

Themes from the Book of Job

James chapter 5 encourages us to consider the Old Testament character of Job:

“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord: that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (Jas. 5:11).

In our considerations this morning, we shall examine some the main themes of the book, in relation to it's central character: his identity, his character, his relationship with God, and his hopes for the future.

In Genesis chapter 46, we read of those members of Jacob's extended family which went into Egypt with him. Verse 13 refers to: “... the sons of Issachar: Tola, and Phuvah, **and Job**, and Shimron” (Gen. 46:13). Here then is a man called Job, who was of the sons of Issachar. It is impossible to prove absolutely that this is the same man being referred to, but there are a number of other details in Genesis which make this certainly possible. For instance, Genesis 36:10-11 identifies a man called Eliphaz, who was the Son of Esau, through his wife Adah: Eliphaz is also a name of a main character in the book of Job. And again, Genesis 25:2 describes the 6th son of Abraham by Keturah as “Shuah”, and Bildad, another character in Job is “the Shuhite”. Assuming these are the same individuals, it would appear that the setting of the book of Job is around the time of Jacob, and the entry of him and his family into Egypt.

Be that as it may, there are many principles that emerge from a consideration of this book, some of which we shall consider today. Job chapter 1 begins by describing the man who the book is named after:

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job: and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1).

Notice these three aspects of his character. He was: 1. Perfect and upright, 2. One that feared God, and 3. One that eschewed evil.

1. He was “perfect and upright”. The word for “perfect” signifies *complete*. With Job, there was no deficiency in his worship, he was completely devoted to the doing of Yahweh's will. Chapters 1:8 and 2:3 also echo this description. The Psalmist also described this attribute: “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace” (Psa. 37:37). We would do well to mark the man Job, and behold his example of patience and uprightness.
2. He “feared God”. Proverbs 8:13 provides a definition of this, which is useful for us to consider: “the fear of Yahweh is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth do I hate”. To fear Yahweh then, is to hate the evil aspects referred to in this verse, and it is evident from Job's speeches, that he did this.
3. He “eschewed evil”. This comes out again in the Epistle of Peter, which contains a number of allusions back to Job: “... he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace and ensue it” (1 Peter 3:10-11). Like Job, we must not sin with our mouth, but rather eschew evil in all it's forms. We must seek to do good, and seek peace with our Maker, as did Job.

JOB'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The first chapter of the book demonstrates the righteousness of Job's character – as we have also seen above. Not only was he personally “upright”, but he also offered Sacrifice on the behalf of his sons, that they might be forgiven for their sins:

“... and it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, the Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered Burnt Offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually” (Job. 1:5).

In these words, we see Job as a mediator and priest, offering sacrifices for the benefit of his sons. To some degree, his example points forward to Messiah, who offered himself for the benefit of others. Being a whole Burnt Offering, his sacrifice amply meets our need for grace and deliverance from our sins.

Job's intercessory role is alluded to in the prophecy of Ezekiel, when speaking of the degenerate state into which Israel had fallen, and the state of Jerusalem. Ezekiel groups Job into a category including Noah and Daniel:

“Though Noah, Daniel **and Job** were in it, as I like saith the Lord Yahweh, they shall neither deliver son nor daughter: they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness”

Even if Job were present in Israel, he would not be able to intercede on the people's behalf: even if that included his sons and daughters.

But despite the faith of Job, one of the main features of his speeches is that he felt that his relationship with Yahweh had been effected. Indeed, arguably it could be that he was more concerned by this than the physical afflictions that he had to endure. Just to pick out two examples from the account:

“... I have sinned: what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? Why hast thou set me **as a mark against thee**, so that I am a burden to myself? And **why dost not pardon my transgression**, and take away mine iniquity? (Job 7:20-21).

And again:

“... Thine hands have made thee and fashioned me together round about: yet **thou dost destroy me ...**” (Job. 10:8).

Job felt destroyed by the One to whom he offered his sacrifices. He was burdened with a sense of his need for forgiveness, and felt that for an unknown reason, his Maker had turned against him, and would not forgive.

By contrast, we have the words of Zophar, who claimed that Job was suffering as a consequence of certain sins:

“know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.

But then he proceeds to claim (by the use of rhetorical questions) that the ways of Yahweh are past finding out: his suggestion being that because Yahweh and His ways are inscrutable, Job would never be able to understand why He was so afflicting him, or what he had done wrong.

“Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection: It is **as high** as heavens; what canst thou do? **Deeper** than hell; what canst thou know ...” (Job. 11:6-8).

