

01b JOB

Let's begin our study proper of the Book of Job. I have been in studies where the introduction could take three or four nights before you ever got to the first verse, but I do try to at least shoehorn them into one session. But we have an idea of the historic framework.

We're in the late days of the patriarchs by almost any measure. This is a very ancient account. I am going to argue and maintain that Moses is responsible for our copy of this story, making it into the era when it could be included in the canon as the human agent.

Obviously, God intended for it to be here. And we know that we are in for a treat because this is a very wonderful piece of literature. Secular scholars have recognized that it's great, as have obviously biblical scholars.

And as we begin, we're going to find that the first section is the prologue. If you have any sort of a study Bible there, you may have an outline of the Book of Job. And virtually all outlines begin with chapter 1, verse 1 through 2.13 as the prologue.

This is going to set the stage. It is going to introduce the main character of the book, Job. This is going to be prose narrative.

There are two fundamental things we have to know to make sense out of this book. And that's what we're going to get in the prologue. First of all, Job is a righteous man.

If you don't have that information, this book is going to unravel on you. Job is a righteous man. Secondly, his suffering is undeserved.

He has not brought down the wrath and judgment of God on himself because of something that he has done. I'm being a master of the obvious here, but those are really critical pieces of information. And it's especially useful to us because one of the first things that tends to happen when things go wrong in our lives is we immediately and rightfully question whether we are in the faith.

Have I messed up in some way and I am now experiencing the leading edge of the wrath of God? Am I suffering because I have messed up? Well, before we ever get out of the starting gate here, we know from the book of Job that it is possible for a righteous person to suffer in an undeserved kind of way, i.e., suffering that is other than for discipline, other than for judgment. Right away, we're going to discover this. Job is a righteous man.

His suffering is undeserved. And this is with God's permission. This is at God's behest.

God is in this undeserved suffering. Some might argue, well, sure, righteous people can suffer and it's because God is impotent or God is busy or God is elsewhere or God is not really God. Not at all.

This is a part of God's plan and purpose. From those really three essential facts, Job is righteous, his suffering is undeserved, and God is in it, that's what generates this book. That's what drives the dialogue and the poetry that we're going to encounter from now on.

This issue of undeserved suffering by a righteous man sponsored by God, or at least allowed by God, is going to be viewed differently by the different major characters. Job is going to see it one way. Job's wife is going to see it another way.

Satan has hopes that it's going to accomplish a certain objective and have a certain outcome. God, being God, has his purpose and his objective and his knowledge of the outcome. The four friends are going to view this suffering and have a take on the explanation or the rationale or the meaning of a man who, by all accounts, appears righteous, suffering.

So, this is what launches us. Let's take a look at verse 1. There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. And seven sons and three daughters were born to him.

Also, his possessions were 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. Well, the first thing we find out is that the area in which this takes place is the land of Uz. Lamentations chapter 4 and verse 21 gives us a clue where it says... Who wrote Lamentations, by the way? Jeremiah.

Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom. This is Lamentations 4.21. Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz. The cup shall also pass over to you, and you shall become drunk and make yourself naked.

Unfortunately, we can't pursue that angle. But we have Edom and Uz set in parallel here in this verse. The only other occurrence of Uz as a place name is also from Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 25.20, where he's talking about the mixed multitude, the kings of the land of Uz, the kings of the land of the Philistines, and he goes on to name them. But there's no clue there of where Uz is, but we do have it in Lamentations. The personal name Uz, as I mentioned before, occurs in Edomite genealogy, Genesis 36.28. One of the sons of Dishon is Uz, and this is repeated for us in 1 Chronicles 1.42. Most of the personal names in Job seem to have an Edomite connection or an Edomite point of reference.

We'll find this out when we get a little further in, when we get the friends introduced. The personal name Uz in Genesis 22.21 is linked with Buz. You've got Uz and Buz, his brother.

And all of this appears in Jeremiah 25, associated with Dedan and Tema, towns in northwest Arabia, not far from Edom. So, this puts us in the locale. We know where Job is living.

