

## CHAPTER 3: Job and Exodus 1

When you read the Bible you go from the end of Genesis to the beginning of Exodus by simply turning the page. But that is NOT where our story goes next. There is one other book that takes place during the period of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). And that is where we are going next. And where is that? The Book of Job!

Now don't worry. God's covenant people aren't going anywhere for a while. They are in Egypt and they are going to remain right there for the next 280 years. Not one word is mentioned about them for nearly 3 centuries! So for now we are going to leave them and will come back to them later. Let's take a look at Job...

The Book of Job actually shows up later, in the middle of the Bible, and there is a reason for this. In the original Hebrew Scriptures Job was placed in the section known as Wisdom Literature because of its literary form. It is written in poetry. While no clear historical context is ever stated in the Book of Job, details mentioned in the text strongly suggest that the events recorded in Job occurred during the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So, with that being the case, this book fits historically with Genesis and before Exodus.

The Book of Job is set in the rather obscure land of Uz. The main character is Job whose background is unknown. Even the author is anonymous. The focus is on Job's experience of suffering and the many questions raised by it.

**There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. And that man was pure and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. His possessions included 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys; in addition he had a very great household. Thus he was the greatest of all the people in the east.** (Job 1:1-3)  
So at the outset we see that Job is a good man. He is a top line guy. He is a wealthy man and devoted to God.

The opening scene takes us into the heavenly realms where God is holding court with some group referred to as "the sons of God." These are supernatural beings that include angels. Among the heavenly participants is a strange figure named Satan. In Hebrew his name means "the accuser." God calls Satan's attention to Job. **So the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a pure and upright man, one who fears God and turns away from evil."** (Job 1:8)

Satan sneers at this. He argues with God's assessment of Job. He claims that, if Job's blessings are removed from him, he will deny God.

Stop for a minute. Do you remember earlier in the story when the serpent in the garden challenged the good character of God? The point made then was that whoever opposes God is evil – top line is God's way and bottom line is any other way. So, based on this we can see that Satan, just like the serpent, is evil. Here Satan is questioning God's stated opinion of Job. Is God ever wrong? NO!

In response, God gives Satan permission to test his premise. Satan can do whatever he wants to Job without physically harming him. Satan acts quickly. One right after the other, in the course of a single day, Satan destroys Job's cattle, then his servants and, finally, his children.

And what is Job's response to this crisis in his life? Well, that is the rest of the Book of Job!

**Then Job got up and tore his robe. He shaved his head, and then he threw himself down with his face to the ground. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will return there. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. May the name of the Lord be blessed!"** (Job 1:20-21) Job does not curse God. He does not blame God for what has happened. Instead, Job worships God! He is quite a man!

Once again God draws Satan's attention to Job. **Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a pure and upright man, one who fears God and turns away from evil. And he still holds firmly to his integrity, so that you stirred Me up to destroy him without reason."** (Job 2:3)

Basically God tells Satan, "See, I told you so!"

Again Satan sneers at God. He says that, if Job were made to feel physical pain, he would openly curse God. So, again God grants Satan permission to try out his theory. This time Satan is allowed to physically harm Job but he cannot kill him. Satan immediately smites Job with painful boils all over his body, from head to foot.

A suffering and bewildered Job is rebuked by his wife. **Then his wife said to him, "Are you still holding firmly to your integrity? Curse God, and die!"** (Job 2:9) But despite Satan's best effort, Job does not sin. He never curses God.

Enter Job's friends...

**When Job’s three friends heard about all this calamity that had happened to him, each of them came from his own country – Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to come to show sympathy for him and to console him. But when they gazed intently from a distance but did not recognize him, they began to weep loudly. Each of them tore his robes, and they threw dust into the air over their heads. Then they sat down with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, yet no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great. (Job 2:11-13)**

Job is so miserable that he wishes he were dead. **After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day he was born. Job spoke up and said... “Why did I not die at birth, and why did I not expire as I came out of the womb? ...I would be asleep and then at peace...” (Job 3:1-2,11,13)** In other words, “I would be better off dead!”

**“I have no ease, I have no quietness; I cannot rest, turmoil has come upon me.” (Job 3:26)** Job is human. He is emotionally distressed. He is in complete and utter despair! He is at a loss to explain why all of this has happened to him.

As we read the Book of Job we cannot help but wonder why God permitted such terrible things to happen to a good man like Job. We think that maybe the Book of Job is going to answer the age-old question, “Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Why?” But – spoiler alert – the Book of Job NEVER answers that question.

For the next 28 chapters each one of Job’s three friends take turns giving speeches, expressing their own ideas about God and Job’s suffering. Job then responds to them. They in turn respond to Job. This back and forth exchange continues for three cycles. Everybody gets a chance to chime in. Each one tries their best to explain Job’s suffering. But they are making a flawed assumption and here it is: if one is wise and good and honors God, then good things will happen to them. Conversely, if one is evil and stupid and does bad things, then bad things will happen to them. Therefore, given Job’s present circumstance, he MUST have done something wrong.

