

Two

THE TRIAL

1:6 One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.

The scene changes. ‘The heavenly beings’ (literally ‘sons of God’) refers to the angelic creatures. We are talking about the heavenly realm here, unseen to us.

WHO IS SATAN?

It is interesting that Satan should be among the heavenly angelic beings, but that is where he had his origin, as we shall see. Who is Satan? His name means simply ‘adversary’—he is the adversary of God and of humankind. He does not appear often in Scripture, thankfully, but when he does he is always the adversary. In the garden of Eden—he is not mentioned there by name, but the Book of Revelation identifies him as: ‘that ancient serpent, called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world’ (Revelation 12:9)—he deceived Eve, against the commandment of God, into eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which she did, and gave to her husband to eat—and so sin entered into the world, and also the judgement of death. That was the work, in part, of Satan—not taking away the responsibility of humankind for their sin, but it was Satan that beguiled us into that. He was opposed to God, so he tempted the man and the woman away from faith in God to be as he is—opposed to God. The thrust of his temptation there in the garden of Eden was, ‘You shall be as God.’ That is how Satan had set himself up—as God. He had not accepted that he was created by God as a son of God, as an angelic being. He looked at his beauty, and he said, ‘All of this is from me, and I should be God—I could do a better job of being God than God could.’ He wasn’t God, he never will be, and he never could be, because he is not God—he is created by God. This is part of his deception. He has set himself up, not just as the alternative to God, but as the substitute for God. He wants to displace God from His throne. So wherever he sees the glory of God—and where does he see it more than in the man and particularly in the woman—he will attack that, and seek to turn it against God, and to make it to be with himself in his opposition to God. That is what Satan did in the Garden of Eden—that is what he must do if he is opposed to God and is to try and keep that up. Continually Satan is confronted with the kingdom of God—the fact and the truth of God’s sovereign rule—and so he must build up everything he can to counteract that and seek to oppose it. So Satan is intent on detracting from God, and detracting from God’s holy sovereign righteousness. He has a compulsive need to somehow prove God wrong, and deficient, in order to justify his own rebellion and his consequent attempt to put himself in God’s place.

We know what that is all about. If there is someone in authority over us whom we don’t like being there, and whom we have decided to go against, then we justify that rebellion by saying that person isn’t worthy to hold that position anyway—they shouldn’t be there. And we find all sorts of reasons why that is so. Maybe your children have decided not to do something you’ve told them to, and they justify that by saying: But you’re a silly old parent anyway, and you wouldn’t know what you’re

talking about. That is what Satan is trying to do with God. That is what he must do, if he is going to justify himself in the position he has taken.

Satan here appears among ‘the sons of God’. Although elsewhere this is used of us as human beings, here it is used of the angels. That tells us what Satan is. He is one of the angelic beings. He is an angel, but he is a fallen angel. It is important that we see that Satan has been created by God, just as we are. He was given from God all the beauty and powers of an angel. God has not taken those powers back from Satan, but Satan now uses them all in direct opposition to God. We are going to see how foolish and misled that is. There are a couple of passages that give us insight into the fall of Satan, and are often used in that way. Both these passages in fact are prophecies that relate to earthly human rulers. Ezekiel 28 is a prophecy regarding the king of Tyre, and Isaiah 14 is about the king of Babylon. But both these passages set forth the principles and dynamics of the fall into sin of human beings and of angels, and their rebellion against God. So this can be very instructive, as we seek to consider what Satan is, and what he is about.