There is a tradition also from the Septuagint, Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, circa 200 B.C. The Septuagint appendix to the Book of Job has a tradition that Uz was located on the borders of Edomia and Arabia, which is in the same general area. Now, why is this important? Is the account historical or is it a fable? Many commentators say, well, this is just a legend. It's an Aesop fable.

It's imaginary. It's fictional. The more clues we have to the historicity of the place and the parties involved, particularly the raiders and the locales and the names and so on, the more we find that this is tied to a place and a time in history.

The text tells us that Job is blameless. In Hebrew, this means he is without moral blemish, morally whole. And it says he's upright, and this literally means straight.

What does this connote? He does not deviate. He's consistent. Upright has the idea within it, the implication of consistency.

You're straight and you don't deviate. This, by the way, is one of the most difficult things for believers to maintain is consistency. In the New Testament, Paul says you ran well.

Who hindered you from essentially finishing the race? Jesus talks to the church at Ephesus and says you've lost your first love. Everybody starts well at the beginning of a race. But who is it that maintains their pace, maintains their consistency, and finishes well? We're going to see that even though there are some bumps and bruises along the way here, Job is going to finish well, and he starts well.

He is a consistent believer. He's blameless. He doesn't involve himself in things that are of a shady nature.

And he is upright. He is consistent in maintaining that blamelessness. Also, it tells us he fears God and shuns evil.

These are not always companions. There are people who fear God, but they don't shun evil. There are people who shun evil, but they don't fear God.

A lot of people who shun evil say, well, I don't see why this mean and vindictive God is going to do something bad to me just because I don't feel like paying attention to Him or His Word or accepting His Son as my Savior. I'm an upright person. I'm moral.

I'm as good as anybody else. I'm better than a lot of Christians I know. I shun evil.

I don't cheat on my taxes. I don't cheat on my wife. I don't do anything bad.

I'm better than most. So, what's the problem? These are two separate issues, aren't they? To shun evil and to fear God. Remember in Hebrews chapter 6, what is the foundation of Christian

life? Change of mind away from dead works, shun evil, and faith toward God, fear God.

Both of those elements have to take place. Now, how easy is it for us, going through the day, doing the things we do, hitting our marks, being where we're supposed to be, accomplishing what has to be done in a timely manner, how often do we stop and think, well, let's see, am I shunning evil? Hmm, am I fearing God? These aren't really the kind of things that you can put on your to-do list and check off at the end of the day, are they? These are behavior patterns. These are policies.

This goes to our thinking. Remember my personal way of organizing human thinking? Into goals, values, and priorities, right? How can we tell if we're shunning evil and fearing God? It's not going to be by analyzing individual episodes. It's going to be by looking at our goals.

The broad direction that we are trying to head in, that's where that analysis is going to bear fruit. Where we stumble and fall and pick ourselves up all the time in the short term, but in the long term, if we want to shun evil and fear God, we have to look at our goals. What am I really trying to accomplish? Why am I going through all of this? What's the point? What is my goal? What are my values? What do I spend my time on? Not what do I wish I spent my time on.

What do I tell others I spend my time on? Where do I actually spend my time? That is a good indication of priorities. We say, oh, my family comes first. Well, is the time spent? My marriage comes first.

Is the time spent? Oh, Bible class and Bible study come first. Is that where the time is spent? Well, love for God, my relationship with the Lord, my spiritual life, that comes first. Is the time spent on it? Do we carve out time and say, this is just as important as a dental appointment or getting my car to the garage or paying my bills and not being late and keeping up my credit? Is it a priority? If it's a priority, we'll spend the time.

We'll make the time. We'll carve out the time. Those of you who show up for Bible class night after night, week after week, month after month, that's a reflection of your priorities.

