Job

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P U B L I S H I N G
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

Reformed Expository Commentary

A Series

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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: O'Donnell, Douglas Sean, 1972- author
Title: Job / Douglas Sean O'Donnell.
Description: Phillipsburg, New Jersey : P&R Publishing, [2025] | Series: Reformed expository commentaries | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "The man Job both prefigures Christ and illustrates our deep need of him. In this redemptive-historical commentary, Douglas O'Donnell applies the teaching of this ancient book to our lives today"-- Provided by publisher.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025017071 | ISBN 9781629954523 hardcover | ISBN 9781629954530 epub
Subjects: LCSH: Bible. Job--Commentaries | LCGFT: Commentaries
Classification: LCC BS1415.53 .O36 2025 | DDC 223/.107--dc23/eng/20250813
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025017071

To Marc Davidson (1973–2022)

"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men."
(Col. 3:23)

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Series Introduction

In every generation there is a fresh need for the faithful exposition of God's Word in the church. At the same time, the church must constantly do the work of theology: reflecting on the teaching of Scripture, confessing its doctrines of the Christian faith, and applying them to contemporary culture. We believe that these two tasks—the expositional and the theological—are interdependent. Our doctrine must derive from the biblical text, and our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture must arise from the doctrine taught in Scripture as a whole.

We further believe that these interdependent tasks of biblical exposition and theological reflection are best undertaken in the church, and most specifically in the pulpits of the church. This is all the more true since the study of Scripture properly results in doxology and praxis—that is, in praise to God and practical application in the lives of believers. In pursuit of these ends, we are pleased to present the Reformed Expository Commentary as a fresh exposition of Scripture for our generation in the church. We hope and pray that pastors, teachers, Bible study leaders, and many others will find this series to be a faithful, inspiring, and useful resource for the study of God's infallible, inerrant Word.

The Reformed Expository Commentary has four fundamental commitments. First, these commentaries aim to be *biblical*, presenting a comprehensive exposition characterized by careful attention to the details of the text. They are not exegetical commentaries—commenting word by word or even verse by verse—but integrated expositions of whole passages of Scripture. Each commentary will thus present a sequential, systematic treatment of an entire book of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, these commentaries are unashamedly *doctrinal*. We are committed to the Westminster Confession

of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Each volume will teach, promote, and defend the doctrines of the Reformed faith as they are found in the Bible. Third, these commentaries are *redemptive-historical* in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are properly understood as pointing us to Christ and his gospel, as well as giving us examples to follow in living by faith. Fourth, these commentaries are *practical*, applying the text of Scripture to contemporary challenges of life—both public and private—with appropriate illustrations.

The contributors to the Reformed Expository Commentary are all pastor-scholars. As pastor, each author will first present his expositions in the pulpit ministry of his church. This means that these commentaries are rooted in the teaching of Scripture to real people in the church. While aiming to be scholarly, these expositions are not academic. Our intent is to be faithful, clear, and helpful to Christians who possess various levels of biblical and theological training—as should be true in any effective pulpit ministry. Inevitably this means that some issues of academic interest will not be covered. Nevertheless, we aim to achieve a responsible level of scholarship, seeking to promote and model this for pastors and other teachers in the church. Significant exegetical and theological difficulties, along with such historical and cultural background as is relevant to the text, will be treated with care.

We strive for a high standard of enduring excellence. This begins with the selection of the authors, all of whom have proved to be outstanding communicators of God's Word. But this pursuit of excellence is also reflected in a disciplined editorial process. Each volume is edited by both a series editor and a testament editor. The testament editors, Iain Duguid for the Old Testament and Daniel Doriani for the New Testament, are accomplished pastors and respected scholars who have taught at the seminary level. Their job is to ensure that each volume is sufficiently conversant with up-to-date scholarship and is faithful and accurate in its exposition of the text. As series editors, we oversee each volume to ensure its overall quality—including excellence of writing, soundness of teaching, and usefulness in application. Working together as an editorial team, along with the publisher, we are devoted to ensuring that these are the best commentaries that our gifted authors can

provide, so that the church will be served with trustworthy and exemplary expositions of God's Word.