Thus says the Lord GOD:
You were the signet of perfection,
 full of wisdom
 and perfect in beauty.
You were in Eden, the garden of God;
 every precious stone was your covering,
carnelian, chrysolite, and moonstone,
 beryl, onyx, and jasper,
sapphire, turquoise, and emerald;
 and worked in gold were your settings
 and your engravings.
On the day that you were created
 they were prepared.
With an anointed cherub as guardian I placed you;
 you were on the holy mountain of God;
 you walked among the stones of fire.
You were blameless in your ways
 from the day that you were created,
 until iniquity was found in you.
In the abundance of your trade
 you were filled with violence, and you sinned;
so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God,
 and the guardian cherub drove you out
 from among the stones of fire.
Your heart was proud because of your beauty;
 you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour.
I cast you to the ground;
 I exposed you before kings,
 to feast their eyes on you.
By the multitude of your iniquities,
 in the unrighteousness of your trade,
 you profaned your sanctuaries.
So I brought out fire from within you;
 it consumed you,
and I turned you to ashes on the earth
 in the sight of all who saw you. (Ezekiel 28:12–19)

'You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created': that blamelessness, and all his wisdom and beauty, were the gift of God. 'Until iniquity was found in you': where did the iniquity come from? Not from God, but from within the creature. 'Your heart was proud because of your beauty': see what happens there? We take the gifts of God, and claim them as coming from ourselves and not from God. We take pride in them as being of ourselves—that was Satan's sin. Great beauty, and great power, but taken to himself from God. Iniquity was found in this being: God brought that fire out from within him, so that its full out-working could be apparent, and in that action the being is consumed and reduced to ashes, and we see the final doom of a creature that persists in going that way. That tells us something about how God's holy love and His wrath operates on the pride of fallen creatures.

The other passage is Isaiah 14. This relates to the king of Babylon, but it calls him 'Day Star, son of the Dawn', which was Lucifer, the Shining One, the Bearer of Light—a name often given to Satan (as in 2 Corinthians 11:14: 'Satan disguises himself as an angel of light'). We see from Isaiah 14:4 that the king of Babylon, like Satan, was a terrible oppressor of God's people. But now he has come to his doom:

How you are fallen from heaven,
 O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
 you who laid the nations low!
You said in your heart,
 'I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne
 above the stars of God;
I will sit on the mount of assembly
 in the far north;
I will ascend to the tops of the clouds,
 I will make myself like the Most High.'
But you are brought down to Sheol,
 to the depths of the Pit. (Isaiah 14:12-15)

'I will make myself like the Most High.' What was Satan's temptation to the man and the woman in the Garden of Eden? 'You will be as God.' Why did he want us to believe that? Because that is what he was setting out to be himself. Satan is not setting out just to denigrate God. He is actually seeking to substitute himself for God, because he thinks that he should be God, because he's so beautiful, so strong, so wonderful, and he hates God. But here we see also the doom of 'Lucifer': 'You are brought down . . . to the depths of the Pit.' See how foolish and how misled Satan is! He is not God, and he never can be, because he is a creature made by God, and so his whole enterprise is doomed from the start. He can only ever work within the limits assigned to him by God, as we shall see.

We could spend some time looking at some of the things Satan did in other parts of the Bible.

In 1 Chronicles 21, he incited David to go against God. It was probably because there was something amenable to that in David at that time—Satan was able to find some leverage there. David had a great kingdom, and David was perhaps very pleased with all the things that God had given him, even proud of them, in the wrong way. He wanted to see how he was going, and how his kingdom was going. 'Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to count the people of Israel'—to take a census. This was something that God did not want David to do at that time. Perhaps it

indicated some lack of trust in God: Why are you wanting to count all the people? Don't you know that I know how many there are, and I am looking after your kingdom? But Satan incited David to do that, and to go against God's will there, and David and the kingdom came under judgement for that.

If you look at the same story in 2 Samuel 24, you will find that it does not mention Satan at all. It says God incited David to count the people, and then God judged them for it. This is something that we will find in the Book of Job: that Satan can do nothing but what God gives him to do. So those two texts from 1 Samuel and 2 Chronicles are not opposed to each other. 2 Chronicles just goes through the mechanics of how it happened, but it was an action of God when He saw something displeasing to Him in David's heart, and so pushed him through into that, to release David from it.