Goals, priorities, values. What is meaningful? What is attractive? What are we weighing and finding meritorious and worthwhile? Do we value the opinions of others? And if so, which others? Do we value the opinion of God? Do we value the judgment of Scripture as it reflects the opinion of God? Do we value financial security? Do we value personal relationships? Do we value the good opinion of those who are close to us? Do we value professional attainment or popularity or the appearance of prosperity? There are people who will knock themselves out getting just exactly the right something to look a certain way or make a certain impression whether it's with their house or their car or their apparel. I've told you before and it really stuck in my mind.

I used to overhear as I'd be working on computers, you're down under somebody's desk trying to fix something and these ladies are chatting and one of the executives of the company walks by

and somebody starts making remarks estimating how much he spent on his suit or how much he spent on his shoes. And I'm sure that when I left they said, well, I can tell where he got his pants and his shoes. He's shopping at the Sears on sale or Goodwill or something.

But you know when you hear people freely remarking and either, you know, here's somebody that's really kind of obnoxious but they wear an \$800 suit and a \$300 pair of shoes and that's all the people talk about. And then here's somebody else that's good as gold and working their fingers to the bone but all people talk about is, oh, you know, stripes with checks or something. You know, something's the matter with the way they look or they're, you know, well, why doesn't he do something about this or why doesn't she do something about that? This is values.

What do you consider important? What do you consider worthwhile? That's going to, all of these are interrelated, right? Things that you value, you're going to prioritize. Things that you value are going to become a part of your goals. It all interacts.

We find out a lot about Job just from this one short little set of statements. He is blameless and upright. He fears God and shuns evil.

Very short, very succinct, but it tells us a lot about him. It says, seven sons and three daughters were born to him. Now, these numbers have ever been significant.

How many times do we run across the number seven and the number three? Now remember, this is before the Mosaic Law. It's before the Bible is in writing. How was the Word of God available to believers before Moses? There wasn't a scrap, so far as we know, of written scripture.

And yet, people are running around living lives and having dinner with God and fighting battles and claiming His promises. How did they do that? Well, a lot of it was oral tradition. A lot of it was fathers telling sons as they would exercise their family priesthood.

Another one of the clues to the day of the book of Job is that he exercises the patriarchal priesthood. He is the father and the head of the household, even though his sons and daughters appear to be grown at this point because they are having feasts in their own houses and so on. He offers sacrifices on their behalf.

Patriarchal family priesthood. This is what Abraham did and what Isaac did and what Jacob did. So, seven sons, three daughters.

These numbers resonate. These numbers were memory aids. They were mnemonics.

They were helpful in remembering things that God had said. And there is a lot of this that is probably now lost to us. How did Abel know what kind of sacrifice to offer? How did Abraham or Noah or the other patriarchs know what kind of sacrifices to offer and how to perform those sacrifices? There is nothing in Genesis telling us how they knew that.

They just knew. There was information available to them that is not available to us. And I would suggest to you that even in these early days, these numbers speak of completeness.

What do you get when you look at the number seven? Do you think Job knew the story of creation? We are going to find out as we go through the book that he very definitely did and so did his friends. Do you think that they understood the strength of the number three? Two is better than one and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken and that sort of thing. What do you get when you add seven and three together? You get ten.

Ten is a significant number. Seven is a significant number. Three is a significant number.

And this is almost too ideal. One of the reasons people suggest this is a legend is, well, look at this. Seven sons.

There are proverbs that say, well, she will be better for you than seven sons. This implies and sums up His blessing from God. Children are an inheritance from the Lord and the fruit of the womb is His reward.

And seven sons and three daughters, this is the suggestion here is this is an act of God. His possessions, and look at the numbers, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels. Add those together, what do you get? Ten.

500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys. Add that together, what do you get? Ten. What is the number of completeness? How many fingers on both hands? Ten.

Your family is complete. You've got ten children. Your sheep and your camels are complete.

You've got 10,000. Your yoke of oxen and your female donkeys are complete. You've got ten hundreds.

Right? It's significant. It means something. And a very large household so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

You'll note there, people, this is sons, the sons of the East. Where is Abraham from? Where is Ur of the Chaldees? East. He's the son of the East.

