

# Why Be Good? | The Book of Jōb

## “The Set-Up”

Job 1.1 - 2.10

4.21.24

**(Job 1)** *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. <sup>2</sup> Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. <sup>3</sup> His possessions also were 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east. <sup>4</sup> His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. <sup>5</sup> When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.*

<sup>6</sup> *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. <sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? <sup>10</sup> "Have You not made a hedge about 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. <sup>11</sup> "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face." <sup>12</sup> Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.*

<sup>13</sup> *Now on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, <sup>14</sup> a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, <sup>15</sup> and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." <sup>16</sup> While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." <sup>17</sup> While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." <sup>18</sup> While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, <sup>19</sup> and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you."*

<sup>20</sup> *Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. <sup>21</sup> He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." <sup>22</sup> Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.*

**(Job 2)** *Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. <sup>2</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." <sup>3</sup> 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." <sup>4</sup> Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. <sup>5</sup> "However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face." <sup>6</sup> So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." <sup>7</sup> Then Satan went out from the*

presence of the LORD and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. <sup>8</sup> And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes. <sup>9</sup> Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" <sup>10</sup> But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

We use this *Season of Pentecost* (May 19!) to consider, "*The Work of the Spirit in the Life of the Church*" (the third paragraph in the creeds). Usually, we look at the *New Testament Letters* (in 2023: *Emotionally Healthy Life*; in 2022: *The Revelation*)

This year in the first part of the "*Season of the Spirit*," we look at how God's Spirit took an ancient man (and his friends!) on a journey into depth and maturity, growth, sanctification, wisdom (all the work of the Spirit!)

This will be our approach to *The Book of Job*. It's NOT primarily a long lesson on how to endure suffering; it's a book about God and wisdom and incentives (WHY you do WHAT you do). It's about how this man, Job, and how God took him on a journey to discover his own motives for serving God. It's a blown up, larger-than-life portrayal of a pattern of endured by virtually everyone whom God claims and to whom God commits Himself to parent, to train and school and sanctify (or make like Jesus Christ)... AND... of course, this being a Christian Church, we expect to see the CHRIST – Jesus Christ – to see Him occupying the space between the lines of the book.

Are YOU ready to take this excursion? For the next nine weeks we plan to take a journey into our own motives to discover what kind of wisdom governs our own lives?

Are you UP for a wild ride?... It's a kind of thought experiment about reasons to be good, about rewards for doing the right thing, punishments for doing the wrong thing? It's about moving toward a worldview that's, on one hand, less black-and-white and less predictable but, on the other hand, richer, more filled with wonder, even more playful. Are ya ready?

Today we want to set up the book... so important that we get the original story that will be dissected and mused on and analyzed ad nauseum through-out the book by "*the commentariat*," the pundits, the "friends" of the suffering man. **So, let's set it up:**

- 1. Set-Up for Wisdom**
- 2. Set-Up of the Book**
- 3. Set-Up for Our Own Journey**

If you think of the wisdom literature or wisdom books within the Bible – what probably comes to mind FIRST is *The Book of Proverbs*... but also *The Book of Ecclesiastes*... and this book, *The Book of Job*.

In a sense, *Proverbs* is the way it ought to be, and the other books are the way it is in a fallen, broken world. *Proverbs* offers us generalizations about how life works. If a person is diligent, his labors will be rewarded, his crops will yield fruit, his children will flourish, her home and business will be blessed... probably. And the lazy person who doesn't labor will find his fields overrun with weeds and thorns.

(Proverbs Ch 24) “I passed by the field of the slacker and by the vineyard of the man lacking sense, and behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; its surface was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down.” (Prov. 24.30-31). The takeaway from these Proverbs is NOT a universal guarantee of results – “do THIS and you will ALWAYS get THAT” – but rather, “There’s a much higher likelihood that you’ll have a better outcome in whatever the undertaking IF you work hard... THEREFORE, work hard.”

This is what the scholar, Tremper Longman, calls “the retributive principle” – diligence pays off, laziness meets with ruin; honesty is rewarded but deception leads to destruction; faithfulness and loyalty lead to fulfillment but betrayal, adultery, immorality ends in estrangement and emptiness. In short, the “*retributive principle*” is – justice: the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer.