Zechariah 3 is an interesting chapter, and one that repays study, because there we see Satan very much in his role as the adversary or the accuser. This is one of the few times he shows up—as I say, you don't want to get over-obsessed or troubled by Satan: he doesn't get all that much airplay in the Bible, so we don't want to give him more than he deserves, but we need to know him and understand his strategies, and not be ignorant of his designs (see 2 Corinthians 2:11). Zechariah 3 is another of the visions that came to the prophet Zechariah:

Then he showed me the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was dressed with filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." And to him he said, "See, I have taken your guilt away from you, and I will clothe you with festal apparel." And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with the apparel; and the angel of the LORD was standing by.

Joshua the high priest was 'dressed with filthy clothes', here identified as Joshua's 'guilt'. It looked like Joshua had plenty that Satan could accuse him of—the goodness we profess is filthy rags and naked shame. So Satan is there accusing Joshua. But God is saying, No—Satan, I rebuke you for that. And Joshua is reclothed at the Lord's command with clean best clothes. So that takes care of Satan's accusations. The filthy rags are taken away, and he is clothed in a clean turban, and good clothes. So, Satan, says God, I rebuke you! Satan couldn't, by accusing Joshua of his filthy rags, make a dent on God's goodness and holiness. It goes on to say:

Then the angel of the LORD assured Joshua, saying "Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. Now listen, Joshua, high priest, you and your colleagues who sit before you! For they are an omen of things to come: I am going to bring my servant the Branch. For on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription, says the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. On that day, says the LORD of hosts, you shall invite each other to come under your vine and fig tree."

'The Branch' here is the Messiah. And there is a promise that what happened for Joshua will be there for the whole earth. We have gone into this chapter to show that Satan attempts to expose God or to detract from God in His holiness and righteousness, but God does something to make his accusations of no avail. He

cleansed and reclothed Joshua, and He gave a prophecy at the time: I am going to bring a Messiah, and I am going to destroy the guilt of this land in a single day. So Satan will not have anything to point the finger at, and there will be peace—everyone 'neath vine and fig tree will dwell at peace and unafraid.

It will be good to bear that in mind as a background to the Book of Job, and Satan's role there. Satan's actions here were counter-acted by God justifying the high priest.

Turning to the New Testament now: Jesus himself was tempted by Satan. When this Messiah comes, you would expect that Satan would be all out to get him. And, as we know, he even tried to get Christ to worship Satan—that is how deceived and obsessed he was with himself as God—and Jesus said, No, you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve. Where Satan was able to find a foothold, say, in David, or in Judas, or in Peter, he could find no foothold in Christ. God's holiness and righteousness was utterly secure there.

Jesus also exposed Satan's nature as a liar, as the father of lies, and as a thief and destroyer. In John 8, to those who were refusing to hear his word, Jesus says: 'You are from your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.' Then in John 10, when he is speaking about the good shepherd, he says: 'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

In Revelation 12 we see how Satan is cast down from heaven onto the earth, and he is defeated there. How is he defeated? He is defeated by those who belong to Christ:

I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." (Revelation 12:10–11)

'The accuser of our brethren'—the maligner, the one who seeks to detract from God by accusing them—is thrown down. He is conquered by virtue of something God has done on the cross—'the blood of the Lamb'.

SATAN AND JOB

It is this Satan who comes now to stand before God and accuse Job. Not because he particularly has it in for Job, but because it is God Himself that Satan desires to accuse, to impugn, and ultimately to supplant.

1:7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

Imagine Satan just trudging up and down upon the earth—that is what he has to do. Remember how God appeared at the beginning of Ezekiel's prophecy, in a mighty chariot, that could appear here, and move to there! God does not need to trudge—He is the Lord of the whole earth. Contrast this picture we have of Satan here with the vision of the Lord in Ezekiel. No doubt what Satan is doing, going up and down the

length and breadth of the earth is trying to find fault with God, to justify his rebellion, and to gather some evidence against God. That is what Satan is always trying to do.

