

Studies in the Book of Job #2 What the Book of Job Teaches about God

Intro: Every book of the Bible is ultimately designed to give us insight into God's nature and activity. Though the book of Job deals with Job, his suffering, and his friends' response to it, it is ultimately a book of about God. What does the book of Job teach about Him?

God is the omnipotent and sovereign ruler of the universe such that nothing happens that does not come under His permissive will.

All believers in God are confronted with the problem of innocent suffering and varying explanations are given. One solution is "finite godism". Rabbi Harold Kushner contends that the only solution to the suffering of the innocent is to affirm that God is not omnipotent:

God is good, argues Kushner, but "it is too difficult even for God to keep cruelty and chaos from claiming their innocent victims. But could man, without God, do better?" This position acknowledges the existence of evil and relieves God of the responsibility for evil in the world; but is it true?

The Book of Job seems to affirm the opposite. As creator God has the right and power to rule the world according to His will.

Job acknowledged the power and sovereignty of God:

I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted. (Job 42:2)

Even Satan acknowledged His sovereign control by seeking permission to test Job.

But what does it mean to say that God is sovereign?

It does not mean that God causes all that happens in the world.

It does not mean that God approves of all that happens in the world.

It does not mean that God is powerless to prevent all that happens in the world.

It does mean that God ultimately permits all that happens in the world.

Peter acknowledged this principle of God's sovereignty in suffering:

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. (1 Peter 3:17)

This should be our starting point in our approach to life's events and its suffering. All events under the sun come under God's sovereign rule and power.

God knows, rewards, and is delighted with the faithful service of all of His people.

You can't read the book of Job without seeing that God was in Job's corner. God had revealed the features of acceptable conduct and Job had embraced them faithfully.

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil. (Job 1:1)

Later Job in chapter 31 would flesh out the moral principles by which he had lived his life under the law of God. He had refrained from lust, told the truth, been faithful to his wife, treated his workers fairly, helped the needy, he had not idolized wealth or worshipped false gods, wish evil for his enemies, refrained from hospitality to strangers. God had revealed his pleasure with Job's actions by blessing Him abundantly. Satan himself acknowledged this:

Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. (Job 1:10)

And thus, God points out Job's faithful service with approval and delight.

And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." (Job 1:8)

God still seeks, blesses, and delights in our faithful service to Him.

It may encourage us to know this truth that God knows every effort of every believer and appreciates those efforts to serve Him! The Hebrew writer reminded the faithful of God's awareness of their obedient lives:

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. (Hebrews 6:10)

Though we should not overreach with this truth, the general teaching of Scripture is that God does indeed bless or reward the efforts of those who faithfully serve Him.

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

What lesson about God did James derive from Job's experience?

Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. (James 5:11)

However, it does raise a legitimate issue which the NIV Study Bible poses well:

"Humans are totally dependent on God for their very lives and well-being. That fact can occasion one of humankind's greatest temptations: to love the gifts rather than the Giver, to try to please God merely for the sake of his benefits, to be "religious" and "good" only because it pays. Satan's accusation of Job is that this is the deep truth concerning his apparently godly and upright conduct—that this is, in fact, the deep truth about the godliness of all righteous people. If he is right, if the godliness of the righteous in whom God delights can be shown to be

evil, then a chasm of alienation stands between God and human beings that cannot be bridged. Then even the redemption of human beings is unthinkable, for the godliest among them would be shown to be the most ungodly. God's whole enterprise in creation and redemption would be shown to be radically flawed, and God can only sweep it all away in awful judgment.

This was Satan's accusation to God concerning man. If indeed God blesses those who serve Him and makes them prosper, is it possible that human beings serve Him only out of self-serving motives?

God may allow His people to be tested by suffering as proof of the genuineness of their faith.

Clearly the book of Job teaches that God allowed Job to be tested by suffering to meet the accusation of Satan that Job's faith was not a genuine trust in God but a self-serving action based on material considerations. Such an argument could not be left unresolved, since it is a legitimate issue in man's relationship to God. God consequently allowed Job to be tested on this basis. And God acknowledged His pleasure with the outcome:

And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause." (Job 2:3)

Again Peter later acknowledged this same truth about suffering:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; (1 Peter 1:6-7)

And James extends the argument by showing that genuine faith tested by suffering may actually serve as a mean of producing even greater spiritual blessing!

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Even when we must suffer as a test of faith we can remember that God allows it not only because it proves our faith in Him but that the process itself brings spiritual blessing to us.

One may raise the question, Was Job better off before or after his suffering?

Conclusion: And so, these are some of the lessons that Job teaches us about God.

The introduction of the suffering of the innocent was an important part in God's sovereign rule of the world, the importance of which would not be fully understood for many centuries. God would send His only son in the world and in this world he would live without sin. Yet in spite of His innocence he would suffer greatly and not only suffer but die in His suffering. But in God's sovereign purpose His innocent suffering would bring about the salvation of all mankind.

**Would you have God remove from the universe the suffering of the innocent?
Without it, we would have been helplessly and hopelessly lost forever!**