

Blessed Be The Name Of The Lord

July 22, 2018 - Job 1

Job's Character and Wealth

1 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. (KEY central theme to the book ... things do NOT happen to him as punishment for some sin he committed ... you are going to be asked to think that throughout most the book, and no matter how compelling the argument his friends make you must always go back to the very first verse that tells us this is NOT AT ALL why all these horrible things happen to him.) 2 There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. 3 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. 4 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. 5 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[a] God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Satan Allowed to Test Job

6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan[b] also came among them. 7 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." 8 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?" (KEY – AGAIN God claimed Job as His servant ... if God is making this claim of Job as such then his friends who suggest otherwise later in the book must be discounted ... what happens is CLEARLY NOT punishment as we see with Israel and breaking the Mosaic Covenant ... going to be a big theme throughout his interaction with his friends.) 9 Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 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. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." 12 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.

Satan Takes Job's Property and Children

13 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 14 and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants[c] with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." 16 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." 17 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." 18 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, 19 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."

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. 21 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."

22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

Job 1:1-5

The function of these verses is to present Job as a uniquely righteous and blessed human being. According to the conventional view presented in the book of Proverbs, such righteousness and blessedness also mark Job as exceptionally wise. Wisdom in the ways of the world produces prosperity; wisdom in the ways of God evokes God's blessing. This may be implied in the judgment that Job was "the greatest of all the people of the east," who, according to 1 Kings 4:30, were renowned for their wisdom.

Questions abound about these five verses. Are we to overhear the Hebrew word *enemy* or *adversary* in Job's name, which is made up of the same consonants (see Job 13:24)? Is the "land of Uz" to be identified with ancient Edom (see Lam. 4:21)? Does Ezekiel 14:14, 20 suggest that we are to think of Job as a figure who, like Noah, lived in the most ancient imaginable past (compare Job 1:1 with Gen. 6:9)? Is there special significance in the fact that Job possessed herds of sheep, camels, and asses (usually associated with nomadic and seminomadic lifestyles) as well as oxen (usually associated with settled farm life)?

What was the occasion of the regular feasts thrown by each of Job's sons in turn, to which the brothers and sisters were all invited? What was the religious basis for Job's

rituals of purification and burnt offerings, apparently designed to ward off the evil consequences of any affront to God that may have occurred during the festivities?

We simply have no definitive answers for questions of this kind, or for many other questions of language and interpretation that crop up regularly in the study of the book of Job. We may take note of them from time to time, but the goal of this book is to concentrate on what is most clearly understandable in Job, rather than on unresolved scholarly questions.

On any reading of Job 1:1–5, we are invited to imagine an absolutely extraordinary human being, one who lives a flawless life before God; one who enjoys a completely blessed existence (the recurring numbers seven and three in verses 2 and 3 are almost surely to signal completeness, as they often do elsewhere in the Bible); and one whose concern for a right relation to God extends beyond his own to embrace that of his family as well. Yet we cannot escape the note of tension that intrudes in verse 5. Are we being warned that none of this blessing and prosperity is to be taken for granted, that all of it ultimately hinges on the favor of God?

Job 1:6–12

If it is difficult to imagine a human being as righteous, wise, and wealthy as Job, what comes next stretches human imagination to the breaking point. Now we are invited to imagine what it might be like to be present in the very council chamber of God, to overhear conversations between God and one of the special members of God’s royal assembly, to hear decisions being taken that have enormous consequences for people on earth.

Human language is clearly inadequate to describe the decision-making process of God. Yet the Bible regularly uses very human, even crude language to point to the unimaginable reality of God. It is an article of faith, in my theological tradition, to believe that God is able to use our wholly inadequate human language to bear faithful witness to God’s own truth. As John Calvin once suggested, God talks “baby talk” to us in scripture, since it is the only talk we can possibly understand. The true indicator that we have heard and understood rightly is to be found not in theological statements but in faithful praise and faithful service to God.

The human language in which Job 1:6–12 is cast is not difficult to trace. People in the ancient Near East had a readily available human model for an awesome decision-making process, one that could have serious consequences for ordinary people living far away from the center of power. It was the royal court of an imperial despot who exercised absolute power over the realm. While few people ever saw the imperial court in action, there were those who could describe its grandeur and its power: the throne, the emperor, the ranks of officials and counselors who were assembled at the emperor’s command. Agents of the emperor might offer advice, make reports on the state of the realm, suggest alternative

plans, perhaps even register points of disagreement (*very* carefully). But the final decision belonged to the sovereign, and once made, it was put into action with the awesome power at the empire's disposal.

As a democrat, I find any such political system reprehensible. The question for me, then, as I read Job 1:6–12, is whether I can accept the ancient author's invitation to see through this terribly flawed human imagery to the unimaginable wonder of God's own decision making. (Note how 1 Kings 22:19–23 and Isaiah 6 place a very similar demand on the imagination. It has been suggested, rightly I think, that Isaiah 40:1–11, Jeremiah 23:18, Zechariah 3, and perhaps even Genesis 1:26, among other biblical texts, owe at least something to this vision of the divine council chamber.)

Two dangers confront us in this extreme exercise of the imagination. One is that we will take this scene as a direct revelation of who God is and how God acts toward human beings. If we do this, then we must conclude that God is like an ancient Near Eastern tyrant inflated to cosmic proportions. On biblical grounds, I am forced to reject any such notion of God out of hand.

The other danger, of course, is that we will dismiss Job 1:6–12 as the outmoded relic of an ancient culture, as if it had nothing to do with the God who confronts us in the pages of the Bible. Yet we have already noted that biblical faith will not let us dismiss Job's God so cheaply.

In what follows I attempt to listen to Job 1:6–12 in a third way, without taking it literally but also without patronizing it as beneath our theological dignity.

On the analogy of an ancient imperial court, the "sons of God" in verse 6 (translated "heavenly beings" in the nrsv) correspond generally to the kinds of people entitled by rank or quality to stand in attendance on the emperor. The word *God* in this phrase is *Elohim*, which is frequently used in the Bible as a designation for the God of Israel. The Bible also occasionally uses *Elohim* in the plural sense, referring to beings that are somehow quite different from God but also distinct from ordinary human beings (see Gen. 6:1–4; Psalms 8:5; 82:1, 6). The term *sons of* in the Bible does not always refer to lineal descendants. It may also refer to the type or category to which these "sons" belong. "The sons [or 'children'] of Israel," when it refers to the people as a whole, is a familiar biblical example of this usage. The Hebrew text of Job 1:3 offers a parallel example: The phrase "people of the east" is literally "sons of the East," that is, "Easterners," those who belong to this category. The attendants of God in the divine council, then, are best understood as beings of the "*Elohim* category"—neither equal to God nor offspring of God and yet of a different order from human beings.

Texts such as Psalm 89:1–7, Deuteronomy 32:8 (in the earliest Greek translation), Isaiah 6:2–7, and Psalm 82 suggest that a much more vivid lore than the Bible sets forth once

existed about these *Elohim* types. The wonder is that the resolute monotheism of those who preserved the ancient Hebrew texts did not lead them to eradicate all references to “heavenly beings” at God’s side, even in the extravagant language of praise. At best, Judaism and Christianity came to understand such heavenly beings as “angels,” “ministering spirits” whose sole dignity it is to reflect God’s glory and stand in God’s service. It may be appropriate that neither Judaism nor Christianity has ever succeeded in working out a satisfactory “doctrine” of angels. This would require us to pay inordinate attention to the angels in their own right (their origins, their qualities, their rank, their functions). To do so would do no honor to the angels, since their vocation is to glorify and serve God alone.

For people of faith, however, the most disturbing aspect of this heavenly council scene in Job is the presence of Satan and God’s interaction with him. Is Satan the evil one, the supernatural embodiment of all anti-godly power, God’s ultimate enemy? Is God somehow in league with Satan as they agree to subject Job to hideous and wholly undeserved suffering? If so, who is the greater villain, God or Satan?

