

# Job's Worst Trial

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We might easily think that Job's worst trial was the destruction of his livestock, or the death of all his children, or his miserable physical afflictions. Yet another hidden trial, deceptive for its mask of righteousness, ate at the core of Job's faith until he reeled from a pain worse than any of the obvious trials assaulting him in the first two chapters of the book where Satan unleashes his assaults.

First we must remember also that Satan's purpose lay beyond the obvious destruction of Job's outer world; Satan intended to corrupt Job's faith and turn him away from worshipping God. Satan's formula for success would lie in trying to convince Job that a deep and diabolical engine of deceptive character underlay the sunny blessings and apparent friendship of God that Job had known and enjoyed; Satan would have to convince Job that God is really a devil!

How does one go about convincing someone that the apparently good God is really a devil? The strategist must line all arguments with high sounding and time tested truths about God's blessing on righteousness and God's certain, undeviating judgement upon sinners. The righteous must never suffer and appear defeated, and sinners must come to indisputable justice every time without exception. Furthermore, at the same time, any concept of mercy must only appear a tool used by a bullying

sovereign who extends it merely to shore up self-centered demands for continued allegiance. God might as well be a party boss in an ugly political ring.

Job's faith endured his early, obvious trials, but Bildad struck a vicious blow, masked with silvery theology, that weakened Job: "When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin" (8:4 NIV). Job had feared this very thing (1:5). Bildad also says to Job, "if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf" (8:6). But the coup comes with Bildad's line "Surely God does not reject a blameless man" (8:20).

Job falters with doubt in the face of Bildad's assertion: "How can a mortal be righteous before God?" (9:1). The impossibility of justification hits Job, along with God's unapproachable power and majesty: Job rehearses in short form the essence of God's argument to Job in the final chapters—who can argue with God? But instead of affirming the character of the God he had known up to this point, Job begins to imagine a God who courts trust from his creation only as a means of fattening them up for the slaughter. God appears like the friendly feeder that not only later chops off the chicken's neck, but also delights in tormenting the chicken as much as possible in a twisted ritual of death.

Bildad, along with Job's "friends," keeps inciting Job to believe in a sin beyond repentance, a sin that cries for mercy only to end in denial and cruelty of punishment: "he mocks the despair

of the innocent. When a land falls into the hands of the wicked, he blindfolds its judges. If it is not he, then who is it?" (9:23,24).

Job is truly off balance now and convinced that no efforts at righteousness will avail him; a terrible script of cosmic torment has overtaken him. God will not justify him, and he cannot justify himself: "Even if I washed myself with soap and my hands with washing soda, you would plunge me into a slime pit" (9:30). At this point, Job cries out for an "arbitrator" to remove God's wrath from him (9:33). The messianic hope springs forth in agonizing poetry.

Job, however, has already been sold a bill of goods: the agent of human trials has slipped undetected into the mouths of religious prognosticators and apparent friends. Where did Satan go after chapter two? Did he inflict those terrible trials and then contentedly disappear? No! Again, no! Satan found a gaping paradise in the mouths of Job's accusing friends and through them inflicted trials far worse than the ones obvious to the reader in the first two chapters. Job could have endured the physical trials; what he could not endure was the eroding of his faith in the character of God.

Job had built his life after the image of a God who is self-for-others in every way. Despite the sins of his youth, Job had come to know and trust God as love with one final threshold of doubt for the conquering. God knew that His character must undergo the final test in the mind of the believer, just as Abraham would have to interpret the apparently cruel and murderous decree to kill Isaac.

The character of God, ironically, must appear completely self-centered and cruel in order to find affirmation as nothing but outpoured love. The law of opposites presents its irrevocable face again; good must be sucked out of the bitter root of seeming evil.

Job will come through; we know the story. After sinking into a despairing view of God, he ends triumphantly in repentance and acceptance; God's ways are just and good. But the path to his understanding led him through the subtlest of satanic trials—the voice of evil in the name of religion. The book of Revelation describes in another way the fixed form of such evil: He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon" (rev. 13:11). Thankfully, Job's friends did not know their own deception, and when God unmasked it, they repented too.

What lesson stands out in Job's trials? One clear, encouraging lesson lies in our awakening to the solid truth that "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Paul goes on in Romans chapter eight to name many sufferings for Christians that equal and possibly surpass the trials of Job. Satan will not be asleep; he will endlessly patrol in the mouths of condemners, often even well meaning Christians, to bring discouragement instead of faith in the character and purposes of God.

Satan will grind down the sufferer with a sense of shame and hopelessness over former sins, or even present sins. However, the sufferer may not even be guilty! The pinnacle of the Christian life is

the suffering of the just. The just one graduates at some point to the school of the buffeted ones.

Yet even if there has been sin, the answer comes to us from the end of Romans chapter seven: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24). Ah! There is a rescue. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our lord!" (Rom. 7:25). God does not condemn us for what we cannot do anyway—keep the law. Final justification means He removes the sin from out of us by nailing it to the Cross. Jesus became sin (2 Cor. 5:21), meaning that Christ became Satan indwelled humanity. In death, sin went out of the body, and the body went into the ground. In resurrection, Christ arose as us.

Paul clarifies that "in Christ" opens the door to "Christ in me." In him, we died, went into the grave, and rose because of justification (Rom. 4:25). We did no works to bring that about, but only believe.

So how can such New Testament truth relate to Job? Jesus said of Abraham, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56 NKJV). Similarly, Job saw through the future to the day of no condemnation. Before he even knew of a devil fulfilling God's sovereign purposes, Job went through the ultimate fires of condemnation where the self justifies itself only to finally justify God and His ways and throw off the yoke of condemnation.

Praise God for His indescribable goodness.