However, Zophar is the voice of unbelief. The voice of faith is that Yahweh is not past finding out, but His Ways are revealed in the pages of Scripture. So the voice of belief is the exact opposite to Zophar's voice:

“... the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise: Say not in thine heart, who shall **ascend into heaven** (that is, to bring Christ down from above). Or who shall **descend into the deep** (that is, to bring up again from the dead). But what saith it? The Word is nigh thee even in thy mouth and in thine heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach” (Rom. 10:6-8).⁴

Yahweh is not a distant and remote Being that cannot be understood: He has revealed His Ways through the Words He had graciously imparted to us. Zophar's voice of unbelief is that the Almighty and His Ways are past finding out by men: but men of faith can see his presence though the Word spoken. God is not far off, but a very ready help in a day of affliction. We, especially in this age, can readily access the Bible that Yahweh has provided us with. There is no shortage of the Word of God, for it can be readily obtained. There is no need to go to the extremities to obtain it, but we must have it within our mouths and hearts. By this means, we can not only direct our steps aright in the site of our Maker, but also impart it to others, that they might benefit from our studies.

JOB'S FUTURE HOPE

Despite his feeling that there was some rift between himself and Yahweh, Job set himself to look beyond the present travail to the glory that would follow:

“if a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, **till my change come**” (Job. 14:14).

“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet **in my flesh shall I see God**” (Job. 19:25-26)

It would appear that Job set his focus upon better days to come, including a bodily resurrection, and a change of nature that would follow. When he shall “see God”, it will be for his blessing, and the granting of a place in the Kingdom.

Job's hope was that in his flesh, he would “see God”. These aspects are picked up again in the first Epistle of John:

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of God: therefore the world knoweth not because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: **but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is**” (1 Jno. 1:1-3).

Notice the terms used here: the central person is Yahweh, and it is He who shall appear a second time, in the personage of Messiah, the Son in whom He is Well Pleased – not as in the Trinitarian fable, of course, but “God with us”, the manifestation of God in his Only Begotten Son.

Job appeared to recognise the value of his suffering:

“... he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job. 23:10).

His hope was to be purged and purified by his sufferings, so that the end result of his trying would be that he would “come forth as gold”. Peter also alludes to this principle:

“... the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of God that perisheth, through it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7).

Gold only reaches its true value in purity. Before it is purified, it does not reach its potential value, but when it has passed through the fire, the dross is removed and the gold emerges in all its beauty and worth. Even so our faith – which is much more precious than gold – will be developed by passing through trials, to remove the dross as it were. Then we shall come forth as purged gold – only more valuable, to become a devoted “treasure” to the glory of our God.

THE LATTER END OF JOB

Returning to James, which we cited at the start of this article, we read that “ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (Jas 5:11). The “end”, or conclusion of the matter then, demonstrates how that Yahweh is full of pity and mercy. The end of the book of Job relates to us a reversal of Job’s sufferings, and granting him a new family and the blessings of an abundance of goods once more:

“So Yahweh blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He also had seven sons and three daughters” (Job 42:12-13).

But these blessings would only come upon Job following a resumption of his intercessory role:

“Yahweh turned the captivity of Job, **when he prayed for his friends: also** Yahweh gave Job twice as much as he had before” (Job. 42:10).

Notice, he was only blessed after he prayed for his friends. Of them it was said: “... ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath” (Job. 42:7). Job endured not only the physical afflictions that he experienced, but also the sniping criticism of his so-called friends. They condemned him as being a sinner worthy of suffering as a punishment for what they thought he might have done. Moreover, looking at their speeches, we see that each one speculated as to what Job might have done to deserve his suffering. Perhaps a bit like those who sought to fabricate a false witness against Jesus many years later.

There is one final point to consider. Job resumed his priestly function and offered prayers after they offered up sacrifices: “... go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burn offering: and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly ...” (Job. 42:8). They had accused him of all manner of evils, and proved to be miserable comforters, all of them. They only added to his suffering in their harsh judgment of him. But yet he did not demand an apology from them. Sometimes when someone trespasses against us, we demand an apology from the before we can forgive them. But that wasn’t the example of Job: he prayed for his friends with a generous spirit before Yahweh, and that was when his fortunes were reversed.

In considering the record of Job’s suffering then, we see a powerful example for ourselves on how to deal with adversities. He patiently endured the pain and discomfort that came upon him from all sides, looking to the glory of the days to come. We must do likewise. It written that “if thou faint in the day of adversity, Thy strength is small” (Prov. 24:10). But Job did not faint. He continued to steadfastly trust in the power of Yahweh to save, and to deliver him out of all his afflictions. We have heard of the patience of Job: may we, like him, endure to the end, so that we might inherit a blessing when our Messiah comes again, and we shall be like him, seeing him as he is.

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