

Solomon: A Retrospective

(The 6 points below summarize the final message on Solomon.)

1. He was given a clear and solemn charge; but he failed to fulfill it. See 1 Kings 2:1-4.

Are you fulfilling the charges that have been spoken over your life?

2. He was handed a kingdom he didn't have to fight for; but he destroyed it. See 1 Kings 2:10,12; 5:4 and 8:56.

What are you doing with the privileges you have been given? Are you being a good steward of the things that God has entrusted to you?

3. He was given a woman to love; but he never learned to love well. See 1 Kings 3:1; 11:1 and Song of Solomon 6:8.

Are you learning to love well? To be faithful to one person? To honor God's plan for marriage?

4. He was given unsurpassed wisdom from God; but he failed to live by it. See 1 Kings 3:7-9; 12-14.

What are you doing with the knowledge that you have already received?

5. He built the temple of God; but then he desecrated it. See 1 Kings 6:1, 11-13; 11:1-6; 9-11.

Is there any sense in which you are desecrating the holy things that God has placed under your care? Is your 'self-love' causing you to ruin the work of God in your life?

6. He spent much of his life searching for purpose; but he never found his purpose. See Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 and compare with Acts 13:36.

Are you still striving to *find* the purpose of life? Are you searching in all the wrong places, as Solomon did? Or, are you *living out* God's unique purpose for your life as David did?

GOD WITH US
Part 5: Soul Songs
Job – Psalms

Message 1 – Job’s Calamity
Job 1-3

Introduction

The book of Job holds a very unique place in the Bible, for it is the only book entirely devoted to the issue of suffering. Job, the central character in the story, was a man who lived back in the time of Abraham (Genesis 12) or even earlier. References to Job are found in extra-biblical texts dated as early as 2,000 B.C. He was a very wealthy and powerful man in the land of Uz, to the far northeast of Palestine. Archaeologists have discovered the ruins of over 300 ancient cities in the area of Uz, which indicates that it was a thriving civilization in the days of Job. The man Job was ranked along with Noah and Daniel as the greatest of men of God in the entire Old Testament (Ezekiel 14:14-20). His endurance in suffering became an example for New Testament believers who were going through severe trials (James 5:11).

The purposes of the book of Job are: 1) to show us what God is like; 2) to give us insight into the problem of pain and suffering in our world; 3) to show us the kind of faith that God wants us to exercise in the midst of severe trials; 4) to remind us that God is the sovereign ruler over everything and 5) to teach us that faith in God often requires us to sit in the mystery of His plan without requiring answers from Him.

Job’s Character: 1:1-5

The story opens with a description of Job’s character. This is an important prelude, for it establishes at the outset that Job was not a wicked man deserving divine punishment (as his friends will wrongly assert); rather, he was *the most upright man on earth*.

“This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil” (1:1).

The “favor of God” was, in that day (as today) measured by the tangible earthly blessings a person enjoyed. By this measure, Job was rich in every way.

“He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East” (1:2,3).

Job’s spiritual integrity was evident in the way he interceded for his sons and daughters after their regular days of feasting. He offered sacrifices for them “just in case” they had sinned.

“His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, ‘Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’ This was Job’s regular custom” (1:4,5).

Job provides a great example of a parent interceding for his children. You may not know all of the details of what your children are up to – whether they are walking with God or acting in ways that are disobedient to God. Job’s example tells us that you don’t really need to know all the details in order to stand in the gap for your children. Pray that they will walk with God. Pray that if they have sinned, God will have mercy upon them and forgive them, even while bringing His loving discipline into their lives. This may be the greatest thing you will ever do for your children . . . simply to bring them before God in prayer regularly. In fact, you can do this every time you think of them. Just whisper a Job-prayer: “God, shower your mercy upon my children, for your name’s sake.”