So is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They're all sons of the East. Now, his sons would go and feast in their houses each on his appointed day.

So these are grown sons. They would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. So it was when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them.

And he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them

all. For Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus Job did regularly.

Now, this is the first ripple in our otherwise completely clear water in my view. I haven't found anybody else who finds this troubling. But I do.

You know why? How does the family priesthood work? You are the father and you offer sacrifices for all those who dwell in your tent or all those who live in your house. These sons no longer live in Job's house. They have households of their own, don't they? To which they can invite their other six brothers and their three sisters.

It doesn't say anywhere that the sons are offering sacrifices. And yet they are heads of household. Esau was still alive when Jacob started traveling around.

When Jacob was out from under his father Esau's tent, what's the first thing he does when he gets up there to Bethel? He builds an altar and offers a sacrifice. He's not in his father Isaac's tent anymore. And so now he's responsible for his own sacrifices.

These sons don't seem to have any participatory action. Job doesn't say, I better go talk to my sons and make sure they sacrifice if it may be that they have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Job seems to think, well, I'll offer a sacrifice on their behalf and we're all good to go.

Not a major blip on the radar, but something to note. Job is continuing to do something for his sons that one could argue they should be doing for themselves at this point. It also is clear that the three daughters are unmarried.

There do not appear to be any grandchildren in this account. It doesn't even indicate that the sons are married, although one would assume that they are. Otherwise, why would they have their own house? But there's no daughters-in-law mentioned here.

We just don't know if they were present or not. But typically, sons didn't set up their own household until they were married. But the sisters, the fact that they come to their brothers' feasts would suggest that they are unmarried.

And so, my whole point in directing attention to this is there is a kind of incompleteness. There is a kind of immaturity not coming to fruition, not coming to completion in this generation of Job's children. There is a stopping point for this generation.

Seven sons, three daughters, but that's as far as we get. Now, keep your finger in chapter 1 and turn over to the end of the book. In Job chapter 42, verse 16, after this, Job lived 140 years and saw what? His children and grandchildren for four generations.

There is the notation a few verses above this. He has seven more sons, three more daughters, and we have their names. The names of the three daughters.

In all the land, they found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. Nothing said about inheritance for the first set of children.

Nothing said about children for the first set of children. Nothing said about marriage for the first set of children. So, there's a contrast here.

This is a pattern. This is a foreshadowing, I think, and one of the reasons that Job has been studied as casting light on the history of Israel. Think about the first generation of Israelites to come out of Egypt and they don't have an inheritance.

They don't fulfill their potential. They are cut off as it were. And then there is a second generation that does go in the land, that does proliferate in that sense.

Think about the relationship of Israel and the church. God's first generation of people, the nation of Israel, as David says about his own house, there was a lot of potential there, but it really didn't sprout. It didn't really blossom.

That potential winds up being cut off because it just doesn't bear the fruit. It doesn't come to the fulfillment. It doesn't receive the inheritance initially that it was supposed to have.

And so, then there is a different generation of the people of God who spring up and exploit and take advantage. The church compares to the generation, the second generation, that gets circumcised as soon as they cross the Jordan and invades the land and seizes and lays hold of it, where the first generation did not. And so, you have these two generations of Job's children.

And this first generation seems to be very dependent on Job. They don't have an independence and they don't have a destiny and an inheritance and really a future at this point. It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.

Thus, Job did regularly. By the way, does it say anything about Job sacrificing for the second generation of children? Well, these verses introduce Job and his family. There are some things that are implied.

It's implied because he's got ten children. He's got a wife. She's not mentioned.

The sons have households. It's implied that they have wives, but they're not mentioned. So, Job is a family priest functioning on behalf of these eleven other people at a minimum.

He's prosperous. He fears God. He shuns evil.

That's section one of the prologue. Beginning in verse six, we have section two. Now, there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.

What an amazing statement. Out of nowhere. It doesn't say, now, let me explain to you that God is up in heaven, and there are these other creatures up there called the sons of God, and there was this time back when, when some of them became adversaries of God.