I can still remember the shock of this question when I first read Job as a committed member of the Christian church. I can also remember the joyous discovery, at the beginning of my formal Hebrew studies, that Job’s Satan is by no means to be understood as that archenemy of God identified in the New Testament as “Satan,” “the devil,” “the evil one,” “the father of lies,” “that old dragon,” and so forth. For one thing, the Hebrew text of Job places a definite article (*ha-*) before the word *satan* (Hebrew, *hassatan*), indicating that Satan is not a proper name of a known individual. Rather, *hassatan* describes a function or an office. *Satan* appears in the Hebrew Bible as both a verb and a noun, and this allows us to determine with some precision what kind of function or office Job’s *hassatan* might have in God’s heavenly court. The range of meanings associated with the word *satan* in Hebrew includes “accusing,” “withstanding,” “playing the adversary,” “denouncing.”

The analogy of an ancient imperial court strongly suggests what kind of special office *hassatan* may have had among the *Elohim* types (nrsv “heavenly beings”) who attend on God when the divine council is in session. Every emperor in the ancient world required agents who moved throughout the empire looking for signs of treason or malfeasance that required the emperor’s attention. The bizarre vision related in Zechariah 6:1–7 (see also 4:2, 10b) suggests something like this kind of activity.

If *hassatan* in the prologue of Job is understood to be this kind of functionary, it makes sense that he should be present among the heavenly beings on council day. God’s initial question to *hassatan* is entirely appropriate to the special function of this official: “Where have you come from [that is, on your journeys in my behalf]?” *Hassatan*’s reply indicates the diligence and the completeness of his investigation: “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.”

I find it both surprising and significant, however, that God does not wait to hear what the royal investigator/accuser has to say. Instead, God asks whether *hassatan* has had occasion to investigate God's "servant Job" (see the Introduction, pp. 9–11). Before the accuser can answer, God gives Job an astonishing accolade: "There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil."

The Bible has few heroes without blemish, and accolades such as those paid to Noah (Gen. 6:9), Moses (Num. 12:6–8; Deut. 34:10–12), and the Servant of Isaiah 42:1 are extremely rare. But perhaps nowhere in scripture do we find a comprehensive endorsement of human life that matches what God here says of Job. The language may strike us as somewhat antiquated, but the inference is that nothing separates Job from the quality of human life God desires for us. As we shall see, it may be essential for our understanding of the entire book of Job not to forget or underestimate this unique accolade as God's first (and final) estimate of Job's character.

In that light, God's judgment about Job can be heard as a direct challenge to *hassatan*. With all his inquisitorial skills, has the professional accuser found anything in Job's life to refute God's judgment of the man?

Apparently *hassatan* has discovered no such evidence, but *hassatan* is a clever and conscientious prosecutor. There is one potential flaw in Job's admittedly spectacular faithfulness and integrity, one that has never been put to the test: the question of Job's motive for living the life approved by God.

We have already learned from Job 1:1–5 that Job's righteous life has been rewarded thus far with every conceivable blessing from God. When *hassatan* wonders out loud, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" all the extravagant things we have heard about Job (including God's own accolade) are suddenly tarnished with doubt. Maybe Job's deepest motive is no nobler than raw self-interest. Maybe he pretends at faithfulness and integrity only because he believes God's richest blessings are reserved only for those who act out this pious charade.

"Have you not put a [protective] fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side?" asks *hassatan*. "You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land." Are God's motives being questioned here, as well as Job's? Has God blessed Job so richly in order to win such flawless devotion from a human being? It's worth a thought.

As we have said, *hassatan* is not Satan. Neither is the serpent in Genesis 3. (See verse 1; the serpent is only the most "crafty" among the animals God created.) Yet there is surely something "satanic" in the questions and assertions of each figure. Both call into question the intactness of a relationship between God and people that had appeared serene until now. The breaking of relationship, the shattering of trust between people and people,

between people and God, not from inside but from outside these relationships, by a “third party”—may this not rightly be called “satanic”?

A strange twist on this theme occurs in Zechariah 3:1–5, where *hassatan* accuses Joshua, the high priest, who has returned from exile. Verses 2–5 suggest the content of this accusation: Joshua has been rendered “unclean,” and therefore unfit to serve as high priest, because of the defilement of exile in Babylon. The angel of the Lord invokes the Lord’s rebuke against *hassatan*, but apparently not because the accusation isn’t true. What is amiss in *hassatan’s* accusation is that it reckons without God’s intention to cleanse and restore Joshua, as a “brand plucked from the fire.” The intactness of God’s intended relationship with Joshua, beyond all past breaches of it, is therefore called into question in a “satanic” way by the otherwise true “accusation” of *hassatan*. (Does Peter’s challenge to Jesus in Matthew 16:22, presumably made in the “best interests” of Jesus, share this satanic characteristic by calling into question the covenanted relationship between Jesus and God?)

In Job 1:11, *hassatan* proposes a means of testing Job’s motives for maintaining his side of this outwardly flawless relationship with God: “But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” Is this an experiment God can undertake in a “scientific” (that is, objective, neutral, unbiased) way, as a matter of curiosity? God’s extravagant affirmation of Job in Job 1:8 suggests otherwise. Whatever is now to befall Job will happen to a human being in whom God delights, one whose life reflects God’s own character as does no one else on earth. Are we to assume that it will cost God nothing to look on while Job is plunged into the depths of human wretchedness?

The only clue to God’s possible reluctance about the proposed test comes in God’s response to *hassatan* in verse 12: “Very well, all that he has is in *your* power; only do not stretch out *your* hand against him!” God here rejects *hassatan’s* proposal that God’s power should be used directly against Job. This test was proposed by *hassatan*, not God. It is to be by the hand of *hassatan*, not by God’s hand, that Job’s suffering is to be inflicted. God’s final word sets a protective limit beyond which *hassatan’s* assault on Job may not go.

This interchange with *hassatan* by no means exempts God from responsibility for what is about to happen to Job. By analogy with an ancient imperial court, *hassatan* is at most an emissary of God. Without any dignity or power in his own right, *hassatan* can act only within the framework of God’s absolute authority. Yet the narrator of Job 1:6–12 has planted a fascinating suggestion in the reader’s mind. Even though God is ultimately responsible for what is about to happen, Job’s suffering will not reflect God’s estimate of Job’s worth (v. 8); nor will it reflect the kind of existence God desires for such a person (suggested in vv. 1–5?). If there is anything “right” about this “alien” test, it is God’s astonishing confidence in a fragile human being, confidence that not even the worst imaginable and least comprehensible suffering can alter Job’s inmost character. True, God is willing to risk everything Job has, without Job’s knowledge or consent, to demonstrate

that this confidence is well founded. But the narrator also allows us to ponder what *God* may be risking in this “alien” test of God’s relationship with Job, at what exquisite cost to God this test takes place. In any case, it is clear that God’s reputation, as well as Job’s, hinges on the outcome. If Job should buckle under pressure, if Job should “curse God to God’s face” as *hassatan* predicts he will, then both Job and God will have been proven false. What ancient emperor (to return to the analogy of the vision) would have staked his imperial reputation, in so utterly vulnerable a way, on the unaided performance of one of his subjects under the most extreme duress?

The question posed by Job 1:1–12, then, is not the one that usually comes to mind when people talk about Job like suffering: namely, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” The question is rather: “Can there be a human being of such incorruptible integrity toward God and people that not even the worst imaginable experiences of life are capable of shattering it?” *Hassatan* is confident that, even for the best of us (and Job is surely presented as “the best” in Job 1:1–8), the ultimate motivation is “What’s in it for me?” God’s confidence is that Job’s heart is not for sale at any price.

Agonized questions about why innocent people suffer are surely raised by Job in the course of the book. But I will keep coming back to this less familiar question of whether Job’s integrity is corruptible as we read all the speeches of Job and his friends, as well as the chilling speeches of God. This may open the way to some fresh insights into the always unfinished and tentative interpretation of this mighty work.

Job’s First Test and Its Outcome

Job 1:13–22

Job 1:13–19

It is unnecessary to pause long over the details of Job 1:13–19. In four swift episodes we see what happens as a result of God’s concession to *hassatan* in verse 12: “All that he has is in your power.” Verse 13 allows us to wonder whether Job’s worst fears for his children may have come true (see v. 5)—an ungodly prelude to the trip-hammer blows that destroy in one day all the blessings enumerated in verses 1–3. In any event, the narrator’s intention is clear: If verses 1–3 confront us with an extreme caricature of human blessedness, verses 13–19 confront us with an extreme caricature of human loss. All the details conspire to set up the dramatic question posed by the conversation between God and *hassatan*: If such unparalleled loss befell a person of such unparalleled blessedness, what would become of his renowned faithfulness and integrity?