BUT the norm of retribution– do good/get blessed, do wrong/suffer – isn’t immutable and absolute as if God is somehow required to honor it. The higher way of God is wisdom. Generally speaking, if you keep oil and water in your car, it’ll run well but sometimes for unknown reasons, the oil leaks out suddenly, the engine seizes up and the car of the diligent owner just dies. And when that happens, the wisdom of God, higher than the retribution principle wins the day.

Biblical wisdom literature can be broadly categorized into two types or sub-genres that go by a variety of names – prescriptive and reflective (one prescribing certain actions) the other reflecting on the lives and experiences of those who do or don’t fit the prescription categories. Others have suggested the words conservative “positive wisdom” and critical “negative wisdom” or “vanity literature”. *The Book of Proverbs* and some of the *Psalms* are examples of prescriptive and traditional wisdom and *Ecclesiastes* and *Job* (and some of the wisdom Psalms [Ps. 73]) are negative wisdom or vanity literature.

Another way of putting this is that *The Book of Proverbs* is wisdom for the young... *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* is wisdom for the old. So many of the proverbs are directed to “my son” (23x) and so many of the advice pertains to the decisions made by the young. On the other hand, *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* look back on “*Lies that life is black and white...*” (Bob Dylan, “My Back Pages”) They reflect on life experience that, like it or not, often the wicked do prosper and the righteous do suffer. THEY reflect on the discovery that I myself am more wicked than I want to admit and I have my own control-illusions... that don’t fit into the neat categories I learned in my youth.

Mature wisdom...real wisdom recognizes that, “When I was young – I was certain I had it all figured out – I was so adult-like, so consistent with all my tidy rules and categories and absolutes – I thought I was so wise... *I was so much older then; I’m younger than that now.*”

This second type of wisdom literature takes us on a journey, often painful and stormy, like a whirlwind, takes us from black and white, crystal clear, strictly “fair” view of life (that, lets face it, doesn’t always “work out”) and we move into a deeper, richer encounter with Wisdom the Person (1Cor 1.30), God Himself. So that’s the Set-Up for Wisdom Literature.

POINT TWO: the Set-Up to *The Book of Job* (Ch’s 1&2) is both tragic and puzzling. We meet a man, perhaps a ruler, even a king from Uz (probably Edom to the East). The names of Job’s friends/counselors seem to be Edomite names. They are apparently not Israelites, except for the young Elihu (Chs 32-37) who has the only Israelite name.

A man, a genuinely good man, “blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil”, Job is ridiculously wealthy. He’s called the *“greatest of all the men in the East”* and that’s important but even more important is the fact that Job is righteous. When his grown children join together for birthday celebrations, Job plays priest to his family and makes offerings and prayers in case the kid’s party goes out-of-bounds (B-52s).

Then, when the sons of God (supernatural beings, spirits, angels), when they come together for some sort of divine counsel before God, Job is held up as a paragon of virtue and God asks a figure called, literally, “The Adversary” – “Ha Shatan” (הַשָּׂטָן) “the satan”... God asks, *“Have you considered My servant Job... blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil”*.

The adversary or the accuser takes up God’s challenge and fires back an accusation against Job and against God Himself, *“Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about 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. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.”*

This is THE set-up to the book; a kind of thought experiment, “Why be good? Why do people ‘LOVE’ You, Lord? Isn’t it so that they will get stuff... get sheep and camels and kids and lands and reputation (greatest man in the East!). Lord, let’s face it – you have lots of friends because you BUY Your friends.”

So, God permits “the satan”, the adversary to test his slanderous theory. God permits the accuser to take everything from Job. In one tragic day, Job’s enormous holdings are taken – his livestock and all his employees. Then his ten children die in a whirlwind. *“Suddenly, I’m not half the man I used to be – there’ a shadow hanging over me...”*

Job shaves his head and falls to the ground and WORSHIPS God. He now looks like a newborn baby and says something both holy but ... also maybe ... a little stoic: *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.”*

But even if Job the infant strikes us as a bit spartan or austere or emotionless, instead of cursing God, Job does the opposite and cries out, “Blessed be the name of the LORD.” And then the narrator offers his assessment “Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.”

And then another divine counsel and the adversary, “the satan” is once again asked, “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.”

People sometimes say, “As long as you have your health!” So the accuser wants to take away that blessing from God as if to say, “He loves Your stuff more than He loves YOU... He lives a good life only so he won’t get sick... Make him sick and he’ll curse You to Your face...”

