of Job in the word of God has never been questioned. If there were any doubts, they should be laid to rest by the reference to Job in James 5:10–11. When James says, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job," he as much as tells us that Job belongs in the word of God and assumes that the believers to whom he is writing have heard of Job and his struggles and of God's mercy to Job.

Both James 5:10–11 and Ezekiel 14:14, 20 establish the inspiration of the book as well as the historicity of Job. In both, Job is viewed as an historical person and as an example of believers. The book of Job is also quoted once in the New Testament: Paul quotes Job 5:13 in 1 Corinthians 3:19, when he writes, "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." There Paul uses the phrase, "It is

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written,” a phrase that always refers to other portions of the word of God.

In the Hebrew Old Testament Job is part of what are called the Writings, and it is usually placed after Proverbs and before Ecclesiastes. The Protestant tradition of placing the book before Psalms traces back to the Latin Vulgate. Since, however, the order of the books of the Bible is not inspired, it makes no real difference where the book is placed and in what order it is read with the other books of the Bible.

Some date the book of Job to the return from the Babylonian captivity, but there are a number of clues, including the language of the book, suggesting that it is very early, perhaps the earliest book of the Bible. Even more certain is that Job himself lived around the time of the patriarchs (1800–1700 BC) and was a near-contemporary of Abraham, perhaps one of those whom Abraham left behind when he migrated to Canaan.

There are other clues as well to the early date of the book. There are no references in the book to Israel or to Israel's history, suggesting that it predates the rise of that nation. Most agree that the land of Uz, Job's homeland, was in northern Arabia or further east, between Damascus and the Euphrates. If this God-fearing man was from that area, he must have lived prior to disappearance of the knowledge of God there, around the time of the patriarchs or shortly after. The offering of sacrifices by Job as head of his family also suggests a time prior to the establishment of the Mosaic priesthood, and the age at which he died (Job 42:16) would put him in the post-Babel era, around the time of the patriarchs.

It is possible that the land of Uz is in the area of Edom. Lamentations 4:21 makes reference to the “daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz,” and there was an Uz who was a descendant of Esau (Gen. 36:28). That would place Job later in history,

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around the time of Jacob, and Job would have lived to the south-east of the land of Canaan, but the book would still date to the time of the patriarchs.

The best clue, however, is the reference to Elihu the Buzite, the kinsman of Ram, in Job 32:2. If, as many believe, the Buzites were near neighbors of the Chaldeans, if Buz is the same person as the man mentioned in Genesis 22:21 (it is difficult to see why else he would be mentioned), and if Ram is the same as Aram in Genesis 22:21, then Job's friend Elihu was not only a near-contemporary of Abraham but a relative. The date of the book, however, is not as important as the content, the story of Job's suffering under God's hand and its fruits.

Is the early date of the book at all important? It is important in that it shows that the struggles of God's people in their sufferings go back to the earliest times; it shows that not only the issues but also the comforts have always been the same. It explains the lack of understanding on the part of Job and his friends of the gracious purpose of trials and suffering. It makes Job's demand for an explanation of his suffering more understandable. This Old Testament perspective is difficult for us to imagine:

Think for a moment what it would be to encounter crushing sorrows not only without Calvary and Gethsemane and the sympathy of the incarnate Son of God, who is Himself touched with the feeling of our infirmities...with no clear views of that eternal blessedness, in comparison with which all earthly sorrow, however grievous in themselves, and long continued, are nevertheless light and momentary.¹

1 Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*, 79–80.

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Trying to put ourselves with our trials into Job's place in the Old Testament therefore should make us thankful for our New Testament blessings.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding regarding Job's struggle and his sin. There are suggestions that Job lost his faith for a time. The book, however, shows Job to be not only a believer but one with a deep understanding of God, a firm faith in God, and a confidence in God that does not waver through all his difficulties. In that, too, he is an example of believers and is commended both in Ezekiel and in James for his righteousness and for his patience.

Job's sin was not weakness of faith nor a failure to understand the equity of God's dealings with righteous and wicked. He was not troubled by the apparent prosperity of the wicked as Asaph was (Ps. 73). He did not doubt that his afflictions were from God or ever question the justice and wisdom of God in afflicting him. He did not despair of God's love and mercy. His problem, as we shall see, was different, but a problem that touches at the heart of our need for patience and peace in afflictions.

