

MYSTERY AND
THE MASTER:
STUDIES IN THE
BOOK OF JOB

“MAN IS BORN TO TROUBLE
AS THE SPARKS FLY UPWARD.”
JOB 5:7



“OF ALL THE GIFTS THAT HEAVEN
CAN BESTOW UPON MEN,
FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST
IN HIS SUFFERINGS
IS THE MOST WEIGHTY TRUST
AND THE HIGHEST HONOR.
NOT ENOCH, WHO WAS
TRANSLATED TO HEAVEN,
NOT ELIJAH, WHO ASCENDED
IN A CHARIOT OF FIRE,
WAS GREATER OR MORE HONORED
THAN JOHN THE BAPTIST,
WHO PERISHED ALONE
IN THE DUNGEON.
‘UNTO YOU IT IS GIVEN
IN THE BEHALF OF CHRIST,
NOT ONLY TO BELIEVE ON HIM,
BUT ALSO TO SUFFER
FOR HIS SAKE.’
PHILIPPIANS 1:29.”

ELLEN G. WHITE.
THE MINISTRY OF HEALING 478.2

WELCOME TO THE BOOK OF JOB

Dear Reader:

All of us, sooner or later, are confronted with mysterious circumstances. Often they come under the guise of sickness or tragedy. As believers in the living God, the Almighty, this presents something of a mystery. How we resolve these difficulties speaks to our understanding of and appreciation for, the Book of Job.

Of all books in the Bible, this book speaks in an interesting way to the problem of suffering and the poignant and pointed question of “why?” This ancient work—the Book of Job—has touched the hearts and minds of millions through the ages since it was written. A famous poet of centuries past, Alfred, Lord Tennyson said of this book that it was “the greatest poem of ancient and modern times” (Wikipedia art. “The Book of Job” 8.3.2015). This literary masterpiece, in a combination of anguished and probing words seeks to make sense out of the mystery of life’s troubling circumstances. But these are extraordinary words. It is the backdrop to the words which gives such depth, pathos, and wonder to them.

Job is presented as a “perfect” man God Himself. The scene then shifts to the accusations of one called Satan—literally ‘the accuser’. Subsequently horrific tragedies fall upon first Job’s family and possessions and then upon his person. But through it all Job’s confidence in God—though severely tested—remains unshaken.

It is this confidence that bids us consider with deep interest the Book of Job. How did this man, so tested in so many ways remain faithful? How did he navigate the treacherous reefs of doubt, self-pity, fear and rejection so perilously close by.

With a prayer that your faith will respond to the teaching of Scripture, and that your mind will come to grasp something of The Mystery of suffering and submit to the love of The Master is our earnest hope and prayer.

Pastor Steve Cook
Chaplain **Services**
Wednesday, October 14, 2015



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“THE GREATEST WANT
OF THE WORLD IS THE WANT OF MEN—
MEN WHO WILL NOT BE BOUGHT OR SOLD,
MEN WHO IN THEIR INMOST SOULS ARE
TRUE AND HONEST,
MEN WHO DO NOT FEAR
TO CALL SIN BY ITS RIGHT NAME,
MEN WHOSE CONSCIENCE IS AS TRUE TO DUTY
AS THE NEEDLE TO THE POLE,
MEN WHO WILL STAND FOR THE RIGHT
THOUGH THE HEAVENS FALL.
BUT SUCH A CHARACTER
IS NOT THE RESULT OF ACCIDENT;
IT IS NOT DUE TO SPECIAL FAVORS
OR ENDOWMENTS OF PROVIDENCE.
A NOBLE CHARACTER
IS THE RESULT OF SELF-DISCIPLINE,
OF THE SUBJECTION OF THE LOWER
TO THE HIGHER NATURE—
THE SURRENDER OF SELF
FOR THE SERVICE OF LOVE
TO GOD AND MAN.”

