

## Lessons from the Book of Job

I recently finished rereading the book of Job in the Old Testament. The situation in Job is somewhat maddening. None of the human characters understand the whole picture. No one can explain Job's suffering accurately, including Job. They all start with the premise, "Do good and God will bless your earthly life; do evil and God will curse your earthly life." This is the worldview of Job and his friends. It is the lens through which they see and interpret what happens in people's lives.

Their worldview leads them to false conclusions. Job's friends look at his wretched condition and conclude, "Job has sinned and God is punishing him. If he'll only confess and repent, then God will restore Job's blessings." But Job knows he has not behaved unrighteously, so he concludes, "God has broken the rules. He is heavy-handed, capricious, and unjust." False conclusions all around.

Of course Job and his friends have no knowledge of the conversations between God and Satan that are recorded in the first two chapters of Job. They know nothing of Satan's accusations against Job or of God's allowing Satan to test Job's integrity. The reality is that Job suffers precisely *because* of his righteousness. He is being tested to see if his devotion to holiness is deep or shallow. None of the human characters in the story have any framework for understanding such a reality. It does not fit their worldview. So the bulk of the story is Job and his friends debating back and forth in their ignorance, Job's friends accusing him of sin and stubbornness and Job declaring his innocence and God's injustice.

Eventually the Lord steps in and tells them all to shut-up, that they do not know what they are talking about. Job realizes he has spoken out of turn and humbles himself before the Lord. The Lord eventually restores Job's good fortunes, but without any explanation about the reason behind Job's sufferings. Job and his friends are left to accept the mystery of God's workings. Their confident worldview must be thrown on the scrap heap.

So what should we conclude from Job in light of the full counsel of Scripture?

1) That which is true *ultimately* may not adequately explain what is going on *temporarily*. Ultimately it is true that you reap what you sow, that you cannot get away with disobeying God, and that devotion to the Lord brings blessings. Ultimately things will be set right; temporarily often not. We live in a fallen world where the Lord allows Satan much sway. Bad things happen to good people. Good things happen to bad people. We do not always have a good explanation, so be careful about trying to force each and every temporal matter into a framework of ultimate truth. It is not that simple.

2) We should humble ourselves and ask for as little testing as possible. Jesus actually taught us to do this in the Model Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." In other words, "Lord, keep me from the test! Keep the Adversary from poking around in my life." We should recognize

our weakness and vulnerability and pray as Jesus taught us. Testing is not something a wise person wants.

3) Whatever temporal matters we experience, let us remember God's expression of ultimate reality: *The bloody cross and the empty tomb*. These are what define us as followers of Jesus. These are our bedrock truth as children of the Father. These determine our destiny and our blessing. A perfect Savior suffered for sinners. Sinners are declared righteous on the Savior's merits. Those declared righteous by faith in the Savior are destined for eternal life with Him. In Christ we receive not justice, but grace. And it is this very grace that will sustain us in the ups and downs of our temporary sojourn.