

Job's Adversity and Restoration

In this discussion we will examine some of the soul-searching and, at the same time, comforting truths set forth in that well-known portion of the Bible, the Book of Job. We know of the “well-known” Book of Job. Nearly two thousand years ago the Apostle James wrote, “Ye have heard of the patience of Job.” To this he added, “and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”—James 5:11

James' words seem to sum up quite well one of the important lessons taught in the Book of Job, that while God permits evil in the form of suffering and otherwise, it is not because he is cruel or unjust, but rather in his wisdom and love he sees that valuable lessons can be learned which will add to the eternal joy of those who are rightly exercised by the experiences through which the Lord permits them to pass. (Heb. 12:11) An eternity of joy compensates many times over for any temporary suffering that may be permitted to come upon us during our present very short span of life. James referred to the patience of Job. As we remember the record of Job's experiences, he really needed patience. (James 1:4) He also

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needed faith in order to maintain his confidence in God, who permitted such severe calamities to come upon him.

Before going further, it would be well to see who Job was, as well as when and where he lived. We read in the first three verses of the Book of Job: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil. There were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. His substance was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household, so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east." The record states that Job lived in the land of Uz. Scholars believe that the land of Uz was just east of Palestine and was once known as Mesopotamia. Many believe that Job was contemporary with Abraham. Later in the book which bears his name it is indicated that he was an outstanding religious counselor in his community.

The circumstances which led up to the calamities which came upon Job are very revealing. He was accused by Satan of serving God only because of the material good things which he received from him. The charge was made

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that if these material blessings were taken from Job, he would curse God. The Lord then permitted Job's blessings to be taken away to prove that the charges were not true. Job's reactions to the calamities which came upon him proved that he loved God with a pure heart, and that his devotion to his Creator was not motivated by material blessings which he had been permitted to enjoy.

With God's permission, evil began to fall upon Job in quick succession. First his oxen and asses were stolen, and his sheep destroyed. Then his camels were stolen. His sons and daughters were all destroyed by a great storm. However, Job accepted these calamities in a philosophical way. The record states that he arose and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped, 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." (Job 1:21) Surely Job took a very philosophical view of his calamities. It seems that for anyone to accept his reverses from this standpoint he must first believe that whatever blessings of life he does enjoy are provided by the Lord and are not of his own making.

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Paul said that in God we “live, and move, and have our being.” (Acts 17:28) James wrote that every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights. (James 1:17) That does not mean that we are to sit idly by and wait for God to bestow his blessings upon us. One of God’s good gifts is the ability to think and plan and work in order to make provision for our material needs, but we should recognize God as the original provider of all the good things of life. Job certainly did just that. After he lost all his possessions, including his children, he lost his health, breaking out with boils from head to foot. Then his wife, thinking that God had withdrawn his favor from her husband, said to him, “Curse God, and die,” but Job said to her: “Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?”—Job 2:9, 10

We surely have to admire Job for his great confidence in the wisdom and love of God! Job spoke of receiving evil at the hand of God. Are we to understand from this that God actually sends evil upon people? Not unless it is in the form of retribution for wrong-doing does God permit evil upon people, therefore, we must make a distinction between evil and sin. Any calamity, such as a fire or an earthquake,

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is an evil, but not a sin. The record shows that Job had not wilfully transgressed divine law, so the Lord was not punishing him. Here the word “permits” would be a better one to use than “sends” evil. God permitted Job to suffer, knowing that ultimately great good would result from his experiences.

Three of Job’s friends visited him in his distress and sought to comfort him. Their names were Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. These claimed that they desired to comfort Job, but actually they seemed determined to prove to him that he was being punished for some gross sin he had committed, a sin which he was hiding from them, but known to God. The record states that they sat down with Job upon the ground seven days, and seven nights, and that they did not speak a word to him during all this time, “for they saw that his grief was very great.” (Job 2:11-13) At this point, although Job did not condemn God, he wondered if life under such circumstances was really worthwhile, so he asked, “Why died I not from the womb. ...For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest. ...Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which wait for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures. ...Why is light given to

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a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?”—Job 3:11, 13, 20, 21 margin; 23

Job was not alone in asking those questions. Many throughout the ages have essentially asked the same questions. Job was simply trying to discover why God permits evil to come upon those who endeavor to serve him to the best of their ability in their own hearts and lives. While Job’s would-be comforters were wrong in their insistence that he had committed some gross sin for which he was being especially punished, yet one of them did express a viewpoint that is often true under such circumstances. He said to Job, “behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou are troubled.” (Job 4:3-5) In other words, it is much easier to tell others to cheer up, that everything will be all right, than it is to remain confident and cheerful ourselves when trouble comes upon us.