ELLEN G. WHITE,
EDUCATION, 57:3-4

STRUCTURE

As was mentioned above, the Book of Job oscillates between a variety of words in several blocks. Here then is its masterful structure:

I. Prologue—The Setting

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 - K. Job responds 19:1-29
 - L. Zophar the Naamathite 20:1-29
 - M. Job responds 21:1-34
- C. Cycle Three
 - N. Eliphaz the Temanite 22:1-30
 - O. Job responds 23:1—24:25
 - P. Bildad the Shuhite 25:1-6
 - Q. Job responds 26:1—31-40
 - R. Elihu the Buzite 32:1-22—37:24
- D. The LORD's Answer 38:1—41:34
- E. Job's repentance 42:1-6

III. Epilogue—The Resolution

- A. The captivity of Job was turned 42:7-17

SETTING

Job opens in an idyllic manner. All is well, in the life of a particular man. Job is introduced in impressive language, almost unlike the introduction of any other person in Scripture. He is outstanding—“that man was perfect” (1:3). Not only was his moral character above reproach but he was blessed with a large family of “seven sons and three daughters” (1:2). The blessings he experienced were not limited to a large family but they extended to his possessions. He owned and managed thousands of sheep and camels and hundreds of oxen and donkeys. His dwelling must have been a settlement for it was a “very great household” (1:3). To sum it up, Job is described as “the greatest of all the men of the east” (1:3).

And this is the word of the living God that has been written to describe this man. Jesus said: “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). No exaggeration or embellishment is happening in this setting; this was the way it was.

Moreover, Job’s family was apparently a typical well-to-do family, even by today’s standards. The kids had a blast, each one on “his day”, probably the birthday of each one. And they didn’t celebrate alone, of course, each one went to the other’s house and invited “their three sisters to eat and to drink with them” (1:4).

But all of this feasting gave Job pause. He wondered whether in the midst of such merriment his children might not have done *something* dishonorable. So he performed what might be styled as preventive spiritual maintenance. He “sent and sanctified them” (1:5). He arose “early in the morning” and offered sacrifices for all of them (1:5). In other words, Job did what he could to ward off disaster by faithfully presenting his family to God and invoking His protecting presence .

“Thus did Job continually” (1:5). Faith with Job was not spasmodic, temporary, hit or miss, or casual. It was continual. It was literally daily. Job truly exemplified the care of God for all of His creation. “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber” (Ps 121:3); and again “Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Ps 121:4).

Job is so true to life. Just when things are going good you can “run off the road so to speak”. And it wasn’t that Job hadn’t anticipated trouble, for a little later on he says: “the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me” (Job 3:25). In spite of all Job’s efforts to avoid trouble, it seems that it was not completely possible. And he knew it.

And we know it too. Trouble. “Man is born to trouble” (Job 5:7). It’s as natural as sparks flying upward. But is there more to it than that? Where does trouble come from? Why do problems dog this world? And where is God in all of this? Is this the way it will always be? Are there any credible answers? That, my friend, is the very reason this book was written, to provide answers to one of the greatest questions that was ever asked—Why?

A D V E R S A R Y

“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth” (Proverbs 26:20).

Where does strife come from? Who or what keeps putting the ‘wood’ on this fire? Who is the instigator of this trouble? What is its source? Who is the adversary?

In a word it is *ha satan*. This one is better known as simply Satan. The adversary. The devil. The enemy. He is described here, in his own words as, “going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it” (Job 1:7). Peter’s admonition given much later adds the malevolent purpose for this restless quest: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

It is this devouring that begins to take shape in the Book of Job. The Bible is clear about where evil originates in this world. “Now the serpent was more subtil (wise) than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Genesis 3:1). This proved to be a deceptive use of a beautiful and intelligent creature to approach our first parents in a way to disarm their defenses. He began by questioning them about God’s words. This attempt to plant doubts about God has been refined over the ages into every conceivable way to avoid the truth about God’s character of love.

And so it was with this particular incident when a gathering of the “sons of God” was convened “to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them” (Job 1:6). It wasn’t long before his malice was revealed. He accused God of favoring Job by putting “an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face” (Job 1:10-11). He doesn’t bother to address the fact that Job is free to worship whom he will. He ignores that Job has chosen to ask for God’s blessing. He bypasses this and accuses Job of being deceptive like himself! He questions: “Doth Job serve God for nought?” (Job 1:6). That is ‘there’s something in it for him! Of course he serves you. Look what he gets for it!’ With these types of sinister and subtle insinuations he undermined the affection of a full one-third of the angels of heaven who eventually fell from heaven with him. (See Revelation 12:3-4, 7-9).

What should God do with such an accusation? The choices are very few. You could ignore it and by doing so appear to be giving it approval. You could *verbally* deny it but again it would simply be a battle of words. God is a God of deeds! And so He accepts Satan’s challenge and determines to *demonstrate* the integrity of Job and the basis of all true worship which is love, free given, no strings attached.