It is our goal and prayer that the Reformed Expository Commentary will serve the church by renewing confidence in the clarity and power of Scripture and by upholding the great doctrinal heritage of the Reformed faith. We hope that pastors who read these commentaries will be encouraged in their own expository preaching ministry, which we believe to be the best and most biblical pattern for teaching God's Word in the church. We hope that lay teachers will find these commentaries among the most useful resources they rely on for understanding and presenting the text of the Bible. And we hope that the devotional quality of these studies of Scripture will instruct and inspire each Christian who reads them in joyful, obedient discipleship to Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless all who read the Reformed Expository Commentary. We commit these volumes to the Lord Jesus Christ, praying that the Holy Spirit will use them for the instruction and edification of the church, with thanksgiving to God the Father for his unceasing faithfulness in building his church through the ministry of his Word.

Richard D. Phillips
Philip Graham Ryken
Series Editors

Preface

The month before I began a sermon series on the book of Job, my friend Dr. Phil Ryken walked into my office on a Sunday morning as my church's guest preacher. He asked, "How are you doing?" My honest and direct response was "God is preparing me to preach Job." I am thankful to Phil because he then, before then, and since then has listened carefully and responded thoughtfully to some of my struggles. That day I faced the loss of three key staff members, the financial failure of the church's school, a letter of resignation from the head of school, who indirectly named me as the major reason he was moving on, opposition from a narcissist, a serious and frightening verbal-abuse issue within a marriage (I feared for my life!), and a friend's cancer diagnosis. Then, a few Sundays into opening the book of Job for my struggling community, the coronavirus pandemic hit. In God's providence, it was the perfect book for the imperfect times.

I dedicate this book to Marc Davidson, a friend lost to cancer on May 9, 2022. He was forty-nine and is survived by his wife, Lisa, and their seven children. Marc was an amazing Christian, husband, father, coach, and athlete. I first met him on the basketball court during my senior year of high school, and after I became a Christian the next year, he was the first person who encouraged me to read and study the Bible. I am eternally indebted to his faithful modeling of the Christian life, his bold testimony, and his help in pointing me in the right direction in the first few years of my Christian walk. You are loved and missed, brother!

I want to acknowledge other brothers and sisters who helped me, with this particular commentary, to exegete faithfully and communicate clearly. Davis Wetherell and Josh McQuaid read a number of the chapter drafts. Thank you! Phil Ryken and Iain Duguid, two of the editors for this series, read the

final manuscript carefully, corrected mistakes, and offered suggestions for improvement. It was, once again, an honor to work with you both. I also thank the team at P&R, especially John Hughes and Karen Magnuson, for skillfully bringing this book into its finished form.

As you use this commentary, my hope is that I will provide an example of how to explain, illustrate, and apply biblical poetry, along with showing you various paths to journey from Job to Jesus. Moreover, I hope to heighten your appreciation for the book of Job as a literary masterwork—that you might echo the acclaim of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, who called it "the greatest poem of ancient and modern times";[1] Victor Hugo, who said that it is "perhaps the greatest masterpiece of the human mind";[2] and Thomas Carlyle, who stated, "There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit."[3] But whether you agree or not with such high commendations from these three literary giants, I hope you recognize something of Job's beauty. For where else in biblical literature can you experience together such awesome imagery ("my belly is like wine that has no vent," Job 32:19), sharp wit ("the bushes of the earth . . . will teach you . . . that the hand of the LORD has done this," 12:8–9), ironic prayers of personification ("O earth, cover not my blood," 16:18), dark humor (Job's digging for death "more than for hidden treasures," 3:21), clever turns of phrase ("eyes to the blind," 29:15a), biting sarcasm ("wisdom will die with you" 12:2b), acrostic closures (14:1 begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, while the last word of 14:22 begins with the alphabet's last letter), and eloquently structured prose (e.g., 1:13–19)? And in what other book of the Bible do you have a story of human tragedy and divine comedy that is enhanced by its realistic characters, its profound poetry, a courtroom scene, and a surprise ending? Enjoy!

1. Tennyson, quoted in Lawrence Boadt, *The Book of Job: Why Do the Innocent Suffer?*, Classic Bible Series (St. Martin's Press, 1997), 32.

