

04a JOB

This is the 19th of May, 2006. We continue tonight our study in the book of Job, resuming in chapter 2. We'll take a moment as we begin to listen to the clock chime and examine our souls and ensure that we're susceptible to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit. Shall we pray? Father, we are grateful for an opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of your word.

We are anxious to learn the truth that is in your word and have it do its transforming work in our souls. We pray that we will find in these passages tonight those things that you would have us to know that will thoroughly equip us for every good work. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. This very old and very fascinating story has brought us through two meetings in the heavenly realm between God and Satan. The first time, when God brings Job to Satan's attention, he says, Have you seen my servant Job? Have you considered him? There is none like him on the earth, blameless, upright.

Fierce God shuns evil. The theme is introduced. The question is broached.

What is the relationship between Job's faith and what God has done for him visibly and tangibly on the earth? There is no one like Job. He is the most prominent man of the East. He has influence.

He has wealth. He has prosperity in many different categories. And Satan impugns the faith of Job, saying it is all based on what you do for him.

And he says if you stop doing for him, and if you take away what you have done for him, he will bless you, he will barack you to your face, which in this context is he will curse you to your face. Stretch out your hand and God says, well, what he has is in your hand, but leave him alone. So, we saw the results of that.

The second time, on another day, chapter 2, we saw a very similar set up. The Lord says in verse 3, Have you considered my servant Job? There is none like him on the earth, blameless and upright, one who fears God and shuns evil. Still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without a cause.

And this is sort of a new twist in the sense that the Old Testament expectation, which of course has yet to be written in Job's day that you find in the Proverbs and in the Psalms and so forth, where the righteous man is blessed, the unrighteous man is cursed, is upset. And God points this out. God doesn't blame Satan.

God doesn't blame Job. God says, you have incited me against him. I have, in a sense, violated Job's expectation and I haven't explained to him why.

It's interesting that Job does not receive a visitation from an angel. Many Old Testament figures

received personal revelation from God. And Job is left in the dark in this.

God could easily have said something to him and he doesn't. Without a cause. This idea of suffering without a cause, from Job's perspective, obviously in God's mind there is a reason and there is a cause.

But we're going to see in the later narrative of the book that from Job's point of view, he does not understand why this happened. And yet at the same time he rejects the explanation that the friends are going to suggest. So that's the major element that was given to us in this second dialogue.

Then Satan answers in verse 4 and says, Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh and he will surely barak you to your face. He will bless slash curse you to your face.

Well, we talked about this skin for skin last time and I told you I wasn't real sure what it meant. But as always, when something like that comes up, then I have to go back and dig a little further. And I have some basically three lines of argument.

No one is real sure what this means, but there are three interesting suggestions about what it means that I want to pass along to you. Skin for skin. This is obviously a colloquialism, a saying.

And it's a little bit of an informal thing that Satan introduces. And it implies a familiarity between Satan and the Lord God that he uses this sort of saying rather than a formal argument. Skin for skin.

The first idea is, well, Job has lost these living things that were most of the possessions. It doesn't say he was robbed of his silver and gold. What did he lose? He lost all of his animals and he lost his sons and daughters.

And so, well, Job basically, although it's implicit rather than explicit, nobody came to Job and said, well, it's either your life or these things. But that's essentially what has happened. Job himself has preserved his own skin at the cost of these other skins.

I personally don't find that one particularly compelling because it really has nothing to do with Job making a choice. Job doesn't say, well, my skin for their skin. I'll make that bargain.

But that's a suggestion. That's what I would call number one. Number two, I find a little more interesting, which is Satan basically says, well, what is the... and we need to remind ourselves of a little background for this, but when you go back to Adam and Eve in the garden and they found that they were naked, their skin was showing, what did God cover them with? A skin.

And so there is a skin for the skin. And what Satan might be saying here is, well, the outer layer of Job's prosperity has been taken away. You've taken away the skin that... what I have touched

and taken away so far was just skin for his skin.