“Behold, all that he hath is in thy power” the Lord declares, adding, “only upon himself put not forth thine hand” (Job 1:12). And thus the contest begins.

It is important to note at this point that God does not ask for Job’s permission nor does he inform him of what is about to take place. In many respects what God is doing and what Satan is doing is something of a template for future time. God’s adversary is seen to be locked in a battle with God. The battleground is human hearts. Who will prevail? We all must decide.

Another instructive lesson is that trouble often has its roots behind the scenes. Things are happening beyond our ability to see or hear. These things can only be comprehended by the eye of faith. “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Trouble does not spring out of the ground. Evil does not exist in a vacuum. Jesus said: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

And in Job’s case it was devastating trouble. The thief came to steal his flocks and herds, his home, his children, his servants—all in a single day! The cumulative effect had to be horrific.

But Job’s response was not what Satan had anticipated. Upon hearing the terrible news “Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and **worshipped**, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly” (Job 1:20-22). This is powerful evidence that Satan’s accusations are false. But he does not yield the argument.

He returns to God with a second accusation: “All that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face” (Job 2:4-5). With God’s permission and the provision “but save his life” (Job 2:6), once again the adversary goes forth to his malicious work.

Now Job is struck with boils all over his body “from the sole of his foot unto his crown” (Job 2:7). What will happen now? “In all this did not Job sin with his lips” (Job 2:10). But as we will see the battle is just beginning!

T R O U B L E

Job is a book about trouble—coming from, seemingly, out of nowhere, for no good reason. But as the title page of this work makes clear “Man is born to trouble” (Job 5:7). Trouble seems to “spring out of the ground” (Job 5:6).

The curious thing about the troubles of Job are that they came from such unexpected sources. His own wife, in apparent despair at his physical calamity told him to “Doth thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die” (Job 2:9). His response is classic: “What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10). It’s bad but it’s not all bad. But you wouldn’t expect the adversary to use his wife to try and weaken Job. . .or would you? Trouble as we will see comes in subtle and through unsuspecting agents.

One of the ways that was not subtle was the affliction of boils that covered Job from head to toe. Boils involve a skin infection that becomes inflamed as the body fights the infection. They are painful and require considerable time to eradicate under ideal circumstances. While it’s impossible to determine the precise nature of Job’s boils they made him into a social outcast. Looking at pictures online I can understand why. Boils are like large pimples which disfigure the skin and appear as hideous eruptions. So uncomfortable had life become that “he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes” (Job 2:8). Even today charcoal has been found to work well with skin problems.

“Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him” (Job 2:11).

Some time had passed for communications in those ancient times took time to get from one place to another. Job had been suffering for some time when these three friends of his finally arrived.

Their reaction as they first encountered their friend was in itself a silent commentary on their take of how serious Job’s illness was: “And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great” (Job 2:12-13). I have read that it was the custom in those days when making this kind of a visit that decorum required that the guest (in this case the three visiting friends) *wait* for their host (Job) to speak first. They followed this protocol. But they could not restrain themselves from weeping with Job in sympathy for his dilemma.

Seven days pass and finally their host opens his mouth, which may have been a very painful act in itself! “After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day” (Job 3:1). He goes on to eloquently elaborate on this request. But notice that while Job wishes he had never been born and feels at this point that his life is a tragic mistake, he only curses *his day*—he does not curse *his God*!

Job summed up his first speech with these words: “I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came” (Job 3:26). Job had been living a normal life—he thought. He wasn’t particularly sheltered. He’d experienced the ‘hard knocks’ of ordinary life. He didn’t see himself diverging from the path of integrity and so making himself a target for this kind of problem. What is going on? He knows that the wicked are a cause of “troubling” (Job 3:17). But he has followed the Lord.

This is the beginning of an extended series of dialogues designed to shed light on this very question. Unfortunately Job’s friends approach the matter with a preconceived idea that is, to this day, quite pervasive. If there is trouble there must be a cause. And the cause must be with the person who has the trouble. Right? W R O N G !

This is the fundamental problem with Job’s friends and their attempts to bring him solace. In the speeches of these men there is a mixture of good and bad. They are highly intelligent and very articulate, which are good qualities in themselves. But they need to be informed by God.

Eliphaz, the first to speak, observes, if I may put it in my own words, ‘Job, you have helped others and encouraged them, now it has happened to you, “it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled” (Job 4:5). He goes on to say: “Who ever perished, being innocent?” (Job 4:7). He continues by stating the obvious: “Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; Yet man is born unto trouble...” [And now comes his advice to Job.] “I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: [so far so good; but there is more.] “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore ddspise not thou the chastening of the Almighty” (Job 5:17). He concludes by saying: Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good” (Job 5:27).