Except at the one point where he sins, he is a wonderful example to us. Even sinning he is an example of what we must not do when we suffer under the almighty hand of God and in his wonderful wisdom. Job lives on in every suffering child of God as he or she learns to submit to God's sovereign good pleasure.

Calvin sums up the lessons of the book of Job beautifully:

The story which is here written shows us how we are in the hand of God, and that it belongs to Him to order our lives and to dispose of them according to His good pleasure, and that our duty is to submit ourselves to Him in all humility and obedience, that it is quite reasonable that we be altogether His both to live and to die; and even if it

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shall please Him to raise His hand against us, though we may not perceive for what cause He does it, nevertheless we should glorify Him always, confessing that He is just and equitable, that we should not murmur against Him, that we should not enter into dispute, knowing that if we struggle against Him we shall be conquered.²

2 John Calvin, *Sermons from Job, selected and translated by Leroy Nixon* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1952), 3. Calvin preached 159 sermons on Job on weekdays from 1554 to 1555. Twenty sermons are selected in this book.

2

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(Job 1:1–5)

Job 1:1–5 tells us very little about Job's outward circumstances but gives us great insight into Job's spiritual character, as does the whole story of his trials. Of his circumstances we know only that he was from the land of Uz, was fabulously wealthy, and had ten children—none of which has any bearing on what we know of his piety and faithfulness, in spite of Satan's accusations to the contrary. Scripture tells us so little of him because it focuses always on the important things.

Uz is thought to be between Damascus and the Euphrates. That would put Job in or near the area from which Abraham came and would explain his knowledge of God and his piety, for the worship of God lingered in that area at least until the end of the patriarchal era (Gen. 31:51–53). Indeed, if the dating of Job's life is accurate, then Job may very well have known Abraham's family and perhaps Abraham himself.

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Job is identified as the “greatest of all the men of the east” (Job 1:3), and though that does not tell us exactly where he lived, “the east” in scripture is the whole area of Arabia and of the Fertile Crescent, which stretches from Syria to Babylon. Abraham sent his sons by Keturah, the ancestors of the Arab tribes, “unto the east country” (Gen. 25:6), and Jacob when he came to Haran “came into the land of the people of the east” (29:1). Job’s three friends and Job himself were apparently from the same vast area.

He was “the greatest of all the men of the east” especially in wealth and influence (v. 3). Estimates of Job’s wealth in modern money range from five to fifty million dollars, but we live in a time when wealth is estimated very differently and when animals, the foundation of Job’s fortune, are much less valuable than in Job’s day. However reckoned, there is no doubt that Job was wealthy beyond imagination.

Later Job speaks of his godly use of the wealth God gave him:

11. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me:
12. Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him.
13. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.
14. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem.
15. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame.
16. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out. (Job 29:11–16)

It may be harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, but Job certainly showed that by God’s grace it is possible. In his trials he showed, too, that

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he had not set his heart on his riches—that he was not a worshiper of mammon. In that he is an example to all who are blessed with material prosperity.

Of his ten children we know nothing except that they were old enough to have their own houses. The reference in Job 1:4 to the round of feasting that his children enjoyed should not be taken as a negative commentary on their spirituality. There is no indication that their behavior was anything other than their enjoying thankfully all that God had so richly given to them and their father (1 Tim. 4:4–5). Indeed, Job, in offering sacrifice for them, does not accuse them of any evildoing or impiety, but only suggests the possibility that they had sinned, as all of us do always.¹

Those sacrifices are a further evidence of Job's piety and godliness. They compare to the prayers that Christian parents offer on behalf of their children, praying with them or for them out of a belief in the promises of God's covenant and in God's willingness to keep these promises by saving of covenantal children. Christian parents imitate Job when in praying with their children they teach them to confess their sins and seek forgiveness in the death of Christ. They imitate Job when they seek forgiveness for their children, acknowledging their immaturity as Job did: "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." These duties are all too often neglected by parents.

Of Job's wife nothing is said until chapter 2:9–10, where she tells Job to "curse God, and die," and it is impossible to judge her character on that alone. A charitable view would be that she spoke hastily and foolishly under the immense pressure of suffering, something we

1 Green suggests that the word "cursed" in Job 1:5 has the idea of saying farewell to God or forgetting him in happy times (*The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*, 23–24).

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are all inclined to do. Whatever her character, it is obvious from the sacrifices Job offered for his children that his immense wealth was not gained at the expense of his family or marital responsibilities.

