

INTRODUCTION TO JOB

(from the Life Application Bible)

TREES snap like toothpicks or fly upward, wrenched from the earth. Whole rooftops sail, cars tumble like toys, walls collapse, and a mountain of water jumps the shore and engulfs the land. A hurricane cuts and tears, and only solid foundations survive her unbridled fury. But those foundations can be used for rebuilding after the storm.

For any building, the foundation is critical. It must be deep enough and solid enough to withstand the weight of the building and other stresses. Lives are like buildings, and the quality of their foundation will determine the quality of the whole. Too often inferior materials are used, and when tests come, lives crumble.

Job was tested. With a life filled with prestige, possessions, and people, he was suddenly assaulted on every side, devastated, stripped down to his foundation. But his life was built on God, and he endured.

Job, the book, tells the story of Job, the man of God. It is a gripping drama of riches-to-rags-to-riches, a theological treatise about suffering and divine sovereignty, and a picture of faith that endures. As you read Job, analyze your life and check your foundation. And may you be able to say that when all is gone but God, he is enough.

Job was a prosperous farmer living in the land of Uz. He had thousands of sheep, camels, and other livestock, a large family, and many servants. Suddenly Satan, the accuser, came before God claiming that Job was trusting God only because he was wealthy and everything was going well for him. And so the testing of Job's faith began.

Satan was allowed to destroy Job's children, servants, livestock, herdsmen, and home; but Job continued to trust in God. Next Satan attacked Job physically, covering him with painful sores. Job's wife told him to curse God and die (Job 2:9), but Job

suffered in silence.

Three of Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, came to visit him. At first they silently grieved with Job. But when they began to talk about the reasons for Job's tragedies, they told him that sin had caused his suffering. They told him to confess his sins and turn back to God. But Job maintained his innocence.

Unable to convince Job of his sin, the three men fell silent (Job 32:1). At this point, another voice -- the young Elihu -- entered the debate. Although his argument also failed to convince Job, it prepared the way for God to speak.

Finally, God spoke out of a mighty storm. Confronted with the great power and majesty of God, Job fell in humble reverence before God - - speechless. God rebuked Job's friends, and the drama ended with Job restored to happiness and wealth.

It is easy to think that we have all the answers. In reality, only God knows exactly why things happen as they do, and we must submit to him as our Sovereign. As you read this book, emulate Job and decide to trust God no matter what happens.

INSIGHT — JOB:

God Speaks to Job

(from The New Student Bible)

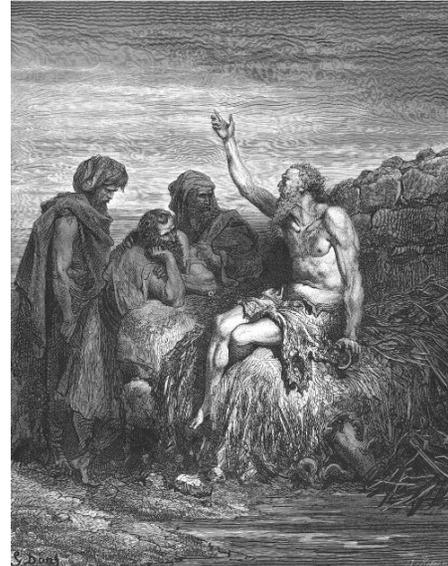
At last, Job gets what he demanded

"Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" Job 40:2

In the span of a few days Job experienced more tragedy than most people encounter in a lifetime. He scratched himself with shards of pottery and mourned the day he was born. He could not even suffer with dignity; he had to endure his wife's taunts and his friends' ramblings. Nothing anyone said helped him.

Through it all, Job steadfastly refused to turn his back on God. He had only one request. He wanted to hear from God in person. He wanted an explanation straight from the Source.

At last Job got his wish. God answered Job



with a speech often quoted for its majesty and beauty. In a touch of irony, God made his entrance just as Elihu was explaining why Job could not expect a direct answer from him.

Not the Expected Message

Job had saved up a long list of questions, but it was God who asked the questions, not Job. "Brace yourself like a man," he began. "I will question you, and you shall answer me."

Author Frederick Buechner sums up what follows: "God doesn't explain. He explodes. He asks Job who he thinks he is anyway. He says that to try to explain the kind of things Job wants explained would be like trying to explain Einstein to a little-neck clam." God did not need Job's or anyone else's advice on how to run the world.

God's reply resembled a nature lesson more than an explanation of the problem of suffering. He pointed out, one by one, all the creations that gave him greatest pride. In short, God asked Job, "Do you want to try running the universe for a while? Go ahead, try designing an ostrich, or a mountain goat, or even a snowflake."

Astonishingly, the question of suffering itself did not even come up. Yet somehow Job seemed satisfied—humiliated, actually. "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand," he confessed, "things too wonderful for me to know" (Job 42:3).

Job Passes the Test

Job had endured his terrible sufferings in the dark. When he needed God most, God had stayed silent. And that was exactly the point of the contest begun at the beginning of the book, back in Job 1. Satan had promised God that Job would "surely curse you to your face." He lost the challenge. Despite everything that happened, Job did not curse God. He clung to his belief in a just God, even when everything in his experience seemed to contradict it.

God had some words of correction for Job. No one, not Job and especially not his friends, had the evidence needed to make judgments about how he runs the world. But mainly, God had praise for Job. He called him "my servant," and, in an ironic twist, told the three friends to go to Job and ask for his mercy (Job 42:7-8). Much later, in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek. 14:14), God included Job in a list of the finest human examples of righteousness.