It is true that Job has worked for the downtrodden. This is brought out in considerable detail later in the book (see Job 29:13-25). He says: “Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor?” (Job 30:25). He goes on to say: “When I looked for good, then evil came unto me: and when I waited for light, there came darkness” (Job 30:26). This is the mystery of trouble for Job. He has done the will of God, both in the ‘letter’ and in the ‘spirit’ of it. But he finds himself in the darkness of inscrutable pain and misery. And he is being told to accept God’s displeasure with him! But why?

Job responds to Eliphaz’ words with an eloquent and probing appeal: “To him that is afflicted pity sould be shewed from his friend” (Job 6:14); “Teach me, and I will hold my tongue: and cause me to understand wherein I have erred. How forcible are right words! but what doth your arguing reprove?” (Job 6:24-25). At the same time Job does not reject the idea that he is a sinner in common with all humanity (see Job 7:20-21).

EXCLAMATION

Job's difficulties are compounded by the added burden of guilt that his friends are attempting to impose upon him.

In response Job reasons vigorously and defends himself eloquently—especially to God. “Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up. . . the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me” (Job 6:3-4).

To God he unburdens himself: “Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me...” (Job 6:8-9). But as depressed as he is he puts himself in God's hands. But his is a frightful condition. “My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken and become loathsome. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope” (Job 7:5-6).

Now comes the attack by Bildad the Shuhite: “Doth God pervert judgment? Or doth the Almighty pervert justice?” (Job 8:3). Job are you going to argue with God? And then he points the dagger of doubt at his friend: “If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes [earnestly], and make thy supplication to the Almighty; If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous” (Job 8:6). And, “Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers” (Job 8:20).

Job cries out to God because in spite of his inner turmoil his spiritual stability is unshaken:

- “If I had called, and he had answered me; yet would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my voice. For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause” (Job 9:16-17).
- “For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both” (Job 9:32-33).
- “I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. . . thou knowest that I am not wicked...” (Job 10:2, 7).
- “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him” (Job 13:15).

Zophar now has the opportunity to make his case to Job: “But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; and that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom...Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth” (Job 11:5-6). This is a similar approach to that of the other friends of Job.

Job's exclamations continue interspersed with the 'comfort' of his friends:

- “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: But I will maintain mine own ways before him” (Job 13:15). Job would argue with God about why he is suffering, as he is doing with his friends, but his core trust is unshakeable!
- “O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands” (Job 14:13-15). Here Job’s faith reaches beyond the grave itself. His confidence in God was stronger than death!
- “Then Job answered and said, I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all. . . if your soul were in my soul's stead . . .I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage [relieve] your grief” (Job 16:1-5).
- “O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour!” (Job 16:21).
- “Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book!” (Job 19:23). Job’s request was granted!

Now we come to one of the turning points in the book of Job. It is here that Job begins to perceive that a divine purpose is at work. It is still in the shadows but his faith rises to express in sublime language his faith in God’s ultimate work.

- “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:8-10).
- ***“Talk and act as if your faith was invincible. The Lord is rich in resources; He owns the world. Look heavenward in faith.”*** (Christ’s Object Lessons 147:0 emphasis added).

“Till I die I will not remove
mine integrity from me.
My righteousness I hold fast,
and will not let it go:
my heart shall not reproach me
so long as I live.”
Job 27:5-6

W H Y ?

This is the heart of the matter, isn't it? And while we are in on the matter of Job's problem—we get to see behind the curtain—Job doesn't know why all of these things are happening!

Perhaps it is to teach us that all of us will have our own questions to ask and the answers will be elusive. Perhaps it is a common thread for humanity. And perhaps it is to give us the assurance that *something important* is going on behind the scenes.

Even the Son of God on the cross asked “Why?” (Matthew 27:46). And there was no answer that came from heaven.

But, praise God, there *is* an answer and that is why the Book of Job was written. There are issues bigger than our pain. There are also forces at work in hidden ways. And there are answers. At least in part, as it is written: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Job is a human being. And it is normal, even for someone with the character of Job, to ask ‘why?’ Job repeatedly asks why?

- “Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?” (Job 3:11).
- “...why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself? And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be” (Job 7:20-21).
- “Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?” (Job 19:22).