1:20–22

The answer to the question posed above comes in verses 20–22, which may strike us as a third extreme caricature: unswerving affirmation of God, out of the depths, without asking, “What’s in it for me?” Job never had any claim on God’s blessings (“Naked I came from my mother’s womb”), nor was it ever possible that he should retain them (“and naked shall I return there,” that is, to “mother earth” or the grave). In that light, neither God’s “giving” nor God’s “taking away” can alter Job’s trusting affirmation of God. Verse 22 comes as an explicit refutation of *hassatan’s* confident prediction in verse 11.¹

‘The greatest of all the people of the east’

(Job 1:1–5)

The words of our title (1:3) state the point which the author wants to emphasize. They come at the end of a multifaceted description of Job and apply to everything contained in it. Readers and students of the book often tend to connect them to the details about his numerous family and vast possessions rather than to his piety, but, in reality, these words are a summary of all that precedes them.

It is true that ‘great’ can sometimes carry the meaning of ‘rich’ or ‘powerful’, and Job was both. But his greatness did not exclude his piety. Indeed, it was his piety that was reflected in his progeny and prosperity—the numbers of which are symbolic of completeness—and that constituted the prelude to all that follows. His piety contributed to his prestige no less than did his possessions.

1:1. 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.

What the opening verse presents is, first, his place of origin and then his piety. It is anticipatory of the form of address in New Testament epistles, where people are identified in terms of where they happen to live, but also of their relationship to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Clearly, the author thinks it noteworthy that there was a man in Uz who could be described in the way that Job was. We shall use these two categories of place and character to consider the section of text that we have isolated.

¹ Wharton, J. A. (1999). *Job*. (P. D. Miller & D. L. Bartlett, Eds.) (pp. 12–20). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Job lived in the land of Uz

Uz was not in the promised land but to the east of it, across the Jordan, whether to the north or south of it. Uz was therefore outside the confines of much of the saving revelation given to Abraham, but not destitute of what had been made known by God prior to that, namely what is recorded in Genesis 1–11.

Working on the basis that place names were derived from the names of people, ‘Uz’ is to be connected either with Aram, a son of Shem (Gen. 10:23), or with Nahor (Gen. 22:21), Abraham’s brother. The covenant line did not include Aram but Arpachshad, his brother (Gen. 10:22, 24). Nahor’s son, Uz, had a brother named Buz (Gen. 22:21) and their people settled later in Edom (Gen. 36:1, Jer. 25:20–23; Lam. 4:21).

Given the state of our knowledge of the times referred to, it is hazardous to make firm identifications. Edom is a likely locale given the mention of the Sabeans. The Chaldeans, however, were in the Fertile Crescent to the north and east of that region. Whichever option is taken, we can be sure that Job did not belong to the covenant line from Shem to Abraham and that he shared in the promised blessing in the same sort of way as did Melchizedek.

Blameless, upright, fearing God and turning from evil

This is a summary statement of Job’s piety. It is made up of two couplets. The first describes him from an outward aspect; the other describes his inward motivation.

First, and to an observer, he was ‘**blameless and upright**’. This refers to the outward manifestation of his piety. ‘**Blameless**’ is used to describe what is physically perfect—for example, animals that were acceptable for sacrifice (see Num. 19:2). But it is also used of human beings (see Josh. 24:14) and then it refers to sincere and consistent compliance with God’s will. It is this that is the point of contention in the subsequent narrative at the level of the ‘heavenly’ debate between Satan and God which is mirrored, or played out, on the earthly plane between Job and the Friends (see 8:20; 9:2–3; 12:4; 36:4; 37:16).

The second adjective is clearly associated with being ‘straight’, or ‘righteous’, in accord with law or divine command (1 Kings 14:8). Job lived in the light which he had been given, as an intelligent, moral being who knew something about sin and mercy and justice, as we shall see. It could have been said of him that ‘he walked with God’, as it was of Enoch and Noah (see Gen. 5:21–24; 6:9). There was a roundedness and a straightness about his character and conduct. There were no glaring sins in his life of either omission or commission.

His inner life is described in the next couplet, which tells us that he ‘**feared God**’ and ‘**turned away from evil**’. These complementary aspects sum up the very essence of

wisdom (see 28:28). Aware of the power, wisdom and justice of God displayed in creation and providence, but also of his kindness and mercy, Job was conscious of his own moral dignity and accountability as God's creature. Loving the one true and living God whom he knew, he forsook what he knew to be evil in God's sight. These themes are all present in his speeches.

This summary of his piety is endorsed personally by God (1:8) and repeated later by him (2:3; cf. 2:9). We shall put some flesh on those bones, so to speak, by borrowing statements from chapters 23, 29 and 31–33. It is useful to do this in order to gain an appreciation of Job's significance in God's purpose and kingdom in his own time and place. We shall list these in relation to Job in private, in his family and in society.

1. Job in private

In 23:12 Job indicates how much he valued God's words. For him what came out of God's mouth was more important than what went into his own. The fact that man does 'not live by bread alone' was something he well understood.

In 29:3–5 he describes how he enjoyed God's presence. God communed with him and protected him. Darkness was no terror or perplexity to him. The light and life God gave him resulted in his being at his best. He flourished in every way, as was evidenced by the fact that his flocks and olives produced abundantly.

In 31:33 he indicates that he had not hidden from God like Adam, but confessed every sin he was aware of. He had known what it was to have communion with God broken and also to have it restored. Job knew what divine mercy was all about.

2. Job in his family

In 1:4–5 and 1:20–21 we have descriptions of Job as a father. As is obvious, two very different situations are mentioned in these two passages.

1:4–5. 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. 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.

The first passage refers to the fact that, while Job was no killjoy, he was concerned about the 'killing' effects of sin, and its subtlety. In particular, the focus of his concern is interesting in the light of what follows. He was afraid that his children might have done something similar to what Satan would attempt to get him to do, namely 'curse God'. There was, however, this difference: Job was aware that his children might have done so **'in their**

hearts'—that is, in their minds; Satan was intent on making Job do it 'to [God's] face' (1:11; 2:5).

But what exactly is in view here? The Hebrew word that is here translated '**cursed**' normally means 'to bless', but that meaning is obviously out of place because Satan would not try to get Job to bless God openly and directly. It has therefore been suggested that the verb 'bless', rather than 'curse', was written in the original text because in the sentence it immediately preceded the word for 'God'!

But there is another way of understanding the use of the verb 'bless'. It also means to 'greet' or, alternatively to 'bid farewell' to someone, in much the same way as our 'Goodbye' is a contraction of 'God be with you'. **So I would suggest that 'bless' in this verse here in Job should be understood as the equivalent of 'to take one's leave of'—that is, 'to renounce'.**

Job was therefore concerned that, in the midst of their birthday celebrations, his children might have set God aside in order that they might enjoy themselves. The very possibility that such thoughtlessness might have occurred was serious enough for him. He watched for their souls like a good father and summoned them to reflection and repentance before God like a good priest, directing them to the need for cleansing and pardon via sacrifice. He did this time and time again. Furthermore, when they died he reacted in a spirit that indicated intense grief but also immense appreciation for God's goodness in ever having granted them to him (1:20–21).

But Job was of course a husband before he was ever a father, and a glimpse into his relationship with his wife is provided in the text (2:9–10). His wife urges him (in effect) to do Satan's bidding. Job's reply to her is often construed as if he were accusing her of being 'a foolish woman'—a serious accusation. In my view, that is not the case. He says that she has spoken '**as**' a foolish woman would, implying that her words were not revealing her true self. He follows that statement by stretching out a helping hand to bring her to a better mind and to bind her to him again—note the use of the first person plural ('**Shall we receive good from God ...?**')—and to help her to receive calamity at God's hand, just as they had together received of his bounty. He is here holding fast to her (Gen. 2:24) and maintaining his marriage covenant (see 31:1).