Where Job’s comforters were wrong was in their claim that only wilful sinners are permitted to suffer. One of them said to Job, “Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off” (Job 4:7) To

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this Job replied, “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. ... They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. ... Therefore, they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.”—Job 21:7-9, 11, 12, 14

Job’s viewpoint concerning the prosperity of the wicked was quite different from that entertained by many today. A common viewpoint in religious circles is that the righteous are almost sure to prosper financially, as well as in health and popularity, and that it is the wicked who do not get along so well. However, Job expressed the thought that is set forth generally in the Word of God. In the Book of Malachi, we read, “Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.” (Malachi 3:15) Can we say that this is universally true? Are there no rewards at all for being righteous? Job expressed a viewpoint that is true with respect to the general permission of evil. When our first parents transgressed divine law they were sentenced to death, and their offspring came under

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condemnation. The entire human race lost the special favor of God. All are born imperfect and dying. (Psalms 51:4) During the short span of life from the cradle to the grave, some fare better than others. Often the openly wicked seem to prosper more than those who endeavor to serve the Lord, however, this is not always true. Job here simply called attention to the prosperity of some of the wicked to prove that his loss of material blessings did not prove that he was a wilful sinner.

Since man's fall into sin and death the hand of the Lord has not been specially manifested in human affairs. Does this mean that God pays no special attention to those who endeavor to serve him? No, that is not the thought. God's hand is over the affairs of his people, although he does not always bless them along material lines. We are speaking here merely of the present time when sin and death are reigning in the world. In God's due time the kingdom of Christ will be established throughout the earth. Then it will be only the righteous that will prosper. There are numerous texts in the Bible to show this, but many fail to realize that these do not apply at the present time. The particular favor of God toward his people at the present time is in the hope he gives them for a future life of happiness. This hope is expressed in the Bible

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by the teaching of the resurrection from the dead. However, before any could be awakened from death in the resurrection they had to be redeemed by the death of Jesus. Job understood this, and it was a real source of comfort to him during the days of his great affliction. Concerning it he said, “Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! ... 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: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.”—Job 19:23, 25-27

What did Job mean by the Redeemer standing upon the earth in the “latter day”? The expression, “latter day” is one that is used in the Bible to identify the final age in the great plan of God for the deliverance of the human race from sin and death. Paul described it as “the dispensation of the fulness of times.” (Eph. 1:10) Is this the traditional “doomsday” we sometimes hear about? Far from it. In the divine plan of salvation there are various ages during which God has been preparing his faithful people to participate in the work of recovering humanity from sin and death. So it will be during this final age “latter day” in God’s plan that the Redeemer will, symbolically speaking, “Stand”

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upon the earth. He will again be present to accomplish for mankind what the Apostle Peter describes as the “restitution of all things.”—Dan. 12:1-4; Acts 3:19-21

If Job were to enjoy the blessings of that “latter day,” as he called it, he would himself have to be awakened from the sleep of death. Job expected that he would thus be raised from the dead. When suffering so severely he asked God to let him die, but then expressed his belief that he would be raised from the dead. “Oh that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, ... 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 unto the work of thine hands.” (Job 14:13-15) It is quite evident that Job expected to be raised from the dead. All the ancient servants of God had this hope, and it was this that gave them strength and courage to endure the hardships through which they passed. Job said of the Lord, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”—Job 13:15

Job said the Lord would have a desire unto the work of his hands. This was Job’s way of saying that as a member of the human race he

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was God's creation, the work of God's hands. While God has condemned the entire human race to death, he still loves the people, imperfect and dying though they are. He still desires to see them blessed with peace and joy and life. It was because of this love for the human family that God sent his Son into the world to die for Adam and his race. Thus all who lost life through Adam will have an opportunity to gain everlasting life through Jesus. This opportunity will come to the vast majority of the human race when awakened from the sleep of death.—I Cor. 15:21, 22

Job had great confidence in God, and in his love, despite the afflictions which had been permitted to come upon him. Job never doubted the wisdom of God in permitting him to suffer. What troubled him was his inability to discern God's reason for permitting such severe calamities to come upon him. Job could not see God in the things which were happening to him. Hear what he says about this, "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! ...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 23:3, 8-10

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Job had no doubt of the ultimate outcome of God's dealings with him. What did he mean by the statement, "I shall come forth as gold"? This was a reference to the process of refining gold. Job knew that he was being tried, or tested, and he knew that if he maintained his faith in God he would come through the refining fires, even as gold. Finally, the Lord spoke to Job in a long series of questions designed to impress upon his mind the fact that his understanding of God was very limited indeed, that there was very little of the creative works of God that he could explain, so why should he be so upset over the fact that he did not understand why God was allowing him to suffer. We should hear Job's reactions to these questions, "Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." "Lord, ... I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. ...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 40:4, 5; 42:1-3, 5, 6) In view of such an expression of repentance and humility, Job did "come forth as gold."