Job asks his questions in a variety of ways:

- “Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net. Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment. He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths. He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head. He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree” (Job 19:6-10).
- “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them” (Job 21:7-9).

- To his friends Job asks: “How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood?” (Job 21:34).
- Of God Job says: “Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me” (Job 23:3-5).
- He hath cast me into the mire, and I am become like dust and ashes. I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not. Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me. Thou liftest me up to the wind; thou causest me to ride upon it, and dissolvest my substance. . . Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor? (Job 30:19-23; 25).
- In defense of his case in contrast with the wicked, Job says: “They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof.” “And if it be not so now, who will make me a liar, and make my speech nothing worth?” (Job 24:13; 25).

“If men could realize the blighting influence of doubt upon their minds, if they could but see into the future, they would realize the imperative need of cultivating firm trust in God and implicit confidence in his promises. They would not sow one grain of unbelief; for every single grain blossoms and bears fruit.”
Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, September 22, 1910 par. 6

“In the future life the mysteries that here have annoyed and disappointed us will be made plain. We shall see that our seemingly unanswered prayers and disappointed hopes have been among our greatest blessings.”
Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing, 474:1

“Oh that my words were now written!
 oh that they were printed in a book!
 That they were graven with an iron pen
 and lead in the rock for ever!
 For I know that my redeemer liveth,
 and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:
 And though after my skin worms destroy this body,
 yet in my flesh shall I see God.”
 Job 19:25-26

C H A R A C T E R

When God allowed Satan to unleash his forces against Job, He knew the man that was about to be tested. Job, as has been observed, was “perfect and upright” (Job 1:1). His was no ordinary character. And he was given no ordinary test. All of us are tested at some time but Job was tested as few people, except the Lord Jesus, ever will be.

But what is character? It is all the qualities that make a person what he/she is; but it is more than that. Typically it has to do more with a person’s moral nature. In short character is *what a person really is!*

Job’s character shines with luster out of the mist of nearly four millennia since he lived. His troubles are often the major point of his life but that is not all that the Book of Job depicts.

He was a wealthy and good man. Those two qualities do not often appear together. Because of his wealth he is described as “the greatest of all the men of the east” (Job 1:3).

His concern for his children is striking: “Job said: It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts” (Job 1:5) and so he offered sacrifices in their behalf on a regular basis!

Job resists the inclination to blame God for his trials and refuses to charge God foolishly (Job 1:22). Even when his own wife tells him to “curse God and die” he responds: “Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh” (Job 2:10).

The Book of Job is about the mystery of suffering but it is also about the man whose Master is revealed in his daily life. And it comes out in the midst of his pain. Later in the book he himself gives many interesting details of his experience with people who, like he now is, are experiencing unfortunate circumstances.

Consider these words which disclose the quality and breadth of his moral character:

- “The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy” (Job 29:13)
- “I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out” (Job 29:15-16).
- “And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth” (Job 29:17). This is a poetic way of describing Job’s habit of coming to the defense of the defenseless. Where Job discovered difficulty he made himself responsible to bring relief.
- “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” (Job 31:1). His character affected his inner being and through grace he was pure.

- “If I have walked with vanity, or if my foot hath hasted to deceit; Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity.
- If my step hath turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes...then let me sow, and let another eat...If mine heart have been deceived by a woman, or if I have laid wait at my neighbour’s door; Then let my wife grind unto another...” (Job 31:5-10). He subjected the wishes of his fallen nature to the will of God!
- “If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant when they contended with me, What then shall I do when God riseth up...what shall I answer him?” (Job 31:13-14). Job had administrative difficulties like all organizations but he did not minimize the concerns of his ‘employees’.
- “If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail...If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering...If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless...Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade...” (Job 31:16-22). This element of practical compassion for the poor finds its way into much of Scripture. Jesus makes it a condition of being accepted at His coming (see Matthew 25:31-46).
- “If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great...This also were an iniquity.” (Job 31:24-25; 28). While Job reaped the benefits of his hard work he never forgot his Benefactor and did not allow the gold to blind Him to the claims of its Maker.
- “If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him: Neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul” (Job 31:29-30). Job never gloated over the misfortune of anyone, even his enemies.
- “The stranger did not lodge in the street: but I opened my doors to the traveler” (Job 31:32). Hospitality marked this man.
- “If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom: Did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families terrify me, that I kept silence, and went not out of the door?” (Job 31:33-34). Don’t miss the significance of this revelation. Job was a sinner (see Romans 3:23) but he didn’t allow his personal failures to control him.
- “The words of Job are ended” (Job 31:40). But the influence of his life—his character— is with us to this day!