That was the outer layer. And he's uncomfortable without his outer skin, so to speak. But his inner skin has not yet been touched.

That's a more intriguing idea to me. And I think that idea might well be embodied in it. And it makes sense of his further argument.

Let's stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and then he will curse you to your face. In other words, this test of the question is Job's devotion, is Job's faith and Job's piety based on his prosperity. Satan's basically saying, well, we haven't really fully removed his prosperity.

We've just taken the skin off. That's just the skin for his skin. We need to touch that inner skin to really test this proposition.

The third idea, which I also think is compelling, and I think is often the case in ancient literature, and is often the case particularly in Hebrew, there can be both ideas carried by the same freight car. You can have double entendres, just as we've often seen in prophecy, near term and far term fulfillment. And I think there may be a double entendre here as well, where Satan is also saying, skin for skin, and this is actually God and Job in view.

The idea being, well, similar to an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life. What has happened to Job so far doesn't really enter into the personal relationship between God and Job. If it is perceived that God has touched Job's flesh, it's sort of the eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, skin for skin.

If he is personally afflicted, he's going to take personal offense. He's going to be personally affronted. And perceiving that you have touched him, he is going to try to touch you.

He's going to try to get skin for skin. It's sort of an anthropomorphism that the relationship between Job and God, which is personal, touches skin. He's going to respond in kind with this lex talionis, if you will, response.

And I think that also has a lot of traction. So I offer those to you because we kind of glossed over the skin for skin, and I think it's important. And I think perhaps both of those are in view when Satan makes this very... All of this, as you have observed, is very terse, very concise and rich.

It's poetic in that sense. There's a lot going on with every few words that we cover, which is going to be a challenge as we get into the subsequent chapters here because we are hoping to not go word by word and phrase by phrase. And yet, when you see things like this, you think it really is not something you can just skip over.

So that's what Satan said. Skin for skin. Stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse you to your face.

The Lord said to Satan, Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life. So then we saw that there's an immediacy and there's an acceleration of the story here because we don't have our usual narrative marker, and there came a day. Satan goes out from the presence of the Lord, and Job immediately breaks out in these boils.

And this word for painful boils is interesting as well. If you remember, we've gone a few times over to Leviticus chapter 14 and talked about the rituals for the cleansed leper, and those follow upon Leviticus 13, which talks about various kinds of, in the King James it was leprosy, it's a skin disease, and that is the word that is used here when he breaks out in sore boils, painful boils. It is some sort of skin malady.

This happens as with the first set of calamities, very suddenly, very propitiously out of a blue sky, and in the same way that when Satan attacks his possessions, he's utterly wiped out all of his camels, all of his oxen, all of his donkeys, all of his servants, and so forth. In the same way, this malady that touches his flesh and his bone is designed to be comprehensive. So he is smitten from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

And this is a phrase we will find in later literature, Deuteronomy 28, if you remember the blessings on faithfulness and the cursings on disobedience, which reflect that standard Old Testament expectation that if you do well, God will bless. And if you remember in Deuteronomy 28, when it says, if after all these things you do not repent, as God begins to put levels of discipline on the nation of Israel, 28:35 of Deuteronomy, the Lord will strike you in the knees and on the legs with severe boils which cannot be healed from the sole of your foot to the top of your head. And that's probably one of the closest parallels to this in the Bible that afflicts Job.

In 2 Samuel 14 and verse 25, it's describing Absalom, David's son. It says, In all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks, from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him. He was comprehensively handsome.

Another fairly close parallel in Isaiah chapter 1, verse 6, From the sole of the foot even to the crown of the head, there is no soundness in it but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. They have not been closed or bound up or soothed with ointment. This is talking about the nation of Israel and the discipline from God that has brought them low and that they are personified as having been stricken.

He says, Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores.

So this is what happens to Job. It's implied, it's a strong suggestion from verse 8 when it says he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes that Job was already sitting in the ashes when these boils struck. He was already in mourning for his

children and was sitting in the ash heap when he broke out with these sore boils.