2. Hugo, quoted in Henry H. Halley, *Pocket Bible Handbook* (H. H. Halley, 1946), 232.

3. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic of History* (Chapman and Hall Limited, 1901), 49.

Abbreviations

CSB	Christian Standard Bible
ESV	English Standard Version
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
MEV	Modern English Version
MSG	The Message
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, 5 vols. (Zondervan, 1997)
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PCA	Presbyterian Church in America
TLB	The Living Bible
YLT	Young's Literal Translation

Job

Where Wisdom Is Found

Prologue

1

Job's Person, Possessions, and Priesthood

Job 1:1–5

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. (Job 1:1)

When the Cuban Missile Crisis played out for thirteen days in October 1962, it was the hottest moment of the Cold War. The two world superpowers—the Soviet Union and the United States—were on the brink of nuclear war. Thankfully, through tense but successful negotiations between Kennedy and Khrushchev, a peaceful agreement was reached. The United States agreed to dismantle missiles in Turkey and Italy and never to invade Cuba without direct provocation; the Soviet Union agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba. In July 2015, Cuba and the United States restored diplomatic relations. But from 1960 until that moment, Americans could not travel to Cuba, or Cubans to America, without a special visa.

Twice in the 1990s I traveled to Cuba with a group of American athletes to play several basketball games against the Cuban national team. The experience was extraordinary. We witnessed firsthand the effects of Castro's communism

and Eisenhower's embargo. For example, we went to a restaurant where only four sandwiches were on the menu: ham and cheese, cheese and ham, ham with cheese, cheese with ham. I'm not kidding! Cuba's national team wore old uniforms and tattered shoes. When we gathered for a final meal together, we were served the worst steak I have ever seen or eaten, or tried to eat. The Americans cut the fat, pushed aside the bones, and tried to find the meat. The Cubans ate everything, the boiled bones and all. Also, at that meal we sat American-Cuban-American-Cuban around the table, which was a nice arrangement. The only problem was that no one on the Cuban team knew English, only one player on our team was fluent in Spanish, and the rest of us, like me, were desperately racking our brains for vocabulary words from our high school Spanish classes. Needless to say, holding a conversation was nearly impossible. What I entered in Cuba was a completely different world.

The opening lines of the book of Job offer a similar impression. Job 1:1 introduces us to the book's protagonist, who has an unusual name and lived in an unfamiliar place: "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job." We might wonder, "Is Job a real person and the land of Uz a real place?" Other questions abound. If Job "was the greatest of all the people of the east" (Job 1:3), who are "the people of the east"—the Babylonians, the Persians, the Chinese? We are told that Job "feared God" (v. 1) and that he "would consecrate" his children and "offer burnt offerings" for them (v. 5), but who is the God (*'elohim*) that Job worships? Is Job a priest within some religious tradition? Whatever our answers are to these questions, we know that we have entered into a world very different from ours.

This affirmation does not mean, however, that we cannot find answers to our questions or that we cannot bridge the gap from Job's world to ours. In fact, my aim for this introductory chapter on these introductory verses is to do just that. Our path is straightforward: by looking at Job's person (Job 1:1), possessions (vv. 2–3), and priesthood (vv. 4–5) in *his* world, we will have the opportunity to return to our own world with fresh wisdom and insight. Along the way, we will learn more than a lesson on history and hermeneutics. We will learn about ourselves and our God and the wisdom he offers us.

Person

We start our journey with Job's person. Job 1:1 introduces us to a man ("There was a man . . . whose name was Job"). The formulaic start of the

setting might remind us of how parables are often told in the Bible. For example, Nathan's parable to David begins, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor" (2 Sam. 12:1). Similarly, Jesus' parable of the rich fool starts, "There was a rich man" (Luke 16:19). Such a formulaic start, along with lengthy poetic monologues and dialogues[1] and the etymology of Job's name, has led some scholars to argue that the book of Job is a work of fiction.[2] It is certainly true that Job's name (a name found only here in all of ancient Hebrew literature but appearing frequently in other ancient texts) suggests symbolic value in that *'iyyob* (which means "Where is the Divine Father?")[3] could be an artistic expression used to suit Job's future dilemma, along with an ironic wordplay on the word "enemy" (*'yb*)[4]—a word that Job uses twice: "Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy?" (Job 13:24) and "Behold, he [God] finds occasions against me, he counts me as his enemy" (33:10).