So, God says permits it. The accuser strikes him with boils from head to toe. And that’s where the section ends, Job sitting on an ash-heap (LXX: “sat upon a dung-heap outside the city...”) a kind of landfill or waste-dump.

He's lost everything, his children, his business; intense pain; head in hands, scraping his infected wounds with pieces of broken pottery.

A more pitiful site could hardly be imagined. But now... an angel appears... a suitable helper, as Eve was to Adam – Mrs. Job offers the sweet counsel: *“Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!’”*

But unlike Adam, when Job heard that his wife was in league with the adversary, he didn't listen to his wife's foolish advice and Job said to her, *“You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?”* That may strike you, again as sort of heartless or stoic but God's assessment comes again in the final verse: *“In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”*

It does remind us of that scene from the very start of the Bible – a garden lush and productive with the riches of God given to a king and queen... And then God makes an arrangement with the man and woman. And then the adversary, the accuser, the serpent, the “shatan” deceives the woman. She trades wisdom for foolishness: *“she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”* (Gen. 3.6)

Here in this book of reflective wisdom, the same characters (God, a man, a woman and the adversary) reenacting the same pattern and Job is better than Adam and would not align with the adversary...

And later will come a last Adam to reenact the pattern once again: the Bridegroom, come for His Bride (the Church). He'll be baptized INTO her situation and drenched in her guilt and shame. And God the Father will single Him out and point to Him... Mark Ch 1: *“and a voice came out of the heavens: ‘You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased. The Spirit Immediately impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.”* (11-13).

But unlike the Adam and Job, this final Adam, this greatest of all sufferers, Jesus Christ will indeed remain absolutely blameless. Job was relatively blameless but not perfect – but Jesus the greater Job will be perfect in all His thoughts, words and deeds. He fulfills the retributive principle for all His people – everyone from the beginning of time who trusts Him the Covenant Keeper.

To anyone who depends on Him is credited what He accomplished, His righteousness attributed to His people. I don't work for it – Jesus Christ already DID that; He did all the Law of God perfectly like a dance. AND He fulfilled the retributive principle and satisfied justice. I did the crime – He did the time.

He too will be found, a Lion shorn of His mane, crowned with thorns, mocked. Entirely righteous yet the Proverbs-type wisdom didn't work for Him... But in the deeper magic/wisdom, it did work for US. The righteous Sufferer found on an ash-heap outside the City, Wisdom crucified.

He appears in *The Book of Job*. We'll see our Savior's face on every page. *The Book of Job* is not primarily about Job – it's about God and it's about the Redeemer of God's people, Jesus Christ. Job later says these famous words: *“As for me (says Job), I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God...”* (19.25-26)

And that brings us to our last (and briefest!) point: A Set-Up of Wisdom Literature; A Set-Up for This Book and LASTLY: A Set-Up for the journey we're about to take.

Are you ready? This is an odd book! A lot of action at the start... and more at the finish but then in the middle all these speeches and dialogue. Scholars say it's the most difficult Hebrew in the Bible. A lot of Hebrew words appear in THIS book and nowhere else in the Bible. AND at the end, the speakers are all told that they're WRONG... so what parts of their speeches are we to believe and what parts are to be rejected as wrong?

If we're going to understand this *Wisdom Book* (not for boys... but for MEN!) – to get wisdom will require wisdom. We're embarking on a Spirit-led journey from the juvenile wisdom of Proverbs with its tidy categories and its emphasis on justice and results: "do this and get that". We may have to humble ourselves to say, "Ya know... I used to think I had it all figured out – I had it all together (and when I say "USED to have it figured out" I mean like three weeks ago!) but now, God is calling us to GROW UP ...and... become young like children (like Job looked like an infant wrapped in torn rags and bald like a newborn).

Along the way, we'll have to ask ourselves, "Why Be Good? – what am I hoping to achieve by being good? Am I loving God so that He won't smite me and take away my stuff... my job... my standing with colleagues and friends... Wouldn't it be amazing to have a higher, richer, more rewarding way of wisdom... What if God is taking us on this QUEST to open to us an infinitely better way of wisdom where the reward is not God's blessings but GOD HIMSELF?

I'll see you next week.