Some very hard things were about to fall upon a very good man. This is the point of the prelude to Job’s story. The question will be: Why is Job suffering? Job’s friends will try to argue that bad things happen to bad people. Thus, Job *must be* hiding some sin. But this prelude sets us up to know that such an explanation will not suffice in Job’s case. Clearly, this particularly righteous man’s suffering was not a punishment for sinful behavior. In fact, Job was chosen to suffer for precisely the opposite reason – because he was *so godly!*

Job’s Calamity – Part One: 1:6-22

The reader is next transported into heaven to see/hear things that Job was unaware of (throughout the entire book). Angelic beings

(good and bad) were appearing before the presence of God to report upon their activities. The fallen angel, Satan, was among those who appeared to give an account of their earthly activities. Thus ensued a dialogue between God and Satan concerning the man Job and his faith in God.

The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.” Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (1:7,8).

It was God, not Satan, who called attention to Job. *Everything* that will happen to Job will be the direct result of God’s *intended plan*. Nothing will happen to Job apart from God’s sovereign authority.

What does the “sovereignty” of God mean? It means that He is truly the KING over every created being, and the RULER over every event that occurs in heaven and on earth. It means that nothing, absolutely nothing happens apart from divine authority. It does NOT mean that God is the author or instigator of evil. It DOES mean that evil cannot run ‘out of control.’ Even evil must run only along the lines of God’s permissive will. Not even Satan, the most powerful force of evil, can make a move without God’s permission. The “sovereign” God is the uncontested King of the universe. He will harness everything, even all “evil” to accomplish His sovereign purposes in our lives and our world.

Satan made a bold accusation against both God and Job, asserting that Job only feared God because God had been good to him. In short, Satan was accusing God of *buying Job’s worship*.

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face” (1:9-11).

Satan’s challenge was simple: If God were to withdraw His favor from Job, then Job’s worship would turn to cursing. In response to this challenge, God gave Satan permission to destroy everything Job had, while not laying a finger on Job himself.

The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in

your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord (1:12).

Thus, we as readers are given the primary answer to the reason behind Job’s suffering. His life was the chosen battleground for a dispute between God and Satan. God will prove to Satan that His work in Job’s heart is *real, abiding and deeper* than the long list of benefits that Job enjoys. God will show Satan that Job really does have a *love relationship* with Him, a relationship that evokes a *trust* that transcends material blessings.

Note: This is ONE of the many answers that the Bible will give to the question of human suffering: *God will sometimes use suffering in order to showcase Himself through the lives of His children.* The manner in which we suffer becomes a testimony to men and to angels of the glory of God and the sheer beauty of His love relationship with humans. There are, of course, other reasons that the Bible gives for suffering. Even in the book of Job we will later see that Job’s suffering took on a ‘refining’ role, as it revealed some deeper issues in his heart that needed to be brought to the surface and healed. Thus, in the long run his suffering served to purify his faith in God even further (see 1 Peter 1:6,7).

Picking up the story again: In a single day, multiple tragedies fell upon Job. 1) The Sabaeans attacked, stealing his livestock and killing his servants. 2) Fire fell from the sky destroying his sheep and killing the shepherds. 3) The Chaldeans attacked, stealing all of Job’s camels and killing his servants. 4) A windstorm hit where Job’s children were feasting, killing them all at once. Thus, in a single day, through both human attacks and natural disasters, Job lost his fortune, his family and his workforce.

(Note the various means that Satan can use to inflict harm. Not every human attack or natural disaster is the work of Satan; but it is instructive to note that *at times* the evil one is behind such ‘movements of destruction.’ See Mark 4:38-40 where Jesus rebuked a storm that threatened to sink their boat. The Greek language indicates that a personal, demonic power was behind this storm. The wider context of the story makes it clear that this was a Satanic attack against Jesus, His mission and His disciples. For further study on the biblical material concerning Satan, see **Addendum #2** at the end of this section.)

Job’s response at the end of that day was simply amazing:

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.” In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing (1:20-22).

Job acknowledged one very important fact about life: Everything we ever have is a GIFT from God in the first place. He is the One that has the authority at any time to GIVE or to TAKE AWAY these earthly, temporary gifts. This is why Job said: *“Naked I came in and naked I will go out.”* Anything that is added to our “nakedness” must be considered a temporary “loan” from God.