But he is not the only one. How many of us try to do that—build up a dossier against God, look out for some slip-up that He has made? And we say, If we were God, we wouldn't let this or that or the other happen: if we were God, we wouldn't let that man murder his children, or whatever; if we were God, we would do a better job than He appears to be doing. And so we seek to justify our own desire, that Satan has implanted in us, to be as God, to be God ourselves. That stumbles and falls to the ground—all our building up of that dossier against God—when we come across one really holy and good person who has faith in God. There are those who seek to set themselves against God all their lives, until they come smack up against a particular Christian person, and there's something about that person that really gets under their skin, and no matter how hard they've been trying to build up their dossier against God, this person is an offence to them, because it challenges all of that. Because such a person, who has faith in God, who is holy and good, who knows that God is holy and good right through, and in control of all things, and whose whole life bears it out—such a person is an obstacle to disbelief. Why else do some newspaper columnists keep having to slam the Christians? If what they are claiming about God is true, they shouldn't have to bother. But they can't seem to be able to leave it alone—they have to keep writing about it. God is holy and good, and in control of all things, and when we come across a person whose whole life bears that out, it is a real problem for disbelief.

So Satan has been trudging up and down on the earth—no doubt he has tripped up over Job already. He has noticed him, and God is only telling him what he already knows, and loathes.

1:8 The LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.”

Satan has his answer ready.

1:9 Then Satan answered the LORD, “Does Job fear God for nothing? 10 Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.”

Because of the stance that he has taken, Satan can only conceive that Job's faith is self-interested. Because that is Satan's own whole motivation. He cannot understand that someone could be as Job is if there was not something in it for him. He cannot conceive that anyone could love and serve God simply because God is as He is. Satan has rejected God as He is. So he thinks there must be something in this for Job. If Satan can show that Job's religion is really self-interest, then he would have that mark against God that he is looking for, and he would have a justification for his cynicism.

I wonder how we would go if that test was brought against us? How much of our religion is self-serving, or convenient for us? Where we gather on Sunday morning, at our church: that is where God in His holiness is to be worshipped. But we don't always take it that way. There are often people who have been going to church for years, and then their blessings are taken away, and things go against them—their wife dies of cancer, or something like that—and suddenly their faith is devastated. It is wiped out, and they never go near church again. If our blessings were taken away,

and things went against us, would our lives still bring glory to God, or would we sell out on Him? There is an expression, ‘fair-weather religion’—we’ll keep it up as long as it suits us, as long as things go well for us. That is often what is behind a very common phenomenon now of church-swapping: I’ll keep trying different churches until I find the one that suits me. (The real question must always be: ‘Where does God want me to serve?’) Or I won’t go to a church at all. Fair-weather religion is with us. It is a common approach. The Book of Job is the end of all fair-weather religion.

What will happen if all Job’s protection and blessing are taken away? If Satan could get Job to curse God, then that testimony to God’s goodness would be removed. ‘Stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.’

Note here that Satan acknowledges something that we do not always acknowledge: that all these things—the giving of blessings and the taking away of them—belong to God. ‘Stretch out *your* hand now’—God—‘and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.’ Satan acknowledges that it is God’s power to do that. Even Satan cannot deny that. Sometimes we say, the good things come from God, and the difficult things come from the devil, as if the devil is some great power equal and opposite to God. That is making the devil equal to God. It is giving him more power and credit than is due to him. No—only God is God, and Satan, like us, is a being created by God. Whatever delusion he is working under, he can never be other than that. There can never be an alternative God. There is only one. Here even Satan must acknowledge that if something harmful is going to happen to Job, that must first of all be God’s decision. ‘Stretch out *your* hand now’. Satan himself does set out to steal and kill and destroy—he is a murderer and a liar from the beginning. But the next verse makes it clear that Satan can do no more, even in that area of stealing and killing and destroying, than God appoints him to do.

1:12 The LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself do not stretch out your hand!”

‘All that he *has*’. What is Satan now able to do? He is able to touch everything that Job has, but he cannot lay a finger on Job himself. That is by the decree of God, and Satan is bound by it. Satan can touch anyone and anything that belongs to Job, but not Job’s person, at this point.