It's more difficult to tell from the English but in Hebrew, if you watch your syntax and your grammatical construction here, it is apparent that Job was struck while he sat in the midst of the ashes. He didn't say, Well, now that I've got boils, I'm really going to go mourn. He was already there.

Some question as to what it means that he sat in the midst of the ashes. Was this the public ash heap outside the city? We know that Job sat in the gates of the city as a judge and as a prominent man, city council, regional judge of some sort and the most prominent of those. Did he go outside the city and sit there or were these ashes somewhere out in his household in a more rural setting? It doesn't really tell us.

We begin by looking at this skin disease because we know from Leviticus 13 and Deuteronomy 28 that there are these skin diseases that are incurable. There are two kinds of skin diseases, those that will heal up and those that won't. The priest was charged in Israel with figuring out what kind does this person have.

There are all kinds of medical descriptions there. Does it have a black spot in the middle? Is there hair growing out of it? Is it manifesting various characteristics? Then that person is declared unclean and they've got to go outside the camp because that's an incurable type sore. If it's of a different type, then they have to wait a while until it heals up and then come back in.

It is evident from Job's later comments that he thinks that this is of the incurable sort. You might imagine that this would also motivate the wife's comment, curse God and die, because she might think, well, you're going to die anyway. You've obviously got this incurable skin disease.

From the narrative point of view, we are a little bit more omniscient than Job is, having heard the heavenly dialogue and so on, and we're not so sure, because God said, spare his life. We know from what the narrator has said that Job is not going to die from this, but it's not so apparent that Job thinks he's going to live over it, especially from the comments that we're going to see here in chapter 3. So, this term for the skin disease is Shachin, S-H-A-C-H-Y-N. This is the one that's covered in Leviticus 13.

There's a great description in verses 18 through 23. If the body develops a boil in the skin and it is healed, and in the place of the boil there comes a white swelling or a bright spot, reddish-white, then it shall be shown to the priests, and so on. This is the very same word, very same type of thing that can be an initial sign of leprosy, but there's a separate Hebrew word for leprosy that's not used here.

Various diagnoses have been made of what was the actual disease that Job had. Let me give you some of these because I find it to be an interesting list. Different ones have said, well, this is elephantiasis, which I don't think it is because that's kind of a slow onslaught thing, and this hit

Job all at once.

There is chronic eczema, smallpox, malignant infectious ulcer, a skin disease called pemphigus foliaceus, which sounds bad, whatever it is. There is another disease over in that part of the world. It's an ulcerous outbreak of boils called the Baghdad button or the Jericho rose, which is a cute name but an ugly disease.

Syphilis has been suggested because at one point later on in chapter 13, Job makes a reference that this is the result of the sins of his youth and that he might have been a little bit of a playboy and ended up later with a STD. People have actually suggested leprosy, pellagra, which is another grievous skin affliction, and so forth. There are a lot of different suggestions.

Some have even suggested that it was psychosomatic, that it was brought on by stress, and that because this appeared, lasted for a time, and then suddenly disappeared, that it was psychologically induced by stress. This is known to aggravate or to bring on cases of lichen planus, psoriasis, atopic eczema, chronic urticaria, dermatitis herpetiformis, and generalized exfoliative dermatitis. These can be brought on by bad news in your life or aggravated by that.

This is from the archives of dermatology, an article in there called Psychosomatic Dermatology. It says that maybe Job had one or another of these. The comings and goings of such dermatoses are enigmatic.

Well, there's no enigma for us because we know exactly what brought it on. It is the personal visitation of Satan. The running sores and severe boils that are spoken of here, we know quite a bit more than what is spoken of in this chapter from later references.

In chapter 7 and verse 5, Job says, My flesh is caked with worms and dust, my skin is cracked and breaks out afresh. When it says caked with worms and dust, without getting too graphic, this is probably, although people have suggested that this might actually be maggots or something, it's more likely that these are worm-like exuding of the type of stuff that comes out of boils. And as it comes out, it has a worm-like appearance, which he is scraping off with his potsherd.