Of Job's godly character God testifies in Job 1:1: "that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil"—an amazing statement. That Job was all this by God's grace there is no doubt, but it is nevertheless what all of us should strive to be and ought to be. That he feared God is evident in the later history of Job when he humbled himself before God: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further" (40:4–5). The fear of God shown by Job is the reverence we feel for God and the awe that overwhelms us in his presence. For us and for Job it was the spring of his uprightness and piety.²

It is worth noting here that the description of Job in verse 1 is God's own description of him; God calls Job perfect and upright, one who feared God and avoided evil. What a wonder, that God should thus speak of anyone, and what a motive to piety and godliness, to hear such a description of anyone.

Job's eschewing or avoiding of evil is something that is altogether lacking in our times. Too many Christians walk as close to evil as they can in the company they keep, in the music they hear, in what they watch, in their recreation and business practices, in marriage and family life, imitating the ungodly in their culture and practices. Churches, too, conduct themselves as businesses, worship is modeled on worldly entertainment, and Christians live piously for only a few hours on the Lord's day, if then. Would that there were more like Job.

² Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*, 20–21.

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That he was perfect and upright refers to his conduct. *Upright* is the opposite of groveling in sin and rolling in the gutter of evil, and *perfect* is not the same as sinless but refers to conduct that is above reproach. There are no sinless men except Jesus. By his own confession Job was a sinner: "I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?" (7:20); "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse" (9:20). *Perfect* means that Job's confession and life matched. He did not, as Calvin says, "keep a shop in the rear" to turn himself away from God.³ Would God we were all like him in that respect. There is more to obedience than outward conformity to God's law and holiness, and Job had that, too, but it is a Christian's behavior and conduct that is seen and that either brings disgrace on God's name or magnifies it.

Ezekiel 14:14, 20 makes reference to Job's righteousness. Righteousness is the righteousness of God himself, freely imputed to unrighteous sinners through faith, the faith that unites them to Christ. Job was perfect and upright, not by his own efforts to distinguish himself before God, but alone by God's grace. His God-fearing conduct was the fruit of that imputed and gifted righteousness, the fruit of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ.

When God asks Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" the word translated *considered* could be *set thine heart on*. Satan had not done that, had not set his heart on Job, had not even really considered who and what he was by God's grace, but God had set his heart on Job in eternity, had foreknown Job in love, and that could not fail or change in the most dire circumstances. Job, like David, was a man after God's own heart, and having set his heart on Job, God would give his own Son to be Job's redeemer and

³ Calvin, *Sermons from Job*, 10.

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would preserve Job from all Satan's wiles. It is Job's spiritual character that is emphasized in these first verses of the book therefore, not his outward circumstances, and his character is an example to us all, those untried and those severely tested. Outward circumstances do not matter, but our response to God's dealings with us, whether in prosperity or adversity, do.

What a reminder he is, too, of our need for God's correction and chastening. If he, perfect and upright, was in need of such trials, how much more we who would be afraid to set ourselves on the same spiritual level as Job. How true it is that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6).

God shows his sovereignty, too, in chastening Job. Job's uprightness did not shelter him from God's chastening hand, or mean that he was above chastening. God does as he will with his own (Matt. 20:15). His ways are not our ways or his thoughts our thoughts.

3

JOB'S FIRST TRIAL AND HIS RESPONSE

(Job 1:6–22)

The story of Job's troubles is valuable both because it illustrates God's sovereignty in trials and suffering and because it shows Satan's part in those same trials. The word *trial* in both the Old and New Testaments shows that God and Satan together are involved in our trials, though never as equals. In the Old and New Testaments the word *trial* and the word *temptation* are the same, though differently translated in English. What is a trial on God's part, that is, a testing of our faith and obedience in the fire of suffering, is on Satan's part a temptation. God tested Job, and Satan tempted him, not only in being the agent of Job's losses but as the shadowy figure behind his friends and wife whom he used to tempt Job further.

The relationship between God and Satan in trials and temptation is exquisitely revealed in Job's tale of woe in a way unmatched by other passages of scripture. The lesson is that though Satan plays a part in suffering, God is sovereign even over him and

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controls all things for the good of his own. The presence of both must be remembered, however: God's sovereign presence in our trials is our comfort, but Satan's presence is a reminder that we must be constant in watching and prayer so that we do not fall into temptation or sin as Job did.