Now, what is God doing here? Is He being a bit reckless? Is He taking a risk? Maybe. Is He being hard on Job? That is not for us to say. But, as Satan’s attack is primarily on God Himself, not really on Job, so we may suppose that God believed He would be able to sustain Job in faith and righteousness through the worst attacks of Satan against him, and so prove the validity of His own faithfulness and goodness. If Job can be kept in faith through the worst testing possible, then God is vindicated in the face of Satan’s libels. And not only will God sustain Job in faith and righteousness, but through these very bitter attacks of Satan, God will bring Job through to a deeper, humbler and more magnificent faith than ever before, as we shall see, and so win a supreme victory, a superb victory, through all of this. Which is why we’ve got the Book of Job in the Bible. On this basis, I believe, God sends Satan to vent his scorn on God’s faithful servant Job.

I was once taking a group of people through the Scriptures in a particular course. We were all sailing along merrily until we got to 1 Samuel 16:14: ‘Now the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented

him.' When we got to that verse, that's when all hell broke loose. People would not have it that God could or would do such a thing. But that is what it says: 'an *evil* spirit from the *LORD*'. If that does not fit with our understanding of God, then we need to enlarge our understanding and acceptance of God's sovereignty over all things, even over the powers of evil.

1:12 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Satan, unaware of what God is going to do through all of this, actually believing that he can get at God through Job, having no idea how God could possibly sustain Job's faithfulness through all this, having no idea how God could possibly even bring him to a more magnificent victory than ever before through all this, he sets out, no doubt thinking that he can succeed, and he does a very thorough job of it.

JOB LOSES ALL THAT HE HAS

So we return now to the earthly scene.

1:13 One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house, 14 a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were ploughing and the donkeys were feeding beside them 15 and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." 16 While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them ; I alone have escaped to tell you." 17 While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." 18 While he was still speaking, another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, 19 and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you."

Remember how many oxen and donkeys there were? Five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred donkeys—all taken, and the servants slaughtered. Seven thousand sheep, and very many servants, all destroyed by lightning. Three thousand camels, gone, plus the servants. And the most bitter blow: all his children dead. If we think we've got problems, spare a thought for poor old Job—all this, all in one day.

What was Job's response?

1:20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. 21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the *LORD* gave, and the *LORD* has taken away; blessed be the name of the *LORD*." 22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing.

What a wonderful faith. But it is the faith that God had given to Job, and God is vindicated by His faithfulness to Job in enabling Job's faith to hold fast, and Job's grasp of who God really is. As far as Job is concerned, as we shall see in the next chapter, Satan does not come into it at all—he simply does not feature. 'The *LORD* gave, and the *LORD* has taken away; blessed be the name of the *LORD*.'

ROUND TWO

So to the next round:

2:1 One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. **2** The LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the LORD, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.”

Satan has not given up—he is still trying to gather evidence against God.

2:3 The LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil”.

Exactly the same words that God used in the previous chapter—nothing has changed.

2:3 “He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason.”

Note that God says all this has happened to Job without cause. We are often too quick to explain the presence of evil in the world. When something tragic happens, when something goes badly wrong, we think that if we can find a reason for it, some reasonable explanation, then we can handle it better. I think this desire to explain everything may be part of our desire to have everything under our control, to be God ourselves. There are things that we may never be able to control, or understand. But to give a reason for the existence of evil in God’s world is to dignify evil beyond what is due to it. There is not one good reason for evil to be in God’s universe. Take, for instance, our own sin. We are constantly looking for excuses and reasons why we have sinned—to excuse ourselves, or to put the blame on others, or on God Himself. We say, ‘It was an accident, or it was part of my makeup, or it was hereditary; my parents didn’t love me, or I was led astray’—anything but: ‘I did it, and there was not one good reason why I ever should have’, which is the truth. There is not one good reason why Satan or any other creature should ever have sinned against God. God never gave them reason. But that is what we have done, and things are not as they should be, and God Himself is moved in holy wrath against the creatures He has made and loves. Yet, even so, God is able to maintain in faith and righteousness the ones He loves. So God is still able to say, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason.’ So when these things happen, let’s not try to explain them too readily, not even in terms of the good that might come out of them. We need to hang loose to that. God says there is no good reason why Job is suffering, so that should be enough for us. At one level we can say that certain things happen because of this and that, but ultimately we must face the truth that evil is without proper cause in God’s universe, and we dignify it beyond its deserving when we try to give it some explanation. Satan is, in fact, without excuse in the damage that he does to Job. There is not one good reason, given everything that Satan had from God, why he should ever have rebelled or set himself up against God. And we human beings are the same. All evil, including our own, is ‘without cause’—without good reason. And in the end, the Bible tells us, it will have no place in God’s universe—it will be a nothing.