Here is just a sample of some of the things they tell Job...

**Then Zophar the Naamathite spoke up and said: “...if iniquity is in your hand – put it far away, and do not let evil reside in your tents...For then you will lift up your faith without blemish...But the eyes of the wicked fail, and escape eludes them; their one hope is to breathe their last.” (Job 11:1,14-15,20)** That is just so encouraging!

**Then Bildad the Shuhite answered: "...Yes, the lamp of the wicked is extinguished; his flame of fire does not shine...Surely such is the residence of an evil man; and this is the place of one who has not known God." (Job 18:1,5,21)**

**Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered: "...Is not your wickedness great and is there no end to your iniquity? ...Reconcile yourself with God, and be at peace with Him; in this way your prosperity will be good." (Job 22:1,5,21)**

With friends like that, who needs enemies?

Well, Job responds... **"I have heard many things like these before. What miserable comforters are you all! Will there be an end to your windy words?" (Job 16:2-3)** Job is not happy with them at all and he lets them know it.

Job defends his character... **"As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made my life bitter..." (Job 27:2)** We can sense a little resentment on Job's part toward God here. **"...for while my spirit is still in me, and the breath from God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will whisper no deceit. I will never declare that you three are in the right; until I die, I will not set aside my integrity! I will maintain my righteousness and never let it go; my conscience will not reproach me for as long as I live." (Job 27:3-6)**

Job insists that he is innocent. He feels certain that his suffering is NOT a result of God punishing him for some transgression. And we the audience know that this IS true. We know that none of this was Job's fault based on what we read earlier in the book. We know this. But the human characters in the story do not know.

As we read through this book we can see that Job is a very conflicted man. He knows God is a good God and the Giver of life. Job says, **"You clothed me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews. You gave me life and favor, and your intervention watched over my spirit." (Job 10:11-12)**

But Job doesn't understand why all of a sudden this good God who watched over him is now inflicting such misery upon him. He is having difficulty reconciling how a good and just God would allow this in his life. He asks God... **"Why have You set me as Your target? Have I become a burden to You?" (Job 7:20)**

And yet, even at this point of Job's greatest despair, with his faith severely tested, Job affirms that God is his Redeemer. Here we see the security that Job had in his relationship with God... **"As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that as the last He will stand upon the earth...I will see God." (Job 19:25)**

Job truly loves the Lord God, but he just would like some answers. So Job takes up his case directly with God. **“Even if [God] slays me, I will hope in Him; I will surely defend my ways to His face! ...See now, I have prepared my case; I know that I am right.”** (Job 13:15,18)

But once again Job’s friends wrongly conclude that Job must have done something really bad for God to be punishing him like this. They conjecture all sorts of possible sins that Job might have committed. Of course they are just making stuff up! They are grasping at straws trying to explain away Job’s plight.

Job eventually gets so fed up with his friends that he stops talking to them. He demands that God show up personally to explain Himself. **“If only I had someone to hear me! ...Let the Almighty answer me!”** (Job 31:35)

At this point a fourth friend named Elihu arrives on the scene. Though Elihu makes some of the same assumptions as the other three friends, he draws a different conclusion as to why good people like Job suffer. It may NOT be punishment for their sin. God might use suffering as a warning to help people avoid sin. OR maybe He wants to build one’s character. OR maybe God wants to teach them some important life lesson. Elihu doesn’t know why Job is suffering, but he knows God’s character. He knows God is righteous and that He must have some reason for it – even if we don’t understand it.

Elihu says to Job, **“Now in this you are not right – I answer you, for God is greater than a human being. Why do you contend against Him, that He does not answer all a person’s words?”** (Job 33:12-13) In other words, “God doesn’t owe you any explanation!” **“Indeed, in truth, God does not act wickedly, and the Almighty does not pervert justice.”** (Job 34:12) Basically Elihu tells Job, “God is a good and just God no matter. Whatever happens to us doesn’t change who He is.”

Job never responds to Elihu and, with that, 35 chapters of dialogue between Job and his four friends concludes. Job is still suffering. He still doesn’t know why nor do any of his friends.

Then suddenly... God appears on the scene and addresses Job personally.

**Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: “Who is this who darkens counsel with words without knowledge?”** (Job 38:1-2)

God directs Job’s attention to the grand and glorious universe that He has created. **“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you possess understanding. Who set its measurements – if you know – or who stretched a**

**measuring line across it?”** (Job 38:4) God asks Job all sorts of detailed questions relating to the order and origin of creation.