3. Job in society

Chapters 29 and 31 are relevant in this connection, and they depict Job as involved in public affairs but not in sinful practices.

In 29:7–25 his status as a judge is referred to and the respect which was accorded to him by all classes of society. This was as a result of the way in which he ascertained the true facts of a case brought before him, was no respecter of persons, defended the vulnerable and opposed the unscrupulous. Righteousness was his habit because it was his heart.

In 31:1–12 he describes how intent he was on banishing impurity even from his thoughts and deceit and covetousness from his ways. (It is as if he had not only read the Decalogue aright, but also the Sermon on the Mount!)

In 31:13–23, 29–32 he describes how he has dealt with his servants, with the poor, with his enemies and with strangers. Here is one who ‘loved his neighbour as himself’. In addition, he indicates that it was his awareness that they all had one Creator and one Judge that animated his words and deeds. He is aware of the teaching of Genesis 1:26–28 and confirms in advance what Paul says about Gentiles and the law in Romans 2:14–16.

In 31:24–27 he reacts against the idolatry of his day, refusing to trust in ‘uncertain riches’ (see 1 Tim. 6:6–10), or attribute their provision or continuance to false gods.

This is the picture presented to us of that **‘man in the land of Uz whose name was Job’**. His piety is rounded and straight—in the eyes of God, and not just of his contemporaries. This means that those afflictions which are described in the first two chapters of the book are not occasioned by sin and are not disciplinary or chastening in character and purpose. What is said about them later in the book is another matter.

But what does his name mean? The name **‘Job’** can be connected with the word that means ‘an enemy’. There is a play on this meaning (see 13:24; 33:10) and in those passages the idea is that God treats Job as his enemy. (For God read Satan!) But whose enemy was Job, or whose could he have been? To judge from his character and conduct, he was neither the enemy of God nor of man! But he was the enemy of the one who was the enemy of both, and so the enemy of God and man cannot dismiss him.

Job was included in the ‘seed of the woman’ which would be opposed by ‘the seed of the serpent’, and in his case not only the serpent’s seed but ‘the Satan’ himself. Here in Job the saving purpose and promise of God are being wonderfully manifested relatively soon after the promise had been announced, and this manifestation is taking place in the land of Uz!

Behind the scenes

(Job 1:6–12)

So far we have seen an example of a man who had served God faithfully in a fallen world and who was richly blessed by him. His piety provoked two very different reactions in the higher realm of God’s creation, and that is what these verses make clear. **Two matters must be noted before we consider the interaction between Satan and the Lord: the setting and the Sovereign.**

The setting

1:6. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.

The action in these verses is not to be thought of as taking place ‘in heaven’, and so there is no need to wonder how Satan could appear there. What is depicted is a royal court, a feature of other ancient Near-Eastern cultures and religions. Shorn of all its polytheistic associations, it is here used to depict a supernatural reality, namely God’s sovereign administration and the execution of his purposes (see 1 Kings 22:19; Ps. 89:5–7). The ‘**sons of God**’ (1:6; 2:1; 38:7) who appear there are angelic beings. Elsewhere they are described as ‘the holy ones’ (5:1; 15:15) or the ‘mighty ones’ (Ps. 29:1, NKJV, NIV). **‘Presenting oneself’ is a way of describing the appearance of a servant before a master (see Zech. 6:5), and so they stand and wait to receive commands, or report on tasks performed. It is therefore the duty of all the angelic hosts to attend. And Satan comes too, not as a gatecrasher but out of necessity, because he too is one of them! The same verb is used of him in 2:1.**

The Sovereign

Before looking more closely at what is implied by the expression, ‘**Satan ... among [the sons of God]**’, we should note that the Sovereign before whom they appeared is identified not only as God, but also as **the Lord**—not ‘the Lord’. The spelling ‘Lord’ is of the utmost significance because it represents the divine name. Two things should be remembered about it. The first is that uses of the divine name are rare in *Job* and so whenever it occurs, there is a particular reason for its inclusion. The second is that, although the meaning of the name was only disclosed in Moses’ time and in connection with the Exodus deliverance (Exod. 3:13–15; 6:2–3), it was not completely unknown before that (see Gen. 4:26). No objection should therefore be made against Job’s own uses of it in 12:9, and particularly in 1:21. His use of a different name for God in his reply to his wife in 2:10 is a reflection of the language that she had used in what she had said to him.

But here in 1:6 the author uses the divine name in distinction from the more common word for ‘**God**’ in the earlier part of the verse, and he does so again in 2:1 and frequently from 38:1 to the end of the book. He evidently has a point to make and it is that the divine Sovereign is the Lord. Names of God are significant in the Old Testament, and here is a clear example of that. **The Sovereign is not just ‘God’ but also ‘the Lord’—that is, the covenant Redeemer. It is no accident that this name is absent from Genesis 1, where the creative acts of God are recorded, but very common in Genesis 2 and 3,** where his rule over all his kingdom and his redemptive purpose are introduced. Such sovereign administration is the point that is being stressed here at the beginning of *Job* and also at the end. It is only because the ‘Great Jehovah’ manages affairs that there can, and there will, be a resolution of them that is to his glory *and also* to the good of his people. He rules not only over his own handiwork but over Satan’s too and, come what may, he will achieve his saving purpose

and bring about Satan's downfall and utter disgrace. That is what is unfolded in the rest of the book, and it is that which makes it relevant to the Christian.

The subject and the servant

That Satan should appear in the heavenly court and that Job's name should be mentioned there is significant. Both are related to the Sovereign Redeemer but in very different ways. Satan is an unwilling subject whereas Job is a glad and grateful servant.

1. The subject

'Satan' has become a personal name, but originally the word represented any kind of opponent. It is used for an adversary in a lawsuit or trial (see Ps. 109:6, 29) and even for the Angel of the Lord who opposed Balaam in order to defend his people (see Num. 22:22). **But in Job 'Satan' is designated as 'the Satan', and by the use of the definite article someone special is identified, just as is the case with 'the serpent' in Genesis 3:1. He is the arch-opponent of Jehovah's reign of grace in the world and is not just a literary symbol for a prosecutor. He is as real as God and Job, and is more opposed to God and to godliness than any human opponent can be.** It is therefore no wonder that both terms, 'serpent' and 'Satan', are used in Revelation 12:9 with reference to the devil. **But when Jehovah holds court even Satan has to appear, and not only turn up but own up, as we shall see from his remarks when he was interrogated.** Having incited rebellion in Eden, he was made subject to Jehovah's saving purpose then and there (Gen. 3:14-15).

Two aspects about him need to be highlighted before we look at the interrogation to which he was subjected.

I. His inferiority

Satan is among the angels because that is his rank in the order of created beings. Man is on the lowest plane of animate and rational existence; one level above is the angelic host, and separated from both by an infinite distance is God. Satan is therefore superhuman but not divine. Like God he is invisible and incorporeal, but unlike him neither omnipresent, omnipotent nor omniscient. His words indicate that he is not everywhere, that he does not understand grace in the human heart and that he does not have the power either to dethrone God or to assault God's people at will.

II. His insubordination

He is not only subject to Jehovah, but he cannot free himself from his subjugation. That increases his malevolence, for not only does he have to serve the one he hates, but he can only do what will advance the gracious purpose of Jehovah. God the Saviour is the

Sovereign and he rules the Satan! These are basic truths about Satan and his activity that the New Testament amplifies but nowhere contradicts.

III. His interrogation

1:7. 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.’

Jehovah holds court and begins by putting Satan in the dock by means of the question: **‘From where have you come?’** Satan’s reply to this may seem to be evasive but it is not. True, he does not say everything, as is made clear by what he adds in reply to the next question that he has to answer. But his first answer is true as far as it goes. He is asked where he has been, and that form of words also implies the question as to what he has been doing (see Gen. 3:9; cf. 2 Kings 5:25, where Elisha questions Gehazi).