2:4 Then Satan answered the LORD, “Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. **5** But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.”

This will be the real test. I have admirable patience under stress. But touch me with pain, and I will explode! When we used to do the dishes together with my brothers, wearing shorts, so that our bare legs were exposed, if for a bit of amusement they began using the wet tea towels to flick each other, I would say, ‘Flick me with that tea towel, and I will not be responsible for my actions!’ In other words, I will use that as my excuse to cast away all restraint and give full vent to my feelings of venomous hatred! A few years ago I suffered a very painful condition, which required an even more painful remedy—if you have ever had an operation for haemorrhoids you will know all about it. (That is when a friend gave me the quote from Shakespeare: ‘There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will’! Bear that in mind reading the Book of Job.) We are so tender, and it is so easy for us to become wrapped in self-pity and depression when we suffer pain, because pain intrudes right in on our very being. Thank God that I was preserved by God in all of that, and am able to speak to you now as I do, out of what I was taken through at that time. Here it is: ‘Skin for skin! . . . touch his bone and his flesh.’

2:6 The LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power; only spare his life.”

Once again, note how Satan can do no more than is given to him to do by God. He can now afflict Job’s body, but he is not permitted to kill him.

2:7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

We need to be aware of Satan’s stratagems: no doubt he has some kind of perverse delight in those sorts of things, and he has many very devious ways of attempting to get us into his power.

2:8 Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

A potsherd is a bit of broken pottery, which Job used to give some sort of treatment to his boils and sores. Ashes were a sign of mourning and penitence. Here he is at a very low point. Yet his response is still consistent with his faith in God.

This time, even his own family is against him: Job’s wife, the one who is closest and dearest to him—the only one he has left, because all his children have perished—now she is against him (as Jesus’ own brothers were against him, when he began his ministry).

2:9 Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God, and die.”

Perhaps we are inclined to say the same thing as Mrs Job at this stage, because that is what we would want to do. But let us listen carefully to Job’s rebuke, and receive it into ourselves:

2:10 But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Note how Satan once more gets no look-in as far as Job is concerned. Job sees it all only as the action of his God, to whom he remains intensely loyal. ‘In all this Job did not sin with his lips.’ As in **1:22**: ‘In all this Job did not sin or charge God with

wrong.' In our next section we will start to see how Job responded, with his mouth. We need to bear in mind, as we look at that, what is written here. He had plenty to say, as we shall see, and he said it very directly, with no holds barred. But in all this, he did not sin with his lips. He was no 'martyr', in the wrong sense of that word. Reading the Book of Job, we need to hear the right tone of voice, and that is not always easy to do, because we put our own tone of voice into the words that are here. 'Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?' could be read in a 'martyred' tone of voice. But that is not the way Job said it, or meant it. For him it was quite factual: 'Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?'—*at the hand of God!*

As we go on through the Book of Job, we shall see how Job, in some small and often inadequate way, prefigures something of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, who 'when he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly' (1 Peter 2:23).

Prayer:

Lord, we do not want to be ignorant of Satan's stratagems, and we thank You that in Your word You give us all we need to know about him to identify and resist his attacks. But, Father, even more, we want our eyes and our hearts to be fixed on You by faith: to see Your sovereign hand in all things—in giving and in taking away—and in all these things to know Your keeping and sustaining of us in this faith by Your own faithfulness to Yourself and so to us. Keep us from sinning with our lips and from charging You with wrong. We pray for those who at this time have suffered loss or pain: sustain them through Satan's attacks by the mighty power of Your love, and reveal Yourself to them as their Father and Redeemer. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.