When you own something and it is stolen, you feel violated. On the other hand, when you borrow something and the owner comes to ask for it back, you freely release what was borrowed. What a life-changing perspective it is to see everything (health, wealth, family, even life itself) as a pure LOAN from God to us during our brief time here on earth. God can require back from us, at any moment, ANY of the things He has loaned to us. This explains why, in the parable of the rich fool, Jesus used these words to describe the unexpected death of the rich man: “You fool. This very night your life will be DEMANDED FROM YOU” (Luke 12:20). The rich fool did not realize that all of his possessions, including life itself, were a loan from God that could be demanded back at any moment. Do you realize that everything you “possess” and enjoy is actually on loan to you from God? Do you further realize, as Job did, that God has every right to take back what He has loaned to you, at any moment He so chooses? Here’s the rule of life according to Job: Anything beyond nakedness is a loan! Hold it with an open hand. Also see James 4:13-15.

Job’s Calamity – Part Two: 2:1-13

After an undisclosed amount of time, another discussion took place in heaven between God and Satan. This time, Satan insisted that Job would curse God IF the suffering hit directly upon Job’s body.

“Skin for skin!” Satan replied. “A man will give all he has for his own life. But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.” The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life” (2:4-6).

Again we note that it was God who gave Satan the authority to inflict suffering upon Job, and determined the limits of the suffering. Satan departed from God's presence and inflicted Job with a disease so severe that his entire body was filled with boils and scabs from head to toe. In immense pain, Job sat at the city dump scraping his wounds and lamenting his suffering.

“Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes” (2:8).

“Many Bible expositors identify his loathsome disease as elephantiasis, a severe form of leprosy. Some of the horrible aspects of Job's affliction were: a) insufferable itching of the skin, b) skin cracked and covered with boils, first hard and encrusted and then festering with worms or maggots, c) foul breath, d) blackened and chapped appearance of the body, e) pain of the limbs, f) extreme emaciation of the body, and g) anguished frame, made restless by nightly dreams, gaspings and tortures.” Irving L. Jensen, Study Guide on Job.

Job's wife was also suffering. His many losses were also her losses – losing 10 precious children she bore and raised brought her untold grief. She lost her ability to trust God at this point, and she encouraged Job to give up both his faith *and* his life.

His wife said to him, “Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!” He replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” In all this, Job did not sin in what he said (2:9-10).

It is sad to think that in all of his suffering, Job did not have a single helper- comforter who encouraged him in his faith and sat with him in his pain. His wife tempted him to do the very thing Satan said Job would do: Curse God! His friends turned out to be critical and mean-spirited. At the end of the day, Job was left to process his pain alone. This is NOT the way it is supposed to work! The apostle Paul writes: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). Who needs you at this very moment to come alongside of them to “weep” with them in their pain? If you are suffering, who can you reach out to?

At this point, Job's three friends arrived. They will take center stage in the remainder of the story as they seek, with Job, to determine the cause of his suffering. Remember . . . *none of them* were aware of the things going on in heaven between God and Satan. They will all be grasping for answers *while the only true answer remained hidden from them.*

These friends came with the good intentions of “sympathizing with and comforting” Job (2:11). When they saw him, they sat for seven days and nights in total silence. This was a good first step.

“No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was” (2:13).

Job’s Lament: 3:1-26

Job finally broke the weeklong silent vigil with his first speech – a lament decrying the day of his birth.

After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He said: “May the day of my birth perish, and the night that said, ‘A boy is conceived!’ That day – may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine on it” (3:1-3).

Job was suffering so greatly that he wondered why he was ever given the gift of life in the first place.

“Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest . . . (3:11-13).

The pressure of pain can be immense, causing us to lose sight of past “good” things. We MUST recognize this when we are sitting with a suffering person. Thus, one of the most foolish things we can say to a person in deep suffering would be: “Don’t forget to count all your blessings.” Or, “Remember, you’ve had plenty of good days too.” Job was the most upright and most blessed man on earth in his day. Yet, in the midst of his intense suffering, not even he could remember “the good old days.” When a person is in the midst of deep suffering, THAT is their only vantage point. Enter into THAT situation with them, rather than trying to ‘transport’ them into some happier memory or ‘correct perspective.’ Grief and loss tend to obscure our view of “good theology!”