R E S O L U T I O N

Some things simply have no simple answer. In the short term. It's true that "No we see through a glass darkly [the margin says "in a riddle"] (1 Corinthians 13:12). Answers exist that might satisfy us at one point, such as when we are merely having an abstract discussion. But when real pain is involved, when it means *your family*, that is a different matter. We want answers and want them consistent with *our* understanding of God's position.

Ages ago, the prophet Isaiah wrote at the Lord's direction: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). This passage makes as plain as it can that God thinks higher and acts in more strategic ways than we can fathom or imagine. The Psalmist chanted: "O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep" (Psalm 92:5). "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Romans 11:33-36).

The good news in Job is that there is an answer in the short term. It's true that it only comes after the pain and uncertainty—and it is also true that it does not directly address the deeper question of 'why?' That question is further answered in future times. What is clear in the broader terrain of history is that we are not the objects of divine caprice. Pain is monitored and moderated according to what we can endure. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

God answers Job "out of the whirlwind" as it clearly declares in Job 38:1. But the "answer" comes in a cryptic or mysterious manner. God's answers take the form of many (seventy-nine, by my count) probing and personal questions. The Lord asks Job questions from the world of nature. From the beginning of this blizzard of interrogation it becomes clear that it will not be easy for Job: "Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding" (Job 38:4).

The question naturally arises: Why does God answer Job in this manner? At the foundation of our relationship with God—in this world at least—is faith. Since God is dealing with a very astute individual, one of His children that is of exceptional spiritual and intellectual ability, He treats Him to a round of

intense and enlightening questions. He takes Job back to the beginning. Job (and the author of Job) is certainly aware of Creation. The first great question that the Lord asks of Job is “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding” (Job 38:4). The answer to this and the answer to all of the rest of the questions with which Job is peppered is. . . ‘I was not there. I do not know. I can only guess.’ And so on.

All of these questions speak to our limitations. And they speak to God’s unlimited knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and power. He always knows what He is doing.

Finally Job grasps the significance of God’s wisdom in relation to his personal problem. God knows. He is aware of all things. Nothing can touch us without His permission. He is as involved in the flight of the eagle (Job 39:27) as in the wings of the peacock (Job 39: 13). God can send lightnings (Job 38:35) and loose the bands of Orion (Job 38:31).

Job sees this. And he is moved to say: “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6).

Why does Job feel the need to repent? In God’s presence Job sees, not only the characteristics of God but he sees himself. And he has nothing of which to boast. Perhaps he feels as though he could have exercised more faith in the storm of trials through which he has passed. Job has now come to rely—for good or bad, whether he understands all things or not!—upon the Lord.

What a place to be! We don’t need answers to have rest in Jesus! We don’t need to know what is going on. We need to know God. We need to behold His the greatness of His love and the limitations of our understanding. We need to cultivate confidence toward Him when life seems to lead us down a dead end street. In the hands of our loving and all-wise God there are no “blind alleys” or insurmountable circumstances. “And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted” (Isaiah 49:11).

The Lord then heard the prayers of His servant in behalf of his friends! “And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before” (Job 42:10). His family now came to him and fellowshipped with him and “bemoaned him, and comforted him” and even gave him gifts of money and gold (Job 42:11). “So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning” (Job 42:12). So it will be with all who trust the Lord and let Him write the concluding chapters of their experience.

“THE LORD'S CARE
IS OVER ALL HIS CREATURES.
HE LOVES THEM ALL
AND MAKES NO DIFFERENCE,
EXCEPT THAT HE HAS
THE MOST TENDER PITY
FOR THOSE WHO ARE CALLED
TO BEAR LIFE'S HEAVIEST BURDENS.
GOD'S CHILDREN MUST MEET
TRIALS AND DIFFICULTIES.
BUT THEY SHOULD ACCEPT THEIR LOT
WITH A CHEERFUL SPIRIT,
REMEMBERING THAT
FOR ALL THAT THE WORLD
NEGLECTS TO BESTOW,
GOD HIMSELF WILL MAKE UP TO THEM
IN THE BEST OF FAVORS.”

ELLEN G. WHITE,
THE MINISTRY OF HEALING, 199:3