That's more likely these are probably erupting pustules in his skin. He also mentions in chapter 30, verse 30, a blackening and peeling of his skin. He says, My skin grows black and falls from me, my bones burn with fever.

This is evidently accompanied by infection and fever. Other symptoms, chapter 19, verse 20, emaciation. My bone clings to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth, he says.

He mentions fever again in chapter 30, verse 30. He is sleepless, and the sleep that he does get is fitful and filled with nightmares. Chapter 7, verse 14, You scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions.

And in verse 4 of that same chapter, chapter 7, verse 4, When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be ended? For I have had my fill of tossing till dawn. Weeping, chapter 16, verse 16. My face is flushed from weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death.

And also in chapter 19, verse 17, he says, My breath is offensive to my wife, and I am repulsive to the children of my own body. We'll discuss this when we get to chapter 19, but some people have said, Well, there was some kind of egregious halitosis, bad breath, associated with this malady. But I think that is not really what is being said there.

There's also a question when he says, I'm offensive to the children of my body. I believe we read that they all just died. So what's going on in that verse? We'll talk about when we get there.

To give you a clue, the word for breath there is our old friend, ruach. My ruach is offensive to my wife. And the word body is not body, it is belly.

So anyway, you can cogitate on that for the next 17 chapters until we get there. But it's probably not putridity of breath or something. I think there's something else being spoken of there.

Anyway, loss of symptoms. Job is in a bad, bad way. He talks about the aching and rottenness in his bones.

In the ancient world, diseases and health were thought to reside in the bones. It starts at the inside and works its way out. Wisdom is said to be health to your marrow and your bones and so forth in the Proverbs.

This is an oft-repeated idea both in the Old Testament and in the New. Jesus talks about the fact that you have light inside that will come out or you have darkness inside that will come out in a moral sense. This reflects the physical idea that disease and health both resided in the very center of your being, in your bones.

He talks about having a burning in his bones. As we mentioned, that fever in chapter 30. The very root of this word that talks about the sore boils, that shakin, comes from a root shakan in many cognate languages.

A lot of times we learn about rare Hebrew words by looking at Arabic and Akkadian and Ugaritic and Syrian and so on. The basic idea of this means to be hot or to be inflamed. This is inflammation.

These are red, fiery, I think of fire ant bites. If you've ever gotten a bunch of fire ant bites on your ankles or something, those things can swell up and have blisters and be exceedingly painful, hence the name. This rapid and very painful disease completely... He's got these up in his hair, in his face, in his beard, which is part of the reason he probably shaves off the rest of his hair after he shaved part of it to mourn for his children.

So he is sitting in the ashes and now this final insult comes. It is literally skin for skin. This is Satan's ploy to try to get Job to renounce God, to curse God, to decide that it isn't worth it.

So he's sitting in the ashes and he still does not say anything. Job didn't really speak until after the last servant came with the bad news and he says, I came in naked, I'm going out naked. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. And God knows this when Satan shows up the second time. God doesn't say, so Satan, how did Job react when you took away all of his stuff and you killed all of his children? God tells Satan he has held fast to his integrity.

And from an Old Testament view of God, especially in a day when there weren't a lot of passages of Scripture talking about omniscience and so on, you look at the Genesis account with the building of the Tower of Babel and so on, and you have these views where a report comes to God. Angels are depicted as bringing in reports of what's going on on earth and God says, I will go down and see for myself, as though he doesn't already know. And so you get the idea that if this is sort of the Old Testament picture of God, that God has kept himself informed on Job, and before Satan shows up again, God already knows that Job has held fast to his integrity, even though he has been afflicted without a cause.

So Job is sitting there in the ashes. Now, why the ashes? Evidently he was there before even the boils. Ashes are associated with worthlessness in the patriarchal age.