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We are told that the Lord restored Job's health, and gave him twice as much of material goods as he had before. He was also given seven sons and three daughters. In other words, he experienced a complete restoration of all that he had lost, and more. Many believe that Job's severe trials and subsequent restoration were illustrative of the experiences of the entire human race which, throughout the ages, has continued to suffer and die. The Bible shows that, even as it was with Job, a time of restoration is coming. Peter speaks of this as "times of restitution of all things." That will surely be a time of great rejoicing for the human race.—Acts 3:19-22

Job's Viewpoint of Death

In the midst of his adversity Job wondered if it might not have been better had he died at birth, so in the presence of those who had come to comfort him he said, "Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me [from being choked]? or why the breasts that I should suck"—Job 3:11, 12

The idea of giving up "the ghost," as expressed by Job, has been misleading to many in their search for the truth relating to death. This expression appears a number of times in our

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Common Version of the Bible, but it is a mistranslation of the original Hebrew text in which it appears. The word here translated “ghost” should have been translated “to breathe out,” or to expire.

Job did not imply that he possessed a separate personality within him which would have escaped and continued to live, had he died in infancy. In this text many theologians have ignored the archaic meaning of the word “ghost”—spirit—to support the error that man possesses an immortal soul which continues to live after the body dies. This theory is not supported by the Word of God.

The word “soul” appears in the Bible for the first time in Genesis 2:7. This text reads, “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Here the expression, “living soul,” is a translation of the same Hebrew word that is translated “moving creature” in Genesis 1:20. It simply means a living being. A soul is simply a being composed of an organism animated by the breath of life. Adam was not given a soul. Rather, he became a soul when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The expression, “immortal soul,” is not found in the Bible

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at all. To the contrary, the Bible tells us that sinful souls die – “The soul that sinneth it shall die.”—Ezek. 18:4, 20

The Bible tells us that “the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything.” (Eccles. 9:5) Job knew this, and that is why he said that if he had died when he was a baby he would “have lain still and been quiet.” To this he added, “I should have slept: then had I been at rest.” Here Job gives us four words [still, quiet, slept, rest] to describe his condition in death had he died at birth, and they all denote a state of unconsciousness. (Job 3:13) To this Job added that he would have “been at rest with kings and counselors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves; or with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver.” Continuing, Job explains, “There the wicked cease from troubling: and there the weary are at rest.” (vss 14-17) Thus Job identifies a fairly complete cross-section of humanity, including infants and the wicked, and affirms that they all rest, or sleep, together in death.

Sheol, the Bible Hell

Later on Job asked God to let him die. We quote: “O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until

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thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!” (Job 14:13) Job wanted to die in order to escape further suffering.

It is revealing to note that in making this request Job used the Hebrew word sheol, here translated “grave”. This is the only Hebrew word in the Old Testament that is ever translated “hell.” Thus it describes the only hell the ancient servants of God knew anything about; indeed, the only hell that God had revealed to them. This word sheol is translated “hell” thirty-one times; “grave” thirty-one times, and “pit” three times.

In Ecclesiastes 9:10 sheol is translated “grave.” The text reads, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave (sheol), whither thou goest.” Thus we are plainly told that sheol is a state of unconsciousness, of oblivion. This is why Job asked God to let him go to sheol, the Bible hell. He wanted to be at rest.

The Resurrection Hope

Having asked God to let him die that he might escape further suffering, Job then in-

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quired, “If a man die, shall he live again?” Answering his own question, Job affirmed, “All the days of my appointed time will I wait [in death], till my change [from death to life] come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire unto the work of thine hands.” (vss, 14, 15) Thus Job expressed the great hope of life beyond the grave that is taught throughout the entire Bible. In the New Testament it is described by the word “resurrection.” Addressing a Roman governor, Paul explained that the assurance of the Law and the Prophets was that “there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” –Acts 24:14, 15

Jesus affirmed that there would be a resurrection opportunity for both the good and the evil. (John 5:28, 29) To Martha, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth [having been raised from the dead] and believeth in me shall never die.”–John 11:25, 26

In the 15th chapter of First Corinthians the Apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of the resurrection of the dead by explaining that unless there is a resurrection, those who “are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” (vs. 18) Then

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Paul assures us that there will be a resurrection of the dead, for “since by man came death, by man [Jesus Christ] came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” –vss. 21, 22

An Awakening from Sleep

Jesus said to his disciples concerning Lazarus who had died, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” (John 11:11) Actually Lazarus was dead, but Jesus used the word “sleep” to denote that death would not be permanent. God forewarned our first parents that their disobedience would result in death, “The day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) Later they were sentenced to death, and this sentence would have been permanent but for the love of God in providing a Redeemer.