My view is that Job was a real person, not a fictional character—someone whose legendary sufferings were the historical ground on which the author of Job built his story, a story that features his magnificent literary embellishment and flair. Part of that literary flair might include using poetic speeches to capture the message of the actual dialogues—between Job and his friends—and renaming the historical sufferer *'iyyob* to "indicate the protagonist's experience of hostility,"[5] both with his accusatory friends and with his silent God.

One reason that I take Job, along with all the characters named (including Satan) and the details of the story told (including the unprecedented misfortunes), to be historically grounded is the referencing of Job in Ezekiel

1. Ninety-five percent of the book is poetry.

2. Who speaks in beautiful parallelisms when arguing or in imaginative imagery when scraping his wounds? (Indeed, who was there to record more than ten thousand words of elevated extemporaneous dialogue?)

3. "The name Job . . . was well-attested in the Near East in the second millennium B.C.E. and appears to have originally signified a quest for divine presence ('Where is the Divine Father?'). . . . If so, the name presages the content of the book, which is largely concerned with God as *Deus Absconditus*, a God whose face is hidden (Job 13:24; 34:29)." C. L. Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*, Illuminations (Eerdmans, 2013), 252–53. For a detailed discussion on Job's name, see David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, Word Biblical Commentary 17 (Word, 1989), 10–11.

4. "To many of the rabbis, Job is not so much a historical figure as he is a *māšāl*, a symbolic figure (*b. B. Bat.* 15a; *y. Soṭah.* 5:8/20C; *Gen. Rab.* 57:4). . . . In fact, Eliezer argued that Job himself knew that he was a symbolic figure, for Job says in 17:6a, '[God] made me a *māšāl* for people.'" Seow, *Job 1–21*, 264.

5. "In this sense, early and medieval Christian commentators may have been right that Job represents anyone who suffers." Seow, 252–53.

14:14, 20 (Ezekiel names Job alongside Noah and Daniel) and in James 5:11 ("the steadfastness of Job"). Another reason is the location named in the setting. Job lived in "the land of Uz" (Job 1:1), on the border of Edom and Northern Arabia.[6] The author's focus, however, is not on Job's historical setting (he spends almost no time there!) but on his godly life.

Job is really righteous: "There was a man . . . , and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). Four descriptions of holiness are provided. The first two have to do with Job's life in relation to people and the second two in relation to God. Both pairs are parallelisms. In relation to people, Job is "blameless and upright." The word "blameless" means not that he is sinless, but rather that he is a man of integrity. He has nothing to hide. His faithful and consistent goodness is evident to all. Job alone in the book of Job receives this designation,[7] and in the context of the book the word is used as simply synonymous with the person who is "just" (12:4) or "right" (9:20; "in the right," 22:3). The word "upright" is synonymous with "blameless," and it refers to the person who is "pure" or "innocent," in contrast with "evildoers," "the wicked," and "bloodthirsty men."[8] So Job is "blameless and upright" (1:1), or, to offer a spatial translation, he is "whole" and "straight." We might say, in the vocabulary of Jesus, that as Job walks down the *straight* and narrow way that leads to life, he treats others the same way that he wishes to be treated; his wholehearted submission to and reverence, respect, and love for God show themselves in his *whole* (or "perfect," Matt. 5:48) love for others. Because of this, other people—even his enemies—have nothing against him. He has treated them with fairness and equity and charity. He is "the man of peace [*shalom*]," namely, a "blameless" and "upright" man (Ps. 37:37).

In these ways, Christians should imitate Job. We should be known for teaching wisdom ("you have instructed many") and also for caring for and helping out the needy (his "soul grieved for the needy"): Job "strengthened the weak hands" and "delivered the poor who cried for help," including "the blind," "the lame," "the fatherless," and widows; he even invited orphans into his home to dine with him, clothed the cold with warm clothes, and

6. "Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz" (Lam. 4:21; cf. Jer. 25:20). Of course, some of Jesus' parables have real cities in the historical setting. But there are only a few examples of this in Old Testament narratives.

