

Studies in the Book of Job #3
What the Book of Job Teaches about God, #2

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 does not rule the world on the basis of immediate just recompense.

If one were to consider the pattern of God's activity in the world it might be easy to develop a simplistic understanding of God's rule.

The OT clearly presents God as blessing the righteous and punishing the wicked in order to provide general evidence of His justice.

Adam and Eve were blessed in the garden; but were punished when they disobeyed the Lord.

Cain was punished by being made to wander for his crime of murder.

The antediluvian world was destroyed for its violent crimes, while righteous men like Noah found favor with God.

Job's friends had concluded that God ruled the world on the basis of immediate just recompense.

If one is righteous he is rewarded by God. If one is wicked he is punished by God. Job's friends contended that Job's suffering indicated that he was not righteous and that God was punishing him by suffering.

One might reasonably argue that Job's friends are overreaching with what had become proverbial wisdom.

He who sows iniquity will reap vanity, and the rod of his fury will perish. (Proverbs 22:8)

The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked goes out. (Proverbs 13:9)

This is a warning to us as well not to overreach with proverbial wisdom! By nature proverbs are general observations about life, not rigid rules without exceptions!

When we ask the question, "What did I do to deserve this?" we are really approaching suffering from the same erroneous standpoint as Job's friends and Job himself.

Not only does the narrative of the first few chapters refute this concept, God's own words and action also testify that it is an incorrect concept of God.

And it came about after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. (Job 42:7)

God is just; but perfect justice is not met out in this life alone. Both Job and other wise men recognized that the righteous may suffer and the wicked may prosper. Perfectly balancing the scales of justice is reserved for the judgment day, not this life!

God's wisdom and greatness as creator and ruler of the universe place Him in a position of unaccountability and inscrutability to man.

Both Job and his friends appear to interpret Job's suffering from the same view of God.

Job's friends said, Job is suffering, he must be wrong.

Job said, I am suffering in innocence. God must be wrong!

Though Job never cursed God, he did in the pressure of his friend's insistence on wrong-doing suggest that God was acting improperly toward him. Elihu was justified in rebuking Job for that; but God would give His own answer to Job!

God's answer to Job and to all who question the appropriateness of His actions is to ask some questions of his own!

What do you know?

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, who set its measurements, since you know? Or who stretched the line on it? (Job 38:4-5)

What can you do?

Adorn yourself with eminence and dignity; and clothe yourself with honor and majesty. Pour out the overflowings of your anger; and look on everyone who is proud, and make him low. Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him; and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them in the dust together; Bind them in the hidden place. Then I will also confess to you, that your own right hand can save you. (Job 40:10-14)

What do you really deserve?

Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine. (Job 41:11)

When we simply contemplate our nature against His own, we come to see that we are not in His league. If we cannot know how He runs His world, upon what platform could we stand in criticism of how conducts Himself in the world He created.

God is worthy of love and faithful service because He is God and not because He always rewards faith immediately and materially or because He explains everything to us.

The story of Job turns on the question, "Can man believe in and serve God without immediate physical or material reward?"

Job himself answers that question by both his actions and his testimony.

Job's comments, though out of line, were not the thoughts of a man ready to abandon God for the darkness. Instead they were attempts to draw nearer to God and understand His actions. A part of his pain was

the seeming abandonment by God under the circumstances. He does not withdraw from God; but instead presses God for an answer. Yet even so we see that his faith in God's existence is not diminished: Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him. (*Job 13:15*)

God answers that question not by giving Job answers to His questions, but a fuller revelation of Himself.

It is interesting that the Lord never explains to Job why he suffered. He does not lay the blame on Satan.

Instead He gives a fresh revelation of His greatness and power and new display of His loving presence. These are enough for Job to simply succumb to God's purposes and trust in Him.

When suffering, instead of calling God to account, we need to love and serve God because He is God and has given us abundant evidence of existence and nature.

God has given sufficient evidence of His power and wisdom to submit to His overruling providence.

God has given sufficient evidence of His love and grace to trust Him when we don't know what He is doing.

Conclusion: These are just some of the things the book of Job teaches about God. But some of the greatest revelations would come later. God would show us in the cross the ultimate display of His love and leave forever answered the question we often ask in times of suffering, "Does He care?"

"I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross...In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness.

That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in light of his. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the cross which symbolizes divine suffering. "The cross of Christ...is God's only self-justification in such a world as ours.

Here is His answer:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (*John 3:16*)