We know this from Genesis 18, 27, when Abraham speaks, when he's talking to God about Sodom and Gomorrah and their destruction, and Lot is living there, and Abraham says, well, but if there were 50 righteous, would you spare the city? And the Lord says, if I find in Sodom 50 righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes, for the sake of the 50. So now Abraham is going to advance his argument, and he says, Indeed now I, who am but dust and ashes, have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose there were five less than the 50 righteous.

Would you destroy all of the city for the lack of five? So he's down to the 45 righteous. But he says, this is self-abnegation, this is self-denigration. He's putting himself down.

He says, I'm just dust and ashes. Ashes and dust. So it speaks of worthlessness.

It is a symbol of that which has no value. In that passage. We find this repeated in the book of Job.

Verse 19 of chapter 30 says, He has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. I'm just worthless. In Job 42.6 we will see this.

When Job says, I shouldn't have said anything. I'm shutting my mouth. I abhor myself and I repent.

In dust and ashes. And so it is a prostration of self. It is a bowing to the ground of self.

It is a picture of repenting and saying there is nothing good about me. The two words dust and ashes sound alike in Hebrew. One is Afar and the other is Efer.

Efer and Afar. And so when you talk about ashes and dust or dust and ashes. You have Afar and Efer.

Same consonants just different vowel sounds. These were often thrown on the head as a sign of mourning. Remember Tamar when she was raped by Amnon.

David's son. She put ashes on her head and tore her robe of many colors that was on her. And laid her hand on her head and went away crying bitterly.

Isaiah 61.3 talking about those who mourn in Zion. He says to console those who mourn in Zion. To give them beauty for ashes.

The oil of joy for mourning. The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. These are exchanges.

You begin in chapter 40 of Isaiah. Comfort ye my people. Speak comfortably to Jerusalem and so on.

And by the time you get to chapter 61. He is saying we want to console those who have been mourning. Remember in Ezekiel.

Those who received the mark of preservation from the ink horn angel. Were the ones who were sighing and crying over Jerusalem. And it is that attitude of contrition so to speak.

And mourning in the sense of humility that brings this about. So God says to console those who mourn in Zion. To give them beauty in exchange for ashes.

Those are opposites. Esther chapter 4 and verse 1. Mordecai tears his clothes. Puts sackcloth and ashes.

Went out in the midst of the city. Cried out with a loud and bitter cry. Obviously ashes speak of disaster.

A city that burns to the ground. A house that burns to the ground. Your fields burn.

And so they are easily associated with calamity. People even would lay in the ashes and dust. Again in Esther.

In every province where the king's command and decree arrived. There was great mourning

among the Jews. With fasting, weeping, wailing.

And many lay in sackcloth and ashes. This would be essentially sitting in the ash heap. So this is what Job is doing.

We don't know for certain if he was at his own house. Or if he was in a public place. There is a suggestion that this is public.

Chapter 30 verse 28. Job says I go about mourning but not in the sun. I stand up in the assembly and cry out for help.

And that he may be somewhere in or near the city. Cities had ash heaps and dung heaps outside. People would carry refuse and dung in particular would dry in the sun.

And would be carried outside the city and burned about once a week in a particular place. And so the ash heap was actually the ashes of dried dung. Not just human refuse but camels, animals of all sorts.

People on the prairie in America used to burn cow chips and buffalo chips and so on in their stoves. It burns fairly well. And so these things would be scooped up and taken outside the city.

And so much so that a hill would eventually build up where this was done. That would sometimes be higher than the ground on which the city was built. The city would eventually build up on a till but the dung heap might be higher than that.

And what is suggestive about that idea that he is on the city ash heap is that he has a potsherd. Because this would be a likely object to find out in the refuse heap outside the city. Would be broken pieces of pottery and so on.

And this is also the whole idea of doing a symbolic form of mourning. Sitting in the ashes. It doesn't really work unless people see it.

And so rather than sitting at home in the ashes that would be something to do before God. Sitting in the ashes outside the city would be a public expression of mourning. But we don't know for sure which of these there is.