Satan’s reply contains an admission but not a confession! The verbs he uses (1:7) are both graphic and meaningful. They indicate what a restless spirit he is. **‘Going to and fro’** is the expression used to describe Joab’s tour of all Israel with a view to numbering the people of God (see 2 Sam. 24:2), and **‘walking up and down’** is used elsewhere with regard to conducting a survey of affairs in God’s kingdom (see Zech. 1:10). But the latter verb can also denote turbulence in water, whether caused by an oar (Jonah 1:13) or by a swimmer (Isa. 25:11), or in the air produced by the crack of a whip (Nahum 3:2; Prov. 26:3). **What Satan is therefore admitting is that he has been engaged in a tour of inspection of the earth with a view to causing a commotion wherever he can.** He is always seeking to gain an advantage over the people of God and he forms his schemes for doing so, whether as a lion or as an angel of light (see 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; 1 Peter 5:8). But Jehovah knows all this already because his eyes ‘run to and fro throughout the whole earth’ as well (2 Chr. 16:9).

1:8. 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?’

By means of his follow-up question (1:8) Jehovah not only shows his delight in Job, but also brings to light Satan’s malice against him. Designating Job as his **‘servant’**, Jehovah honours him and, by implication, reminds Satan that Job is no longer his slave. But in asking, **‘Have you considered ...?’** Jehovah is charging Satan with having been ‘eyeing’ Job. This is a much better rendering than the rather insipid term ‘considered’. The Hebrew verb means literally ‘to set [the] mind on [something or someone]’. It is used in 1 Samuel 9:20, where Saul is told not ‘to set [his] mind’ on his donkeys—that is, not to ‘worry about them’ (NIV)—because they had been found. Satan had therefore noticed not only Job’s existence, but also his character. Job had not just crossed Satan’s mind but his schemes, and as a result Satan had designs on him, just as he had later on Simon Peter (see Luke 22:31).

1:9, 11. Then Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘Does Job fear God for no reason?... But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.’

That this is the drift of Jehovah’s second question is indicated by Satan’s reply to it (1:9). He can neither speak dispassionately about Job nor confine his remarks to him. He has to speak about God as well. Piety infuriates him on sight, and the fact that God protects and prospers his people even more so. But his reply is not just a vicious outburst. It is also a distortion. Satan is no atheist and he cannot deny the existence of piety. But he sees everything through his own perverted understanding. **‘For no reason’** (1:9) is the dark filter through which he views both human piety and divine praise. For him true religion is a protection racket. It cannot ever be that anyone serves the Lord ‘for no reason’—that is, for love’s sake. Piety is self-centred, and so is God! God buys praise by selling protection and Job pays for prosperity by his loyalty—and Satan is utterly confident that he can prove that to be so. If all that Job had were to be taken from him, he would not just put Jehovah out of his mind temporarily, but renounce him openly and permanently. Satan therefore makes an indirect request for that to be done and, what is more, he wants God himself to do it.

2. The servant

Jehovah has exulted in Job and honoured him among the angelic hosts with the dignified title of being **‘my servant’**. In point of fact he has so described Job to Satan with the inference that Job gives willing and thorough service, and not forced labour. All that has been mentioned about Job from other parts of the book is relevant here.

But a cloud has been cast over Job’s character and conduct by Satan’s claim that it is not genuine. This dark view of things impugns not only Job’s good name, but also the truthfulness and honour of Jehovah. Seeing this larger picture enables a better perspective to be adopted about the permission that Satan is given to test Job. **It shows that Jehovah was not only concerned for his own glory, but also for Job’s good, and that he has a larger purpose than just refuting Satan’s lie. (Elihu makes this clear later in the narrative.) The book is about Job, but it is not only about him. It is also about God as Jehovah—and in the forthcoming conflict both are going to stand or fall together. Indeed the honour and glory of his entire redemptive programme are at stake. Job is only the principal human ‘actor’, whereas God as Jehovah is the primary figure.**

I. Permission needed

Though Satan has designs on Job and is also much stronger than he, yet he cannot ‘touch’ Job at will, and he knows it. Jehovah has indeed put a protective hedge around him and his household, while his flocks and herds have been amazingly productive (1:10). Satan can only gnash his teeth at him. He knows that he is incapable of acting without divine permission. He therefore seeks it, but in a way that is so typical of

him. Rejecting Jehovah's evaluation of Job, Satan requests him to deprive Job of 'all that he has' been so abundantly given. He wants the hand that blessed to be the hand that takes, so that Job's view of Jehovah will change and that, instead of blessing the Lord, he will renounce him. In that way Job's testimony and influence will be destroyed and Jehovah will be dishonoured.

II. Permission given

1:12. 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.

Jehovah is faithful to his promise, and to his people and he will neither be a turncoat nor a tempter (see James 1:13–15). However, he can test while Satan does the tempting, and that is what happens with regard to Job, but only within the limit requested and with a prohibition specifically added. Job *himself* is not to be 'touched'—that is, physically harmed. Jehovah opens his protecting hand just a little, as it were, and permits Satan to deprive Job of all that outwardly marked him as one greatly favoured by God. But Job's life is sacrosanct, so that he might live to give the lie to Satan's claim and so to bring praise to Jehovah.

But for Jehovah to concede to the request even to this degree is awe-inspiring because it is as much an expression of confidence in Job as in the work of divine grace within him. Job is going to be the buffer state, the cockpit of war between Satan and Jehovah—and he is completely ignorant of what is about to happen and why.

Job's 'evil day'

(Job 1:13–22)

We move now from 'a day' in Jehovah's court to a day on earth. A storm is about to break on an unsuspecting head! When will it happen? What form will it take and what will its result be? These questions are all answered in Job 1:13–22, which we shall consider in two parts: the action of Satan and the reaction of Job.

The action of Satan (1:13–19)

1:13, 18–19. Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house ... 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, 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.'

Having been given permission to ‘touch’ all that Job has, Satan leaves Jehovah’s presence to go about his nefarious activity. All that now follows discloses his ‘craft and power’, although he is not mentioned by name in these verses. That omission is worthy of note. It has often been said that Satan disappears from the book after chapter 2. I do not accept that for a moment. The events recorded in this section are his acts no less than the ones attributed personally to him in chapter 2, and this variation opens up the possibility that he continues to be active in what is recorded in the subsequent narrative. Are not all discord and doubt traceable to him? Adopting this view enables a connection to be made between Satan and the speeches that follow and the struggle that they record. Did he not leave the Servant of the Lord ‘until an opportune time’ after his initial onslaught? (See Luke 4:13).

There are four things to note here which indicate Satan’s activity.

1. The time he chose

Whatever a ‘day’ may represent in the supernatural realm (1:6; 2:1), we understand ‘a day’ on earth as having its natural meaning. All that is recorded in these verses befell Job in one twenty-four-hour period. It might be thought that, having such ill will towards Job, Satan would have put the permission to proceed against him into immediate effect. (That is possibly what happened in 2:7, although the form of words there may be a case of compression or summary.) But it seems from 1:13 that he waited for a special day to come around, the birthday celebrations of Job’s firstborn son. Satan is not only cruel but also crafty. He chooses his time and his methods. He is out for maximum effect. He chose a day of special family celebration, which was also a day when Job feared that thoughtless sin might have been committed.

2. The losses he inflicted

Satan had been given leave to touch ‘all’ that Job had’ (1:11, 12). Here he goes about that progressively, as can be seen by comparing what was taken with the list of Job’s possessions given earlier (see 1:2–3). Proceeding in reverse order, we have first the oxen and (female) donkeys and the servants who were ploughing with them—preparations were being made for the next year’s harvest. The sheep (and goats) and shepherds were next, and then the camels and the servants who attended to them. Finally and climactically, we have the deaths of Job’s sons and daughters. Nothing was left—well, almost nothing: only his wife and four servants! Why were these spared? It was not that they were off-limits, as Job himself was. Satan could have included them too had he wished to do so. He left them in order to be able to use them against Job.

3. The reports he brought

Four servants (out of a large number) were spared in order that they might bear reports to Job of what had happened. They were therefore ‘messenger(s) of Satan to harass’ him (cf. 2

Cor. 12:7). Their arrival was orchestrated so that a rapid succession of blows might rain down on Job. After the arrival of the first messenger, three times we have the words: **'While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "... and I alone have escaped to tell you"'** (1:16, 17, 18–19). **This repetitiveness indicates something of Satan's brutality. He not only uses subtlety, but force. He bludgeons the saints.**

4. The means he used

He uses natural disaster as well as human activity, and does so in equal measure, so to speak. Two of the four calamities are attributed to the plundering activities of marauding tribes, the Sabians and the Chaldeans, while the other two are traced to lightning and the hot desert wind. Such a distribution of causes makes it impossible for Job to avoid bringing God into the picture, because the latter two are 'acts of God' in judgement on the wicked (see 20:26; Jer. 4:11–12). That of course was what Satan intended, and the fact that it was 'an act of God', and not of men, that brought about the death of Job's children is particularly noteworthy. The other losses were intended to soften him up; this one was to shatter him.