The sins to which we are tempted in suffering are many. We sin by questioning God's justice and goodness, by complaining and being discontented, by thinking we deserve better than God sends us, by taking out our frustrations and discontent on others, by attempting to find a reason for our trials beyond what God reveals in his word (as Job did), by using our trials as an excuse to commit deliberate sins, by cutting ourselves off from God and from others in suffering. Satan is there to tempt us to these sins, though the lesson of Job's suffering is that we must watch diligently for his lion-like and devouring presence (1 Pet. 5:8).

God's presence in our trials is revealed in Satan's inability to do anything against Job without God's permission and in God's strictly limiting what Satan was able to do. In the first trial Satan is forbidden to put forth his hand against Job's person, though he is permitted to take everything else away from Job. That he was permitted to act against Job is not a denial of God's sovereignty. The word *permission* describes perfectly what we read in the story of Job, but there is no difference between God permitting Satan to act against Job and God himself acting, and Satan can do nothing without God's permission. Indeed, Satan is entirely in the hand of God for Job's good.

Satan comes "to offer his homage, to receive his commissions, to render his stated account of work done and service performed... in the attitude of a servant of God, and made subservient to the discipline and training of his people."¹ Satan is God's agent in the trials

1 Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*, 41, 43.

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of Job and “in all his blasphemous designs he is, in spite of himself, doing the work of God. In his rebellious efforts to dethrone the Most High, he is actually paying Him submissive homage. In moving heaven and earth to accomplish the perdition of those whom Christ has ransomed, he is actually fitting them for glory.”²

Nevertheless, we ought to tremble when we think of Satan’s power, given by God to be sure, entirely controlled and directed by the Most High, but great indeed. God says to Satan, “Behold, he is in thine hand” (Job 2:6). He is the prince of this world and an enemy to be reckoned with. He was able to do Job much harm both physically and spiritually. God’s sovereignty over Satan does not change that. He is an enemy to be reckoned with. Only by prayer and grace is he to be resisted and overcome.

We may not dismiss Satan’s presence in our lives as of no account. He is able to do us much harm: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet. 5:8–9).

Yet Satan himself is in God’s hand as Job was, with God’s permission in Satan’s hand. This comes out especially in Job 1:12, where Satan invites God to put forth his hand and touch Job’s possessions and family. When God says to Satan, “All that he hath is in thy power” (v. 12), God makes it clear that Satan is merely his instrument. Satan’s own words show that he himself recognized this. He was under the sovereignty of God, the hand of God reaching out to touch all that Job had. Job himself, whether aware or not of Satan’s agency, recognized the fact that it was God who afflicted him and speaks of it often.

2 Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*, 63–64.

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Satan's activity, even when successful, is always under God's direction and control, and we can be sure that our sins, when we fall prey to Satan, though inexcusable, are nevertheless used by our sovereign God for our good. Certainly that was true in the case of Job. Though he fell prey to the roaring lion whom we call Satan, even his sin brought him to a better confession of God's sovereignty and to a humble confession of his sin and repentance for it.

Satan's appearance in heaven is part of the story of his attack on Job. It is difficult to understand that he had access to heaven after falling, but both Job and Revelation 12 indicate that he did. So he appears before God among the unfallen angels (called "sons of God" in Job 1:6) to charge Job with the most mercenary of motives in serving God. And though Job's name comes up in the conversation between God and Satan almost as an afterthought, there can be no doubt that Satan's presence in heaven was the beginning of his evil attack.

Satan lives up to his name in the story of Job, for Satan means *slanderer* or *accuser*. He is Job's slanderer in his charge that Job served God only for what he got out of it—only because God had made him wealthy. That charge is slander because the true service of God cannot possibly be motivated by self-interest. It is always and only the fruit of God's amazing grace.

In Revelation 12:10 Satan is called the "accuser of our brethren...which accused them before our God day and night," and he most certainly appears in that role in Job. The pride with which Satan accuses Job before God leaves one gasping, but it is evidence of the same pride that led to his fall from heaven. So he accused others also, as he did Joshua the high priest in Zechariah 3:1. So he accused all the brethren until Christ came and took away whatever right he had to appear before God with his slanderous accusations.

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Revelation 12:7–9 tells how his slanderous accusations came to an end. With the exaltation of our Savior, there was war in heaven between Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels. What a war between angels and demons is like we can only imagine, but it must be, in light of Jude 9, a war of words. In that war Michael and his host prevailed through the power of the ascended Lord and Satan was cast out. No doubt it was the finished work of Christ that was Satan's downfall. Christ came in the flesh, was crucified, risen, and exalted, and so there is no longer any room for such accusations as Satan brought against Job: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:33–34).