7. See Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; 8:20; 9:20, 21, 22.

8. See, in order of quotation above, Job 8:6; 17:8; 8:20; 9:24; Prov. 29:10.

brought justice to many. Moreover, like Job, we should treasure God's words and keep his commandments and thus avoid idolatry; flee the love of money; remain sexually pure; confess our sins and ask for forgiveness; be honest, fair, and responsible in business dealings; show hospitality; care for creation; love our enemies; and comfort mourners ("Did not I weep for him whose day was hard?").[9] Put simply, we should be salt and light in the world so that others see our "good works and give glory" to God (see Matt. 5:13–16). We should imitate Job! As the Puritan Thomas Brooks put it:

> Set the highest examples and patterns before your face of grace and godliness for your imitation. In the business of faith, set an Abraham before your eyes. In the business of courage, set a Joshua. In the business of uprightness, set a Job. . . . Next to Christ, set the pattern of the choicest saints before you.[10]

Job is in right relationship with his fellow man. He is also in right relationship with God, as seen in the two other descriptions of holiness. Job fears God and he turns away from evil (Job 1:1; cf. 28:28). With these phrases, we have another parallelism—a synthetic or focusing parallelism—in which the second half focuses on or expands on or even explains more fully the first. Throughout the Wisdom Literature of the Bible, to "fear God" takes on various qualities, such as the attitude of humble reverence and the action of totally dependent trust. Here in Job, fearing God encompasses those qualities, but it also flows into moral purity. Thus, Job demonstrates his reverence for God and trust in God by turning away from evil. The focus is on *actions* that stem from an *attitude* ("The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil," Prov. 8:13; "by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil," 16:6) and include both turning from evil and turning to God and keeping his commandments (see Eccl. 12:13; or, in Job's case, what he knows of God's will).

Job is not holy, holy, holy like the Lord God (see Isa. 6:3), but this opening description highlights his unique holiness, as God himself will later state: "There is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil" (Job 1:8; 2:3). The phrase "There is none like him," which summarizes the descriptors of Job's character, is—as Eric

9. In the paragraph above, verses quoted from or alluded to that support Job's character include Job 4:3; 6:22; 23:11–12; 29:12–13, 15–17, 25; 30:25; 31:1, 9, 13, 19, 21, 24–30, 32–34, 38–40.

10. Thomas Brooks, "Appendix to Memoir," *Works of Thomas Brooks*, vol. 1 (Banner of Truth, 1980), lxiv.

Ortlund points out—"an amazing thing to say because it is most often said in praise of God himself and only occasionally to describe human beings."[11] The point of such language is plain: Job is quite out of the ordinary! He is "the most godly and virtuous man on earth."[12]

Possessions

As a result of his godly life, Job embodies Proverbs 22:4 ("The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life") and Psalm 112:1b–3a ("Blessed is the man who fears the Lord. . . . His offspring will be mighty in the land. . . . Wealth and riches are in his house"). Perhaps that is why the author transitions from Job 1:1 into Job 1:2 with the unusual phrase "there were born to him" ten children. It leaves the reader wondering whether the pinnacles of Job's blessings—his offspring—are born as a result of Job's impeccable character and not merely his wife's reproductive system. Whatever the intention of the transitional phrase, the thought is clear: "Following the fourfold statement about Job's person, there is a fourfold build-up of evidence of Job's blessedness: his family, his livestock, his household, and his status (1:2–3)."[13]

We can umbrella those blessings under the term *possessions*,[14] as identified in Job 1:2–3: "There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He *possessed* 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and [he *possessed*] very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east." The numerology here presents Job as

11. See 1 Kings 8:23; Pss. 35:10; 71:19; 86:8–9; Jer. 10:6–7; Mic. 7:18. Eric Ortlund, *Suffering Wisely and Well: The Grief of Job and the Grace of God* (Crossway, 2022), 40, citing Norman Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Westminster, 1985), 40.