Jesus was that Redeemer, and Paul wrote that Jesus gave himself “a ransom for all.” (I Tim. 2:3-6) This means that permanent death has, by the redemption provided through Christ Jesus, been transformed into a temporary sleep. Thus throughout the Scriptures the dead are referred to as being asleep, and it was in keeping with this that Jesus referred to Lazarus as being asleep, when in reality he was dead. Jesus

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made it plain to his disciples that such was the case, “Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.” –John 11:14

There are certain characteristics of sleep which lend themselves suitably as illustrations of death. One is that those who are asleep are unconscious; similarly, the dead are unconscious. Then, there is an awakening of those who are asleep; and the dead, likewise, will be awakened by the power of God, again to enjoy the blessings of life. Generally speaking, it is during the night that people sleep, and this also is in keeping with the Bible’s use of sleep as an illustration of death. The long period of human experience, beginning with the transgression of our first parents in the Garden of Eden until now, is likened in the Bible to a nighttime, a time of darkness, during which there has been much sorrow and weeping. However, this is not to continue forever. David wrote, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” –Ps. 30:5

During this long nighttime of sin and death, Satan, the Devil, has been the ruler of the world, the one who rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience. (II Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2) The Bible assures us that Christ is to establish his rulership over the earth, and soon. This great change

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is likened in the Bible to the coming of a morning of joy, and Jesus is referred to as the “Sun of Righteousness” who will rise “with healing in his wings.”—Mal. 4:2

People suffer and die because of sin. As a result God withdrew his favor from the human race. The Bible speaks of this in a more positive way as “the wrath of God” now being manifested throughout the earth. (John 3:36; Rom. 1:18) With the establishment of Christ’s kingdom, God’s wrath will be taken away. This is why Job prayed, “O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave [sheol] ... until thy wrath be past.”—Job 14:13

Job felt that he had endured his share of human suffering resulting from original sin, and he wanted to fall asleep in death, not forever, but until that time in the divine plan when Christ would be the Ruler, and when sin and death would be destroyed. Paul wrote that Christ will reign until all enemies are put under his feet, and that the last enemy to be destroyed is death.—I Cor. 15:24-26

In a number of Old Testament prophecies the kingdom of Christ is likened to a great mountain which eventually will fill the whole earth. Isaiah wrote that in this kingdom “the

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Lord of hosts will make unto all people a feast of fat things,” and that in this mountain, or kingdom, he will also destroy death and wipe away tears from off all faces. (Isa. 25:6-9) Truly a glorious time awaits all mankind when, in the resurrection, they are awakened from the sleep of death! The Bible explains that there is to be a “first resurrection,” and later a general resurrection. Those who come forth in the “first resurrection” will live and reign with Christ. It is to these that the precious heavenly promises of the Bible are made.—Rev. 20:6

The vast majority of mankind, however, will be awakened from death as humans, and will, through belief and obedience, receive perfect and everlasting human life here on the earth. This will mean that all will meet and know their loved ones in the resurrection, that there is to be a glorious homecoming of all the dead. Concerning that future time of blessing, we read, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”—Rev. 21:4, 5

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Close your eyes for a moment to the scenes of misery and woe, degradation and sorrow that yet prevail on account of sin, and picture before your mental vision the glory of the perfect earth. Not a stain of sin mars the harmony and peace of the perfect society; not a bitter thought, not an unkind look or word; love, welling up from every heart, meets a kindred response in every other heart, and benevolence marks every act. There sickness shall be no more, not an ache nor a pain, nor any evidence of decay - not even the fear of such things. Think of all the pictures of comparative health and beauty of human form and feature that you have ever seen, and know that perfect humanity will be of still surpassing loveliness. The inward purity and mental and moral perfection will stamp and glorify every radiant countenance. Such will earth's society be; and weeping bereaved ones will have their tears all wiped away, when thus they realize the resurrection work complete.—Rev. 21:4