In Job's case Satan was still able to bring charges against one of God's elect, because Christ had not yet come in the flesh. Job had no doubt, however, that Christ was his all-in-all, and he confessed a living Savior in Job 19:25–27 who would deliver him not only from the vicious attacks of the great deceiver but from all his sins, and who would give him life everlasting in the presence of God, that is, in the very place where Satan was then standing.

Was Job aware of Satan's evil intentions and his agency in what happened? There is no evidence that he was any more aware of what Satan was doing than any of us would be. As far as Satan was concerned the purpose of God's dealings with Job was to disprove his lies and to show that obedience and service are all grace, not self-interest. In Job's case God's purpose was different. Job had to learn that it is gross sin to question God's ways with us and to demand an account of them from God. That may well mean Job never knew what happened in heaven, for God did not and would not explain himself to Job or give him a reason for what happened.

JOB'S FIRST TRIAL AND HIS RESPONSE

That does not mean, though, that Job was altogether ignorant of Satan's devices. Job was only a few generations removed from the fall of Adam and Eve and was as knowledgeable of Satan's evil work as we are. He might have heard the story of the fall third or fourth hand—Adam to Lamech to Noah to Shem to Job. Job would have known of Satan and his evil works, though he may well have forgotten to watch for him as we do.

Satan therefore goes out from God's presence and takes everything away from Job, making sure Job receives the news of his ill fortune in the worst possible way. The story shows Satan's great power among men and in the forces of the creation, for both the coming of Job's enemies and the whirlwind that killed Job's children were his work. It is Satan's doing, too, that Job receives the news of his losses as a series of blows. Unable to do no more or less than God willed, Satan has great power indeed!

We cannot imagine being in Job's place and losing everything in one day, including all of his children. As this is written, the nation is largely under quarantine due to the coronavirus. In parts of the world people are rioting and looting, and few find themselves able to cope with the loss of some luxuries and privileges. Sitting in a warm home with plenty to eat and access to a computer such as the one on which these words are being written, we feel deprived and ill at ease. Job bore losses that few others have experienced and showed that there was indeed none like him—that he was perfect and upright, a man who feared God and eschewed evil.

His response to his trials, though amazing, proves not Job's greatness but God's. He confessed that he had nothing that was really his own when he said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither," and confessed in it his own lack of merit (Job 1:21). He ascribed all to God, who gave and

JOB: GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN SUFFERING

took away according to his own good pleasure and will, and who is always right and good in what he does. Job worshiped God, a testimony to God's greatness and grace!

Job was not a stoic. Verse 20 tells us that he tore his robe and shaved his head, both signs of unspeakable grief, for who would not grieve the loss at once of ten dear children. Yet even in his grief, Job submitted to God and acknowledged the righteousness and the goodness of God, for God who took all away had also given, though only for a time.

Such must be the confession of every child of God in his trials. Not only must he confess that all that he has and is belongs to God who has the sovereign right to do as he pleases with his own, but also that his enjoyment of what God does give, even if it be for a little while, is a privilege and reason for thanks.

If God gives me good things and then impoverishes me, I may not complain. I must confess that it was all his anyway. If God gives me health and then takes it away, I may not be discontent but must acknowledge that my very existence is a gift from him. If God gives me a child and then takes that child away, I must not be angry with him but confess that it was a privilege to have that child for a short time and be thankful for the short time that child was in my arms and my home. What Job did in his trials I must do in mine.

The last verse of the chapter tells us that Job did not sin in his response to his trials and that he did not charge God foolishly. To charge God is to accuse him of injustice and unrighteousness in his dealing with us. That can be done in words when we complain and question, but is more often done by despondency, by unhappiness and discontent. These, though they are not openly directed against God, nevertheless amount to a charge of injustice. Job's response is amazing in light of what happened to him and to

JOB'S FIRST TRIAL AND HIS RESPONSE

his family, and a great example to us who are inclined to grumble at the slightest inconvenience.

Such a response is rooted in the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Nothing else can make me thankful in prosperity and patient in adversity but the blessed knowledge that I am not my own but have been given, in eternal love, by the shedding of blood and the sovereign work of the Spirit to someone else.