No introduction. No background. No context.

No frame of reference. It just says there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord. This, by the way, is another one of those uses of yom that is nonspecific.

You can't really argue that this is a 24-hour day. It means there was a time. There was a point at which this took place.

The sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord. Without saying anything else, what does this put in your mind? Why? That's what comes to my mind. A. Who are the sons of God? B. Why do they need to present themselves to God? Well, this to me is a wonderful little verse.

Half a verse. Remember Genesis 6. The sons of God saw the daughters of men. They were fair to look upon.

They took wives of all whom they chose. And there's this endless debate about, well, who are the sons of God? Maybe this is the unfallen angels. Maybe this is the fallen angels.

Maybe this is the godly line of Seth. And the daughters of men are the ungodly daughters of Cain. These are the most popular views for Genesis chapter 6. It is plain as day in Job, which is essentially a contemporaneous writing with the writing of Genesis, that when somebody in those days said sons of God, who were they talking about? Somebody who can present himself before the Lord.

And that doesn't mean the godly line of Seth. They're up there in heaven presenting themselves before God. They're standing there side by side with Satan, viewing God, talking with God.

These are angels. The sons of God are angels. So, there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord.

There is activity in heaven. There is accountability in heaven. The sons of God have to present themselves before the Lord.

Why? Does God just wonder where they were? Kind of lost track of you. Please show up. I just want to get a head count.

Make sure I haven't lost any angels. Is that it? Not at all. They are accountable.

They are doing something. And they're coming in to report. They're giving an account.

Well, I'm over here working in Mesopotamia. This is what happened. I'm engineering a new virus.

This is what happened. I don't know what they're doing. I'm controlling the wind.

And here's my report. I'm creating climatic conditions and rain on all these godless Chinese over here that don't know anything about God. I'm whipping up a typhoon and wiping out a bunch of people over in southern India or whatever.

They're carrying out God's will, God's judgments, God's decrees on the earth. And they present themselves before God because God holds them accountable. When you present yourself before someone in power, you're being held accountable.

You're giving a report. That's what they're doing. Satan also came among them.

Now I find this curious. Is Satan still reporting to God even though he's fallen? He shows up. You get the idea that you've seen the movies where it's in the days of a monarchy or something and they're having a royal banquet.

They're having a ball or the princess is getting married or something and there's a dance and they're waltzing and the orchestra is playing and everybody's got their white wigs. Then the back doors fling open, the double doors, and some black sheep, some ne'er-do-well, some villain comes striding in and the music stops and the dancers stop and everybody looks and ooh. Well, you get the idea here that Satan wasn't on the list of those who were called to present themselves before God.

He's a fallen angel. He's been kicked out. He's persona non grata.

He has fallen from grace and been cut off from God. But he comes among them. He shows up.

So, the Lord doesn't say to Satan, hey, I thought I threw you out. Get out of here. Does He? He addresses him.

Was God taken by surprise by this visit? No, He was not. And God already has a purpose. He already knows what He's going to do when Satan shows up.

God says to Satan, from where do you come? How many times in the Bible do we see God at first contact with someone asking a question? What's the first dialogue that takes place in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve partake of the forbidden fruit? Why are you where you are? God does not ask these questions because He does not know the answer. He is like any good parent who never asks a question that He doesn't know the answer to. Any good lawyer cross-examining a witness will never ask a question that he does not know the answer to.

That is fatal in a law case is to have a witness surprise you with something you didn't expect and then your case comes unglued. God always knows the answer. So, when He says, where do you come from? Does God know the answer? And if He does, then why is He asking? Why does God ask this question? Well, why do parents ask questions of their children? Have you been wrestling in the house? Is that why this TV is overturned in the floor? Have you been eating the snack that I told you not to eat? Have you had your hand in the... Well, we already know they have.