12. C. J. Williams, *The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Job* (Wipf & Stock, 2017), 27.

13. Seow, *Job 1–21*, 253.

14. In the ancient Near East, and as repeatedly recorded throughout Scripture, children are the patriarch's "possessions" in that he legally owns them and is responsible for them, along with other members of his household, including his wife and servants (see Ex. 20:17; Matt. 18:23–24). Contemporary readers are understandably uncomfortable with this ancient approach to property, especially when it extends to the apparent "possession" of humans—God's own image bearers. Nevertheless, we should not be surprised when ancient texts employ their own customary manners of speech, nor should we forget to interpret this verse in light of Scripture's clear teachings elsewhere that all humans are made in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:26–27; 5:1; James 3:9), and that Israel's own practices on such matters were to reflect the character of the God "who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex. 20:2; cf. Lev. 25:38).

the "perfect" man in that he has ten children ("*seven* sons and *three* daughters," Job 1:2) and ten thousand animals (v. 3).[15] And the large numbers of animals and laborers indicate that he owns what we can label a successful fabric company (sheep's wool used for clothing), agricultural operations (oxen to plow the abundant acreage of his large estate and servants to harvest crops), travel and trade industries (donkeys and camels for transport of people and goods), and perhaps food distribution (mutton chops and donkey's milk). Job has deep pockets (made of wool, we assume); and he receives deep respect, for both his piety and his possessions—sheep, camels, oxen, donkeys, servants, and children—earn him the prestigious title "the greatest of all the people of the east" (v. 3), the indicator "east" designating the regions of Edom, Moab, and Ammon (Isa. 11:14) and "the nomadic groups that migrated about the Arabian desert, occasionally raiding the settled communities of the Transjordan and even Cisjordan itself."[16] Though he is not a Hebrew, he is the personification of the perfect son of Proverbs and the promised blessings of Deuteronomy come to life. He fears God and reaps the rewards of affluence, offspring, and honor.

Priesthood

Satan will slither onto the scene soon enough to test this whole paradigm, and we will turn to the texts about him in chapters 2 and 4 below. For now, all is well in the world. What an idyllic introduction! Standing atop the world's stage is the righteous man (*person*), surrounded by his servants and sons and donkeys and daughters (*possessions*); and his only action—perhaps a daily one—that our text focuses on is Job's *priesthood*, as detailed in Job 1:4–5:

> His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

15. The numbers 3, 7, and together 10 are all symbolic of completion or perfection. On the round numbers as representing perfection, see David J. A. Clines, "False Naivety in the Prologue to Job," *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985): 127–36.

16. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, NICOT (Eerdmans, 1998), 17.

While Job might have lived at or near the same time as the patriarchs of Genesis, there is no clear indication that he is part of God's covenant people, even as a Gentile convert. He is a wise man from "the east" (cf. 1 Kings 4:30) who, like the magi in Matthew, has some revelation about God from God, and in light of that light, he seeks to know, serve, and worship him. In fact, Job twice addresses God as Yahweh (Job 1:21; 12:9), a title used by the author thirty-two times in total. And when God speaks in chapters 38–41, it is obvious that he is the Creator and Sustainer and Redeemer, the only true and living God, the covenant Lord of Israel.

Part of Job's dedication to God is demonstrated in his priestly sacrifices. After Job cleanses his children—perhaps "by means of a sanctification or purification ceremony"[17]—he offers burnt offerings by killing and scorching bulls and rams (see Job 42:8; cf. Lev. 1:5; 5:15–16) for each of his children (ten costly sacrifices!) on a regular basis ("continually," Job 1:5). Job barbecues all day most days. His robe must smell like the cook's apron at Pappy's Smokehouse in St. Louis. Again, since the likely historical setting for the characters in the narrative (not necessarily the author) is during the patriarchal period (roughly 2000–1700 B.C.)[18] and since there is no mention of a tabernacle and any of the specific garb and rituals associated with Israelite cultic practice, Job is not a priest from the line of Aaron. He more closely resembles Noah, Abraham, and Jacob, who, as the heads of their families, offered sacrifices on open-air altars and were called righteous before the law came into being.[19] Job might also resemble Abraham's contemporary, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God" (Heb. 7:1; cf. Gen. 14:18)—also called "king of righteousness" and "king of peace"—a man who was "without . . . genealogy" and who became "a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent [like Aaron's sons], but by the power of an indestructible life" (Heb. 7:2, 3, 16). But there is some indica-