But that public ash heap in later Hebrew, post-biblical Hebrew is called the Zebel. Beelzebul, Beelzebel, the lord of dung so to speak. Zebel, that's where this comes from.

The Arabic preserves this for us. And they call the place of the burning of the dung the mezbel or mezbele. Put a name in front of that and it becomes a noun or a place.

So he picks up this potsherd out of the ash heap perhaps and starts scratching these sores. They're itchy. He's got this dry flaking skin that is sloughing off.

This black skin that is dying and falling off of him. These oozing sores, the exudate that is coming out from those. He's scraping that away to reduce the irritation.

He's not slashing himself. We know from the later law of Moses that gashing yourself for the dead and so on is forbidden. And we don't think Job was doing that.

But his two trials have now kind of come together because he is sitting in the ashes mourning over everything that happened the first time. And he's covered in this awful disease. And he is alienated.

He is humiliated. And he is afflicted all in one spot. When we get to verse 9 and we have Job's wife saying to him, Do you still hold fast to your integrity? It's interesting that she uses the very phrase that God uses to Satan.

He holds fast to his integrity. And she says, Do you hold fast to your integrity? You cannot help but think back to the avenue of temptation for Adam in the garden which came through his wife. And here Job is similarly tempted through the agency of his wife.

She has been called the devil's assistant or the devil's tool here since she is essentially whispering in Job's ear the very case that Satan has made. Well, you should curse God to his face. And that is her suggestion here.

But unlike Adam, Job does not respond to that suggestion. He takes a different route. And you get the idea that perhaps in the conclaves of heaven when Satan has talked about the human race in the past, he has made a case based on Adam.

And here is Job who is sort of like an Adam living in an Eden. He is like Satan with wealth and influence and power and nothing really touches him and draws near to him. God has placed a hedge around him much as Eden was walled off from the rest of the earth.

And so we see these sort of three parallels. You have Satan in his unfallen state. You have Adam in his unfallen state.

And you have Job in what you might call an unfallen state. The sacrifices that Job offers are for who? His sons. Job does not seem to be too worried about his own situation.

So each of these is sort of set in parallel. And of course we do not know that there is any sort of a wife analogy for Satan in heaven. There is no indication in the Bible that he had anybody whispering in his ear other than his own ambition.

In his own heart. I will be like them. His heart was lifted up.

And there is an often cited relationship in our minds and in our souls to the intellect being the man or the dominant decision making part of the human psyche. And the heart, the seed of emotions,

being sort of the feminine side, the female side. The man is typically presented as the voice of reason and cold hard reality.

And the woman is compassionate and sympathetic, empathetic and more emotional. And so when you think about the heart being lifted up and you think about operating on your feelings and on your sensation of things rather than what is logical and what is reasonable and what is right. Even in Satan's case you can think that there might be this avenue through the less thoughtful.

Which, you know, that sounds bad. It isn't true that women are less thoughtful. But they do tend to be more emotional and more empathetic.

And feelings don't have the ability to reason. We separate that when we look at the human mind. You have reason and you have emotion.

And emotions can't think. You can be unreasonably afraid. You can be unreasonably worried.

You can be unreasonably giddy and euphoric and happy about something. And your reason is constantly trying to bring that under control. And so in each of these three situations there is this avenue of attack in Adam and Job's case through the woman.

And she doesn't make a logical argument. She says, what's the matter with you? Don't you feel bad enough to curse God and die? Is sort of the sense we get here. So it's a fascinating set of parallels.

Satan fell. Adam fell. But Adam came back to God where Satan has not.

And so the Adam example cuts both ways. So now we have Job. And he's a different scenario.

He's more like Satan was in the beginning. And so the Adam attack is made through the wife. And Job does not let go of his integrity.

He blesses God. So that's where we stand. That's where Job sits in the ash heap.

And now his three friends are going to approach. We'll pause here and take our break. And when we come back we're going to take a close look at these three quote unquote friends.