Why do we ask it? It establishes the facts not only for them, but also for any onlookers, any other children in the room who realize, well, this is the great hammer of doom falling here. And it's an inexorable judgmental process. The Lord says, from where do you come? Satan answered the Lord and said, from going to and fro on the earth and from walking back and forth on it.

This information is for our benefit. This information is a reminder to all of the assembled angels that Satan has already been disciplined and is in line for judgment. Why is he... This is a sour grapes kind of thing.

You can imagine, and I don't mean to read my own attitude into God's words, but Satan is persona non grata, so God says, well, Satan, where have you been? With a little half smile. Because I know you haven't been up here. And there's a reason.

And Satan says, oh yeah, you consigned me down to that little ball of dirt in the solar system down there. I've been walking around, up and down, to and fro. This is like... We used to visit Marines, the one or two that would get in trouble in Japan.

They would get locked up in the Japanese jail. And I went and visited a guy one time from my battery. He'd been locked up before I ever got there.

But you get all these additional duties, and one of them is, well, go visit the guy and make sure if he has any correspondence or whatever. So I went down and visited him. He was in a little 5x5 cell.

It was made for Japanese guys, and he was a great big guy. He could barely turn around in there. Well, if I walked in and said, well, Lance Corporal Goofus, what you been doing? I mean, this would be a mocking kind of thing, wouldn't it? What do you think I've been doing? I've been walking up and down and back and forth in my 5x5 cell.

Well, there is an irony. There is a hint of sarcasm here in God's question to Satan. So, where'd you come from? Where have you been? And Satan says, oh yeah, I've been going to and fro on the earth and walking back and forth on it.

You don't often see angels restricted to walking. They're usually, especially the high order angel that Satan started out as. Why is he walking? He's the prince of the power of the air.

Why isn't he flying? Well, his little flight feathers have been clipped. And he's stumping. He's hiking, spiritually speaking.

Going to and fro on the earth and walking back and forth on it. Then the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job? While you were walking around down there, did you see my man Job? That there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? Gives us the identical description we got at the beginning of this prologue. What is the significance of this? One of several significances.

God makes human beings the object of teaching points for the angels. Our lives, evidently, certainly Job's life, was an issue for the angels. God, remember, this is not just a dialogue between God and Satan.

All of the sons of God are assembled on this occasion. And this dialogue that God initiates with Satan is designed to be heard. The first issue that God settles is Satan has come from a place of judgment and a place of restriction.

And he has been assigned and restricted down to the place where God's man dwells. God essentially sent Satan to the same place he's got his people dwelling. And has restricted him to that.

Okay, you've been walking around amongst my people. Did you see the best one I've got? Did you see my blameless and upright man who fears me and shuns evil? Did you see him? Because you're supposed to see him. And I want all the angels standing here to know that I've put you, this high and mighty angel, down there and essentially I'm pitting you and my man against each other in some context, in some way.

Satan is not upright. He doesn't fear God. He doesn't shun evil.

Job does. They're both in the same place. So God says, okay, non-shunner of evil, non-fearer of God, have you seen my creature who does? Because that's what you're supposed to be doing.

That's what the angels are supposed to be doing. Have you seen that this inferior, insignificant creature is doing what you apparently could not do? You couldn't keep yourself in the fearing God and shunning evil category and I've got this little inferior creation called Job down there doing what you could not do. That's the traction that this remark has.

What is the conclusion that we draw from this? This has been written for our instruction. Our lives make a difference. Our lives can serve as illustrations, teaching points.

Angels are in God's classroom. We are in God's classroom and we will someday be sitting in the same classroom they are in. We will be moving up and having the kind of viewpoint that they have here.

But it's important for us to remember that we're not just living to ourself and we're not just dying to ourself and our life is not just about the events and the circumstances that happen to us. We are God's examples. It's helpful to remember.

It helps us to put ourselves in perspective in the larger sphere of God's plan and purpose. Well, we're out of time for tonight. We'll pick up here in Job chapter 1 next time.

Father, thank you for this great reminder of the place that you have assigned man in your plan. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths in our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.