The Book of Job

Understanding Suffering

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Facing Inexplicable Suffering

Most of us have experienced examples of this:
- Loved one has long painful illness before dying
- Young person cut off in the prime of life
- We ourselves experience suffering that seems purposeless

The book of Job is helpful in understanding some of the most difficult such cases.
The Plot of Job
How the Book Begins

- Job's circumstances:
  - Most righteous person on earth in his day
    - No reason to think our day much better
  - Very wealthy
  - Happy family

- God's evaluation
  - No one on earth like him

- Satan's response
  - Job is well-paid to be good!
  - Take his wealth away, he will curse you to your face!
The Tests

- God permits a test to see whether Satan’s challenge is warranted.

- First test (chapter 1)
  - Satan takes away Job's:
    - Wealth
    - Children
  - Satan times arrival of messengers to build impact.
  - But Job doesn't curse God.
The Tests

- Second test (chapter 2)
  - Satan is not about to admit he is wrong.
  - He raises the stakes.
  - Job will curse God if his health is taken away.
  - Satan takes away:
    - Job's health
    - The support of his wife
  - Still Job doesn't curse God.
The Rest of the Book

Why chapters 3-42?

- Wouldn't the message be clearer with just a chapter or so on Job's friends, plus another for interview with God?
- Looks like God continues the test to take away things Satan didn't (not sure what part Satan plays in this):
  - Support of friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar)
  - Support of being right (Elihu)
  - Support of God (who comes with accusations)
The Rest of the Book

- When God finally does appear (ch 38), Job doesn’t curse him.
  - Job comes to see his own sins, and repents.
  - If we find it hard to imagine ourselves doing this, it just shows we aren’t in Job’s league!
- Then God praises Job …
  - … though he said things he shouldn’t have
- God rebukes Job’s friends …
  - … who were trying hard to defend God
The Rest of the Book

- Job remained (relatively) faithful under far more difficult circumstances than his friends faced.
- Finally – ruining the story for many liberals – God gives Job double what he had lost.
  - By the way, if you were Job, this wouldn’t ruin the story!
- Let us look at the book to see what lessons we can learn from it.
Some Lessons from Job
The Two Worlds

- As readers, we have a great advantage over Job & his friends.
  - We see what is happening in the unseen world.
- Job’s friends don't see this other world.
  - To defend God (which they know is right) …
  - … they attack Job (inventing a 'secret sin' theory).
  - Their theology (& Satan's) is like today's health & wealth gospel.
Job doesn't see the unseen world either.

- He knows God allowed these things to happen.
- He is right about this, whether he knows about Satan or not.
- He knows that his friends' accusations are false, so their preaching/counseling tends to drive him away from God rather than toward repentance.
The Two Worlds

Outside the book of Job, we don’t see this unseen world either.

- Will we respond like Job's friends?
- Will we respond like Job in his worse moments?
- Will we cling to God & trust Him for vindication in His time?

Apparently much (all?) inexplicable suffering is really persecution from Satan.
Job’s Response

- Though Satan claimed that Job served God for what he got out of it …
- … Job (& friends) came to see that Job served God because of who God is.
- God is worthy of our worship whether we get anything for it or not.
- Do we serve God for who He is or for what we can get out of it?
Satan's Response

- He clears out before the end.
- He is defeated, but not about to admit it!
- He won't admit it until the very end …
  - … when every knee will bow & every tongue confess.
- So don't expect vindication in this life.
  - We may get vindication here and now.
  - We may not.
God's Response

Important that Job not know what is happening.

- Otherwise this won't be the right kind of test
- God cannot intervene to bail Job out, or the test will be invalidated.
- So God goes beyond Satan's charges to take away everything.
- Once Job has seen God, admitted God's charges, worshiped Him, the test is over.
God's Response

- God then praises Job, humbles his friends.
- Job's other 'friends' come back.
- God gives Job double what he lost.
  - Two times the wealth
  - Same number more children
- God is no cheapskate.
  - Though we serve Him for nothing …
  - … He will not send us away empty-handed.
  - But the full reward cannot come till the test is over.
Our Response?

- Pay attention to the book of Job.
- We are experiencing similar things.
  - The unseen world
  - Satan's attacks
  - The same God
  - Our friends are watching too.
The End?

Not yet!

Therefore, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding... for your labor is not in vain in the Lord.