The fact is that God sees and knows all of the minute details of the world, most of which Job cannot even begin to conceive of. God humbles Job by asking him all kinds of complex questions about nature and animals and weather patterns, none of which Job has any idea about. So, what is the point of all this? God is showing Job just how vast and complex the universe is. And God controls ALL of it – yes, every little detail.

Job, on the other hand, being human, has only a limited perspective which he draws from his own observations and experiences. His worldview is VERY small. So with that being the case, Job is in no position to question a sovereign God. Things are not nearly as simple and straightforward as Job and his friends seem to think.

This brings us back to the question surrounding Job’s suffering – Why? Well, God never explains why. Instead, He tells Job to trust Him.

**Then the Lord answered Job: “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? Let the person who accuses God give Him an answer.”** (Job 40:1-2) Do you know more than God, Job? No, you don’t! Then you are in no position to question God. That means that all you CAN do is trust that God knows what He is doing.

And with that Job humbly repents. **Then Job answered the Lord: “Indeed, I am completely unworthy – how could I reply to You? I put my hand over my mouth to silence myself. I have spoken once, but I cannot answer; twice, but I will say no more.”** (Job 40:3-5)

In a short epilogue God says that the ideas Job’s friends expressed about Him were too simplistic. On the other hand, God says that Job was right in how he spoke about God. This does not mean that everything Job said about God was true. We know that Job struggled and questioned God. But God is pleased with how Job processed through his terrible ordeal.

**...and the Lord had respect for Job.** (Job 42:9) God approves of the way Job earnestly sought Him in the midst of his suffering and He appreciates Job’s honesty.

**So the Lord restored what Job had lost after he prayed for his friends, and the Lord doubled all that had belonged to Job.** (Job 42:10) Job has his health and wealth restored. His brothers and sisters and many friends come and consoled him after what he had gone through.

An important point needs to be made here. None of the bad things that happened to Job earlier in the book were because he deserved them. God permitted them to

happen for His own reasons. By the same token, none of the good things that happen here at the end of the book are because Job deserved them. Rather, they are a result of God's grace poured out on Job.

There are some definite takeaways for us from the Book of Job. God invites us to trust His wisdom whenever bad things happen to us. Rather than try and figure out reasons for it, we are to honestly bring our pain and grief before God. We must trust God, that He really does care about us and that He knows exactly what He is doing.

OK, so now we are ready to move into the Book of Exodus.

When we last saw God's covenant people Israel they were living in peace and prosperity in Egypt. **All the people who were directly descended from Jacob numbered seventy. But Joseph was already in Egypt, and in time Joseph and his brothers and all that generation died. The Israelites, however, were fruitful, increased greatly, multiplied and became extremely strong, so that the land was filled with them.** (Exodus 1:5-7)

Over the last two centuries the Israelite population has grown exponentially. What began with 70 members of Jacob's family has grown to hundreds of thousands! And as the Israelite nation grew they were able to maintain their racial purity, to retain their distinct identity as a people group for one very interesting reason – the prejudice of the Egyptian people.

You see, the Egyptians hated shepherds, which was the primary occupation of the Israelites. So the Egyptian people kept themselves segregated from the Israelites, or as they called them, "the Hebrews." This meant that God's covenant people did not intermarry with the Egyptian populace.

For 75 years following Joseph's death at the end of Genesis, life was good in Egypt. Then, without warning, everything changed!

**Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power over Egypt. He said to his people, "Look over at the Israelite people, more numerous and stronger than we are! Come, let us deal wisely with them. Otherwise they will continue to multiply, and if a war breaks out, they will ally themselves with our enemies and fight against us and leave the country."** (Exodus 1:8-10)

The current Egyptian king, known as Pharaoh, views the fast-growing Hebrew immigrants as a threat to Egypt. At the same time he sees them as an economic asset – a readily available cheap labor source. Pharaoh is filled with evil and he brutally enslaves God's people. He places them into forced labor.

In an effort to control the exploding Hebrew population, Pharaoh decrees that all baby boys born to Hebrew women be drowned in the Nile River. This is more than just the cruel act of a tyrant. It is diametrically opposed to God's plan to make Israel into a great nation. It is a bottom line evil action. If Pharaoh's plan succeeds, it will prevent the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to make him a great nation. It will impede God's promise to Eve in the garden to raise up from one of her descendants a person to defeat the evil one. Pharaoh's plan cannot and must not succeed!

The Israelite nation, like Job, follows the one true God. Like Job, they suddenly and through no fault of their own find themselves suffering various afflictions. Like Job they are in deep emotional distress. Like Job, they are experiencing the loss of their children. Like Job their good life has been interrupted suddenly and without warning. Their prosperity has been replaced with calamity. And just like Job, the people cry out to God in desperation.

So, what we learned about the character of God and human suffering previously in the life of Job provides us with valuable insight moving forward. Does God hear the cries of His people? Yes He does. Is God going to intervene? Yes He is. So the question before us in our story is – when and how is God going to do it?