At the end of his first lament, Job poses the ultimate question of the entire book: Why is life given to *anyone* who will ultimately suffer greatly? Really this question can be framed more broadly: Why does a good and all-powerful God let people suffer at all?

“Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave? Why is life given to a

man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in (3:20-23)?

It is this passage and this question that makes the book of Job one of the earliest “theodicies” (the attempt to explain the existence of evil in light of a God who is all-powerful and all-loving). The entire remainder of the book will be a dialogue between various characters (Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Elihu and God) as they seek to answer this fundamental question: WHY does God allow such things to happen? The great irony (and lesson) in the case of Job is that *an answer will never be found*. Instead, the question of Job’s suffering will be replaced by a different question: If we truly believe that God is GOD, then why must we demand that He justify what He allows to happen to us?

**Addendum #1: William Cowper -
“God Moves in a Mysterious Way”**

William Cowper’s life was full of pain and suffering. At five, his mother died. In school, he was bullied and mistreated. At eighteen, he fell in love, but his beloved’s father refused to allow them to marry. After completing law studies, he failed to succeed in the profession. At one point, he became so despondent that he attempted suicide. After time in a private asylum, he recovered his reason. Eventually, Cowper met John Newton, the former slave-trader who had become a pastor. Newton was very concerned for his friend, who suffered constant bouts of severe depression. Thus, in 1771, Newton suggested that he and Cowper co-author a book of hymns. “Amazing Grace” is one of the many hymns authored by Newton. Cowper wrote 68 of the hymns, including “Oh for a closer walk with God,” “God moves in a mysterious way,” and “There is a fountain filled with blood.”

*God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs and works His sov’ reign will.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.
His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flow’r.
Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.*

Addendum #2: The biblical portrait of Satan
(Adapted from Unger's Bible Handbook, pp.520-21)

- He appeared in Eden as the deceiving serpent (Gen.3:1-14).
- He was Lucifer, son of the morning, before his fall (Isaiah 14:12).
- He was the anointed cherub that covers (Ezekiel 28:14).
- He moved David to do evil (1Chronicles 21:1).
- He accused and afflicted Job (Job 1:7-2:10).
- He opposed and accused Israel before God (Zechariah 3:1-9).
- He is the tempter (Matthew 4:3).
- He is the prince of the demons (Matthew 12:24).
- He instigates false doctrine (1Timothy 4:1-6).
- He twists the Word of God (Matthew 4:4).
- He works in demon possession (Matthew 12:22-29).
- He is Satan, the adversary (Zechariah 3:1).
- He is the devil, the slanderer (Luke 4:13).
- He moved Judas to betray Jesus (John 13:2,27).
- He moved Ananias to lie to the apostles (Acts 5:3).
- He blinds people spiritually (2Corinthians 4:4).
- He seeks to harm believers (1Peter 5:8).
- He heads a celestial hierarchy of evil (Ephesians 6:11-12).
- He holds power over the unsaved (Ephesians 2:2; John 8:44).
- He performs diabolic miracles (2Thessalonians 2:9).
- He is the father of lies (John 8:44).
- He is a murderer (John 8:44).
- He is the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30).
- He is a fallen angel (Matthew 25:41).
- He sows tares and snatches away the Word (Matthew 13:19).
- He will be bound during the Millennium (Revelation 20:1-3).
- He is the evil one (Matthew 13:38).
- He is routed by Spirit-directed prayer (Ephesians 6:10-20).
- He is overcome by faith (1Peter 5:8,9).
- He hinders God's will in believers (1Thessalonians 2:18).
- He is the deceiver (Revelation 12:9).
- He is the dragon (Revelation 12:9; 20:2).
- He viewed Simon Peter as a target (Luke 22:31).
- He will end up in hell (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10).