The loss of his children was meant to sow doubt in his mind about the character of the God to whom he had prayed. Why would God do such a thing—especially after Job had prayed for them so often (and, doubtless, had been going to do so again) in connection with sin and sacrifice? Clearly Satan not only uses a club, but also a rapier. He not only crushes bones with a succession of blows (like Giant Despair), but he pierces the mind with excruciating thoughts and doubts.

The reaction of job (1:20–22)

This was Job's 'evil day' (Eph. 6:13). How did he react? Satan was sure of what would happen; he had confidently predicted it. But Jehovah was in no suspense as to what the outcome would be and had therefore allowed the trial. Job, unaware of both, was left to grapple with all that had taken place—alone. He responded as a frail man but as a godly man, and he did so magnificently in both respects.

1:20–21. Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshipped. 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.'

1. As a frail man

This is how people reacted to adversity and bereavement in Job's day and in his society. A 'robe' was worn over a tunic, and it was this outer garment which Job tore, as Jacob did for Joseph (Gen. 37:34). Doubtless, Job's robe was ornate and costly. Shaving of the head was a common custom too in such circumstances (see Jer. 7:29; Ezra 9:3). While the latter was

forbidden in the law, the fact that Job did not inflict gashes on his body, as was done by the heathen, is significant (Lev. 19:27–28). In no way was he either insensitive to all that had befallen him or excessive in the way in which he manifested his grief like the heathen. His godliness did not destroy his humanness.

2. As a godly man

He fell to the ground and worshipped. His prostration was with a view to expressing his own frailty but also exalting God. His words indicate his thoughts. They are full of his own smallness and Jehovah's great goodness, and he does not misrepresent God.

First, *he abases himself before God*. His torn finery and bared head manifest his awareness of the transience of earthly glory and his vulnerability in the presence of death. He recalls his birth in terms of his having nothing and envisages his death in terms of his being deprived of everything. His mother's womb becomes the symbol of the earth to which he returns and from which he was made (Gen. 3:19; Ps.139:15). The sudden and colossal change that has taken place is a reminder to him of his lowly condition. He faces his own mortality, but he does so in the presence of the God who is Jehovah.

Secondly, *he exalts God* by acknowledging that he was no less good in taking from him than he had been in giving to him. But what is so striking and glorious is that Job in this circumstance of bereavement addresses God as 'Jehovah'—the one who spoke of life amid death in the Garden of Eden. Faced with fleeting life and fearful death, he trusts again in a living Redeemer and blesses, instead of cursing, him. He draws near to the immortal Jehovah rather than departing from him.²

Job 1

"The book of Job," wrote Heinrich Heine, "is the Song of Songs of skepticism, and in it terrifying serpents hiss their eternal question: Why?" Why do we ask "why" upon reading the book of Job? Simply because what happened to Job and what happens to so many of us seems so utterly inconsistent with what we know to be true of God. If God is good and great, as we believe He is, how can He stand idly by and permit a righteous man like Job to suffer so horribly? This is a book that chronicles the human response when one's experience conflicts with one's expectations.

² Jones, H. R. (2007). *A Study Commentary on Job* (pp. 39–62). Darlington, England; Webster, New York: Evangelical Press

There is one thing about the book of Job that makes it easy for us: one need never struggle to make it relevant. Even if we ourselves have never experienced the agonizing tragedies described in this book, all of us know someone who has, whether it be the shattering news of terminal cancer, devastating loss of all one's possessions in a flood, tornado, fire, or earthquake, the unexpected death of a child, financial bankruptcy, an adulterous affair that destroys a marriage and devastates children, a teen-age son on drugs or a daughter who secretly has an abortion.

Simply put, life is not fair, Injustice often seems to triumph. Good people suffer indescribable pain and bad people prosper with baffling regularity. No, I don't know why, and as best I can tell, no one else knows either. But whenever such issues arise, people invariably turn to the book of Job.

Who was Job? When did he live? Who wrote the book that tells his story? The opening words of v. 1 tell us little. Most believe he lived during the time of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, although there is no way to be certain. He was probably a Jew, although nowhere in the book is his ethnic heritage mentioned. Some have suggested that the opening description of Job is phrased in such a way to make it appear that he is representative of all who suffer, whether Jew or Gentile. **A biblical patriarch is usually introduced in Scripture with a full genealogy. But Job has neither a genealogy nor any reference to his tribe or clan. This makes it possible for us all to identify with him.**

A. *Job's Character—1:1-5*

Our author mentions three things about Job's character.

1. *His piety—v. 1*

a. "blameless"

This word was often used to describe a sacrificial animal that was "spotless and without blemish." **When used of a person it referred to personal integrity, not sinless perfection.** Job was a man without overt blemishes on his public record. Whereas "blameless" does not mean guiltless, it does mean he is forgiven and consistently obedient. His reputation was impeccable.

b. "upright"

This word describes someone who is faithful to observe the law of God: just, fair, honest.

c. "feared God" and "shunned evil"—To "fear God" and to "shun evil" were a familiar pair in the OT (cf. Prov. 3:7; 14:16 ["the wise man fears the Lord and

shuns evil”]; 16:6). These phrases refer to someone whose loving reverence and holy awe of God lead him/her to hate and turn away from sin.

In sum: these words are designed from the outset to highlight the fact that ***Job’s suffering was not the result of Job’s sin.***

2. *His prosperity—vv. 2–3*

Observe the use of the numbers **3, 7, 10**, all symbolic of completeness, wholeness, which highlights how God had richly blessed his servant.

Although it may sound strange to refer to his children as an example of his prosperity, we must remember that in the OT “sons” (children) were a heritage from the Lord, a gift of grace, a boon (cf. Ps. 127:3). **The fact that Job had seven sons and three daughters implies he had the “perfect” family.** In addition to this, he was richly blessed with abundant livestock: sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys.

3. *His posterity—vv. 4–5*

Each son hosted a seven-day feast at his own house, together with their sisters. These were not continuous rounds of feasting, but most likely were non-religious festivals, perhaps birthday celebrations. **There is no indication of laziness or moral license or drunkenness on their part. No word of condemnation is spoken against them.** What we read here is a mark of divine blessing and prosperity. They enjoyed life to the fullest by virtue of God’s favor.

Yet another noble feature of Job’s character is his fervent spiritual leadership in the home. Just in case any of his children had inadvertently and unknowingly sinned, he was careful to offer the appropriate sacrifice. He didn’t want some hasty curse to fester in the conscience of any of his children. Job took his role as spiritual head of the family quite seriously. **Again, our author’s point is to emphasize that *Job’s suffering is not the result of Job’s sin.***

N.B. See Ezekiel 14:14, 20.

B. *Job’s Calamities—1:6–22*

1. *Satan’s accusations—vv. 6–12*

- a. v. 6—The “sons of God” refer to the angelic host (cf. Job 38:7). They constitute the heavenly council, God’s courtiers surrounding the throne ready to obey His every command. See also 1 Kings 22:19 and Daniel 7:9–14. **With them was “the Satan”.** Everywhere this word appears in Job it has the definite article (“the”; cf. 1:6, 7(2), 8, 9, 12(2); 2:1, 2(2), 3, 4, 6, 7). Hence, it is a title, descriptive of his

function and character. The word “Satan” literally means one who opposes at law, an adversary (see Zech. 3:1-2).