The book of Job ends on a note of surprise. Job's friends, who had spouted all the right pieties and clichés, ask for forgiveness. Job, who had raged and cried out, is given twice as much as he ever had before. "And so he died, old and full of years" (Job 42:17).

Life Questions: In Job's place, what kind of answer would you have wanted from God? Does God's reply to Job surprise you?

INSIGHT—JOB: What Job Teaches about Suffering (from The New Student Bible)

“But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction.” Job 36:15

“Why me?” Almost everyone asks this question when terrible suffering strikes. An automobile accident, a diagnosis of cancer, a long-term disease like arthritis—each of these raises intense questions about why God allows pain.

Over the centuries, suffering Christians have gained help and comfort from studying the book of Job. The book gives no compact theory of why good people suffer. Nevertheless, the following insights into the problem of suffering do come out of the book of Job.

PRINCIPLES FROM JOB

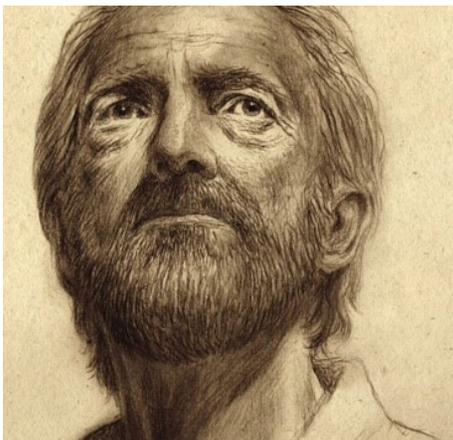
1. Some suffering is caused by Satan.

Job 1 and 2 make the important distinction that God did not cause Job’s problems. He allowed them, but Satan actually caused the pain.

2. God is all-powerful and good.

Nowhere does the book of Job suggest that God lacks power or goodness. Some people say that God is weak and powerless to prevent human suffering. Others, called deists, assume he runs the world at a distance, without personal involvement. But in Job, God’s power is never questioned; only his fairness. And in his final summation speech, God used splendid illustrations from nature to prove his power.

3. Suffering doesn’t always come as a result of sin. The Bible supports the general principle that “a man reaps what



he sows,” even in this life (Galatians 6:7; see Psalms 1:3; 37:25). But other people have no right to apply that general principle to a particular person. Job’s friends tried with all their persuasive power. However, when God rendered the final verdict, he said simply, “You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (Job 42:7). The Old Testament includes other examples of people who suffered through no fault of their own, such as Abel (Genesis 4) and Uriah (2 Samuel 11). And Jesus spoke out against the notion that suffering implies sin (see John 9:1-5 and Luke 13:1-5).

4. God will reward and punish fairly in a final judgment after death. Job’s friends, along with most Old Testament folk, did not have a clearly formed belief in an afterlife. Therefore, they expected that God’s fairness—his approval or disapproval of people—had to be shown in this life.

Other parts of the Bible teach that God will reward and punish fairly after death.

5. God does not condemn doubt and despair. God did not condemn Job’s anguished responses, only his ignorance. Job did not take his pain meekly; he cried

out in anguish to God. His strong remarks scandalized his friends (see, for example, Job 15:1-16), but not God. Ironically, despite his bitter speeches, Job earned God’s praise, while his pious friends were soundly rebuked.

6. No one person has all the facts about suffering. Neither Job nor his friends had enough facts. Job concluded God was unfair, treating him like an enemy. His friends maintained that God opposed Job because of his sin. All of them later learned they had been viewing the situation from a very limited perspective, blind to the real struggle being waged in heaven.

7. God is never totally silent. Elihu made that point convincingly, reminding Job of dreams, visions, past blessings, even the daily works of God in nature (Job 33). God also appealed to nature as giving evidence of his wisdom and power. Although he may seem silent, some evidence of him can be found. One contemporary author expressed that truth this way, “Remember in the darkness what you have learned in the light.”

8. Well-intentioned advice can sometimes do more harm than good. Job’s friends were classic examples of people who let their pride and sense of being right interfere with their compassion. They repeated pious phrases and argued theology with Job. His response: “If only you would be altogether silent! For you, that would be wisdom” (Job 13:5).

9. God asks for faith. God refocused the central issue from the cause of Job’s suffering to his response. Mysteriously, God never gave an explanation for the problem of suffering. He did not even inform Job of the reason behind it: the

contest recorded in Job 1 and 2. He concentrated instead on Job’s response. The real issue at stake was Job’s faith—whether he would continue to trust God even when everything went wrong.

10. Suffering can be used for a higher good. In Job’s case, God used a time of very great pain to win an important, even cosmic, victory over Satan. Looking backward, but only looking backward, we can see the “advantage” Job gained by continuing to trust God. Job is often cited as an Old Testament picture of Jesus Christ, who lived a perfectly innocent life but endured great pain and death. The terrible event of Christ’s death was also transformed into a great victory.

Thousands of years later, Job’s questions have not gone away. People who suffer still find themselves borrowing Job’s own words as they cry out against God’s seeming lack of concern. But Job affirms that God is not deaf to our cries and is in control of this world no matter how it looks. God did not answer all Job’s questions, but his very appearance caused Job’s doubts to melt away. Job learned that God cared about him and that God rules the world. It was enough.

Life Questions: Do these principles from Job match up with what you have heard about suffering from other Christians?