- b. v. 7—The question here does not indicate a lack of knowledge, but was a customary way of saying: “State your business!” Satan was a “restless, shiftless, roving hoodlum” (Mike Mason).
- c. v. 8—With what can only be called “fatherly pride,” God boasts about Job! He endorses the characterization of Job found in v. 1, using the same terminology. He also calls Job “my servant,” a designation reserved for such as Abraham and David. He is unequalled, says God. “No one is like him” on the earth.
- d. vv. 9-11—Satan was at a loss. Job was a complete puzzle to him. He didn’t doubt that Job was obedient and upright. There was no mistaking his godliness. But the devil just couldn’t bring himself to believe that anyone would want to be holy for nothing. The only thing left is to launch an assault against Job’s motives. Whereas he could hardly question Job’s righteousness, he did wonder about the reason for it. His diabolical conclusion was that Job served God for what he could get out of him. Job’s piety, reasoned the devil, must be a calculated effort to milk God of his gifts. “Take away the pay and he’ll quit the job,” he thought. **Satan was persuaded that worship must be fundamentally selfish, that it is nothing more than a man-made device to flatter God into generosity. If God’s generosity were cut off, thought Satan, Job’s praise would turn to cursing.**

In sum, Satan accuses God of having bought Job’s loyalty with health and wealth: “Job doesn’t serve you for free. Don’t flatter yourself, God! No one else does either.” In effect, he says: “He doesn’t love you for *who* you are but only for *what* you’ve given him.” In other words, it isn’t Job that Satan accuses, but God!

The question that Job will face, the question we all face is this: “Is God worthy to be loved and deserving of our obedience for who he is, irrespective of all other considerations?” Is Job sufficiently dedicated to remain loyal if no benefits are attached? Satan says no. He accuses God of being a deceptive fraud and Job of being a selfish hypocrite.

Note also how abrupt and rude Satan is. Traditional court etiquette in the ANE avoided the use of personal pronouns when addressing a superior. Courtiers would say, “my lord” instead of “you” and “your slave” instead of “I/me.” But not Satan. He also uses imperative verbs, as if to *command* God what to do.

- v. 12—Satan has no power or authority beyond that which God grants or permits. Derek Kidner makes it clear, however,

“that this is indeed permission, not abdication; for in both these chapters [Job 1–2] it is God who sets the limits of the test. The conditions are all that the challenger could desire (for nothing would be proved or disproved by Job’s death, 2:6), but they are of God’s choosing, not his. Likewise, at the end, it will be God who calls a halt to it—as it will be also (we may add) at the end of history” (59).

For a NT parallel to this, see Luke 22:31–32.

2. *Satan’s assault*—vv. 13–22

No sooner had Job concluded offering his sacrifice on behalf of his children than he hears the stunning news of their demise.

a. Woe—vv. 13–19

- 1) Sabeans—vv. 13–15
- 2) the fire of God—v. 16
- 3) Chaldeans—v. 17
- 4) a great/mighty wind—vv. 18–19

Notice that when given permission by God, Satan is able to exercise tremendous destructive influence on both nature and nations.

Here we see the alteration between “human” and “natural” disasters. Note also how they strike or converge from all four points of the compass: the Sabeans come from the south, lightning (probably from the west), the Chaldeans from the north, and the treacherous sirocco out of the east.

b. Worship—vv. 20–22

To this point Job hasn’t had a chance to respond. With quick-fire rapidity, one after another, before the depth of one tragedy has time to sink in and without so much as a moment’s break to catch his breath, the bad news breaks on him. Finally, though, ...

- 1) he tears his robe—a common ritual of mourning and grief (cf. Gen. 37:29; Joshua 7:6);
- 2) he shaves his head—another symbol of sorrow, later forbidden by the Mosaic law;

- 3) he falls prostrate to the ground—not in despair but in reverence; touching his face to the earth in silent submission, nose and forehead pressed to the ground.

Observe three things in what he says.

First, “*naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there*”. The phrase “mother’s womb” is often a symbolic reference to the earth (cf. Ps. 139:15; in the ANE they would customarily bury a corpse in the fetal position, suggesting a return to the womb). His point is: “I didn’t bring it with me when I came and I won’t take it with me when I leave. All I own is on loan from God.”

Second, “*the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away*.” He doesn’t say, “the Lord gave and the Sabeans have taken away,” or “*the Chaldeans have taken away*,” or even, “*Satan has taken away*.” He acknowledges that whatever secondary causes may be involved, ultimately nothing could touch him apart from the permissive will of God. As one commentator has put it:

“Job sees only the hand of God in these events. It never occurs to him to curse the desert brigands, to curse the frontier guards, to curse his own stupid servants, now lying dead for their watchlessness. All secondary causes vanish. It was the Lord who gave; it was the Lord who removed; and in the Lord alone must the explanation of these strange happenings be sought” (FA/ 88).

Third, “*may the name of the Lord be praised*” or “*blessed be the name of the Lord*”. God is blessed not only for the giving but also in spite of the taking. In every circumstance he is to be honored. Thus, although Job knows nothing about Satan’s involvement, he in effect says: “Satan, you are wrong. God is *still* worthy of worship even when life is hard.”

Concluding observations:

First, Job’s faith in God does not relieve his agony. If anything, it only serves to intensify it. What will plague Job’s thoughts throughout the book is the apparent inconsistency in the suffering of one who *does* trust God. **If he had lacked faith, his suffering would not have been so confusing. But everything that happens to him appears on the surface to be a contradiction of all he knew to be true about God. Unbelievers, materialists, atheists, secular humanists all suffer, but for them such tragedies, though an inconvenience, are not a moral problem. What happens to Job is a moral problem that creates turmoil and confusion only for those who believe that the universe is owned and operated by an infinitely good and powerful God.**

Second, what is this book about? It is not primarily about who is responsible for suffering (the sinner, Satan, God, none of the above). Nor is it primarily about why the righteous suffer. Nor is it primarily a theological debate about the goodness of God and the existence of evil. **Rather, it is about faith in the midst of unexplained and undeserved suffering. It is about God: is He really worthy of our adoration and devotion and love even when He is silent, hidden, and declines to put an end to our pain?**

Third, the calamities that overwhelmed Job came as complete surprise to him. Such things were not expected to happen to godly people. In general, they don't! In other words, this book portrays the exception to the general rule. The book presupposes that God blesses the righteous and curses the unrighteous. So why, then, does Job suffer?

* What God allows is not indicative nor characteristic of His nature or His dealings with His people.

Fourth, note well that God refuses to afflict Job directly. He grants permission to another. But He himself will not do it. See 2:3-6.

Fifth, Job never discovers Satan's role in this affair! We know from the beginning what is at stake and who is responsible for Job's horrible agonies. Thus we are in a privileged position in comparison with Job. Before we too quickly criticize him, let us remember that he *never* is told that Satan has approached God with his "wager". As far as Job is concerned, it is God and only God who has caused his sufferings. What might have been his response had he been informed of the heavenly conversation described in chapter one?³

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF JOB

Job 1:1-5

The opening paragraphs of the book set forth the place, person, piety and prosperity of the hero of this book.

A. His Name (1:1)

Those who regard the story of Job as fictional believe that the patriarch's name has been contrived by the author. The name seems to be derived from a root which carries the idea of "enmity, hostility." The vocalization of the Hebrew reflects a pattern which regularly

³ Storms, S. (2016). *Biblical Studies: Job* (Job 1). Edmond, OK: Sam Storms.

designates a profession, or a habitual or characteristic activity. Thus Job would indicate one who is an implacable foe. Some take this idea of enmity in a passive sense, i.e., the name is intended to designate one who is the object of enmity or persecution. Job then would mean something like “the persecuted one.”

As appealing as this explanation of the name may be, some strong arguments can be raised against it. First, there is no play on the name or allusion to its significance in the book. This is strange if the author coined the name. Second, though the name Job is unique to this man in the Bible, it appears to have been quite common in the second millennium b.c. The name *may* have been chosen for the hero of the story simply because it was an ordinary name. The position taken here, however, is that an ancient patriarch named Job actually experienced the trials set forth in this chapter.

B. His Place (1:1)

The setting of the book is in the “land of Uz.” The exact location of Uz is uncertain. The name *Uz* appears several times in the Old Testament. Uz was certainly outside Palestine as is indicated by the geographical references, customs and vocabulary reflected in the book. This land appears to have been east of Edom, in northern Arabia.³ The narrative makes clear that Job lived near the desert (1:19); yet his land was fertile for agriculture and livestock (1:3, 14; 42:12).

C. His Piety (1:1)

Four expressions describe the piety of Job. First, he was blameless (*tam*), i.e., whole, complete. He was a man without any obvious moral blemish, a man of integrity. The term *tam*, which is first used in Scripture of Noah (Gen 6:9), does not suggest that Job was sinless. Job’s blamelessness is affirmed in heaven (1:8; 2:3), by Job’s wife (2:9); and by Job himself (9:21). Even Job’s antagonists concede the blamelessness of Job in a general way (e.g., 4:6), although they argued that he must have been guilty of some serious offense to account for his calamities.

Second, Job was “upright” (*yashar*), i.e., he did not deviate from God’s standards. The combination of the terms “blameless” and “upright” indicate the peak of moral perfection.

Third, this patriarch is described as “fearing God,” i.e., he revered the creator and humbly submitted to his will. The ancient sages viewed the fear of God as the foundation of wisdom as well as its goal.

Finally, Job “turned aside from evil,” i.e., he avoided all that area which the Holy One had designated as sinful. The fear of God gives one the moral discernment to avoid evil.

D. His Prosperity (1:2-3)

Job was blessed with many children. He had seven sons and three daughters. In the Patriarchal period a large family was viewed as an asset. The children are mentioned directly following Job's piety to suggest that they were the reward of the Lord (cf. Ps 127:3). **Seven children, especially sons, were considered the ideal blessing from the Lord (Ruth 4:15; cf. 1 Sam 2:5).**

Job was a semi-nomadic chieftain whose wealth was measured in terms of livestock and servants. Seven thousand sheep provided clothing, food and wool for export. Three thousand camels and five hundred donkeys provided transportation of produce and merchandise to distant cities. Five hundred yoke of oxen provided meat, milk and plowing power for crops of wheat and barley (cf. 31:38–40) in Job's extensive fields. Job also had a very large number of servants.

Measured by the standards of his day, Job was "the greatest of all the men of the east" (1:3). His greatness did not lie in his wealth alone, but in the respect in which he was held and in his influence. Since the children of the east were noted for their wisdom (1 Kgs 4:30), the text may be suggesting that Job excelled in this respect as well as in his wealth.

E. His Priesthood (1:4–5)

Job's godly character is indicated in his concern for the spiritual well being of his grown children. He was faithful in his priestly ministry to his family. Each year the ten children of Job got together at one of their homes to celebrate birthdays. **That Job's sons each had their own house is another indication of the family wealth.** The unmarried daughters probably stayed in their father's house (cf. 2 Sam 13:7, 8, 20). They were invited to share in the drinking feasts (1:4).

When the annual round of drinking feasts was concluded, Job performed a priestly ritual for his children. He first sent for his sons and "sanctified" them. This ritual probably consisted of washings and a change of garments (cf. Gen 35:2). Early the next morning he offered up burnt offerings "according to the number of them all." Perhaps he offered up the seven bulls and seven rams mentioned in 42:8.

Why these religious ceremonies? The old patriarch was concerned lest while under the influence of strong drink his children might have sinned by renouncing God in their hearts. **The text probably has in mind a momentary turning away of the heart from God in the midst of social merriment. This priestly sacrifice Job performed continually, i.e., after each year's round of feasting. This man of God was exemplary in his concern for his family (1:5).**

THE CALAMITIES OF JOB

Job 1:6–2:13

The calamities of Job came in two stages: (1) his possessions were first assaulted (1:6-22), and then his person (2:1-10). In both stages the reader is permitted to know what Job could not know, *viz.*, that these calamities were part of the testing of his faith orchestrated by Satan himself with the permission of Yahweh.

A. Satan's Slander of Job (1:6-12)

On a certain day the "sons of God" (angels) presented themselves (lit., stationed themselves) before the creator to report on their activities. A scene similar to this appears in 1 Kings 22:19-23 (cf. Ps 89:7). Satan was among them. The term Satan means "the adversary" or "the opposer." Here, as in Zechariah 3:1, Satan stands before the Holy One to challenge the spiritual credentials of one of God's most noble servants (1:6).

Yahweh interrogated Satan about his activities. Satan responded that he had been traversing the earth. As he had walked back and forth in the earth he apparently was searching for those that he could accuse and devour (cf. 1 Pet 5:8). Yahweh asked Satan if he had considered the piety of Job "my servant." Yahweh knows that Satan hates mankind and that he is convinced that every man has his price or breaking point. The Lord repeated the evaluation of the author of the book. Job was a man who was blameless and upright, who feared God and shunned evil. In Job Yahweh has a champion who will prove Satan wrong (1:7-8).

Satan responded to Yahweh's question with one of his own. "Does Job fear God for nought?" Thus the arch slanderer accused the patriarch of ulterior motives. Satan could not deny that Job was in fact a godly man. But *why* was he godly? The allegation is that Job is being paid by God through a life of ease and prosperity to be pious. **Here is the fundamental issue in the book. Do men serve God for who he is? Or for what he does for them? Will a person worship God without personal gain? Is worship essentially selfish? (1:9).**

Satan's second question accuses God of placing a thorny hedge around Job, his family and his possessions thereby protecting him from pain and hardship. Then Satan pointed out that God had blessed all the work of Job's hand thereby increasing (lit., causing to burst out) his substance in the land (1:10).

The stage was now set for Satan's challenge. "Put forth your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face!" Yahweh then put all of Job's possessions into the power of the evil one. Satan was restricted, however, with regard to touching the person of Job. Armed with this warrant, Satan "went out from the presence of Yahweh" (1:11).

At least before the redemptive work of Christ, Satan had access to the heavenly throne room. Indeed he seems to have relished his role as the accuser of the brethren. The Scriptures say amazingly little about the origins and workings of Satan. He appears to have led a rebellion against God sometime before the fall of Adam in the garden (cf. 2 Pet 2:4;

Jude 6). Here in Job he is seen as subordinate to God. His powers and sphere of influence are limited by the Lord. Yet the righteousness of God required, it would seem, a response to the criticism of Satan regarding Job.

The final book of the Bible suggests that at the ascension of Jesus Satan lost the right to appear in heaven. This one who accused the brethren day and night before God has now been “thrown down.” Through the blood of the Lamb believers can overcome him (Rev 12:7–11). There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ (Rom 8:1).

B. First Assault Against Job (1:13–22)

The hammer blows of calamity began to fall almost immediately upon Job. The disasters fell on the day when Job’s children were enjoying a feast at the home of the eldest brother (1:13).

A messenger came to Job with the news that the oxen and donkeys were seized by the Sabeans. All the servants who attended these animals had been slain. Only the messenger had survived the attack (1:14–15).

Before the first messenger had finished his report, a second arrived. He notified Job that “the fire of God,” i.e., lightning, had destroyed all the sheep and killed the servants who tended them. Again the messenger was the only survivor of the disaster (1:16).

While the second messenger was still speaking, a third arrived with more bad news. The Chaldeans had executed a well-planned three-pronged attack in which the camels had been captured and their keepers slain (1:17). The Chaldeans here are unsettled semi-nomadic marauders. Beginning in the ninth century they filtered into the civilized world and eventually took control of Babylon.

A fourth messenger brought the worst news of all. A blast of wind (a tornado?) off the desert had ripped through the house where Job’s children were feasting. Job’s sons—and presumably his daughters also—died in the disaster. The messenger alone had escaped the collapse of the house (1:18–19).

Job responded to these devastating reports by entering into a state of mourning. To demonstrate his agony he tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground and did obeisance before God. The act probably consisted of touching the face to the ground a number of times (Gen 33:3; 1 Sam 20:41). In immortal words which still eloquently articulate human grief, Job cried out to God: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither. Yahweh gave, and Yahweh has taken away; blessed be the name of Yahweh” (1:20–21). Of course Job did not mean that he would return to his mother’s womb, but to the earth which was the “womb” from which the original body of man was created.

THE BOOK OF JOB

VENTURE
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Study Notes

In spite of these blows against him, Job “sinned not, nor charged God foolishly (*tiphlah*),” i.e., he did not consider that God had acted out of character (1:22). Satan is defeated, for he had predicted a curse.⁴

⁴ (Smith, J. E. (1996). *The wisdom literature and Psalms* (Job 1:1–22). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.)