17. John Goldingay, *Job for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone (Westminster John Knox, 2013), 9.

18. The evidence for this era is that Job's wealth is measured in the number of animals and servants he possesses (Job 1:3), his service as a priest on behalf of his family (v. 5; cf. Gen. 12:7–8), and the longevity of his life and description of his death: "Job lived 140 years" (Job 42:16); "these are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years" (Gen. 25:7); "Job died, an old man, and full of days" (Job 42:17); "Abraham . . . died in a good old age, an old man and full of years" (Gen. 25:8). See Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Job: The Mystery of Suffering and God's Sovereignty*, Focus on the Bible (Christian Focus, 2017), 13.

19. Or if we follow Martin Luther, we take Job to be a Gentile who received God's "irregular grace" because he was saved before the giving of the law of Moses. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 6, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 31–37*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Hilton C. Oswald (Concordia, 1970), 380.

tion that the author of Job lived much later than the setting of the story he gives us.[20] It seems most likely that the book itself comes from a time when wisdom writing flourished in Israel (from Solomon in the tenth century B.C. to Hezekiah in the eighth). If so, then the book's author most likely took the well-known sufferings of Job, set the story in the patriarchal age (with authentic language and coloring), and retold the story for Israelites (Job is written in Hebrew), perhaps for the exiled people of Israel, who were then living not only east of Eden but east of Jerusalem.

Regarding the routine sacrifices, why does Job do what he does? Some commentators make much of his children's overindulging at their feasts ("His sons" would "hold a feast" and "their three sisters" would come "to eat and drink with them," Job 1:4). But as Francis Andersen rightly notes: "We need not suppose that they spent all their time in roistering and did no work. There is no hint of drunkenness or license or laziness."[21] Elsewhere in the Old Testament when the verbs "eat and drink" are used together, they symbolize joy ("And when Boaz had *eaten* and *drunk*, and his heart was merry," Ruth 3:7; "Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They *ate* and *drank* and were happy," 1 Kings 4:20). Moreover, the sons' independence and successes are described (each of the seven has his own house and can afford routine feasts for a large group), and there is no sibling rivalry (they all attend the festivals) but only harmony. Job's household is harmonious and also happy. So these festivals, which might have been birthday parties ("his day," Job 1:4, equals "his birthday"), or more likely seven religious feasts throughout the year,[22] are celebrations of *pure* pleasure!

But within all this wholesomeness, harmony, and happiness, something is amiss. God's will in heaven is not yet done perfectly on earth. Satan is to come, but sin is already there. We are not in Eden; we are east of it. Job has to turn away from evil, and the reason he thinks it necessary to sanctify and sacrifice is rooted in his fear that his children might have sinned by cursing God in their hearts. It is difficult to know what is meant by "cursed God in their hearts" (Job 1:5). Part of the difficulty is that the word translated

20. For example, the reference to mined iron ("Iron is taken out of the earth," Job 28:2)—as opposed to meteoric iron—is quite significant for the dating of the book, since iron ore didn't start to be mined until the beginning of the Iron Age (toward the end of the first millennium B.C.).

21. Francis I. Andersen, *Job*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 13 (InterVarsity Press, 1976), 80.

22. That last reading fits the idea of their "blessing" (*barak*) God at these events. See Seow, *Job 1–21*, 269.

"cursed" (*barak*) is usually rendered "blessed," as it is translated in Job 1:10, "You have *blessed* the work of his hands," and in 42:12, "And the LORD *blessed* the latter days of Job more than his beginning." The context determines the translation, and here in 1:5 "cursed" is the right sense. But we might say it this way: "While they praised Yahweh outwardly, they belittled him inwardly."

We aren't told why Job offers sacrifices. Perhaps it is due to the deceitfulness of riches (his children are quite wealthy), the lure of pagan idols (they live in "the east"), patriarchal fraternal pressure (their father's faith isn't always theirs, but they dare not rebel outwardly), or simply some unintentional attitude or action ("And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven," Num. 15:28). *Or*, as Job himself admits, their sin is just a possibility: "It *may* be that my children have sinned" (Job 1:5). This view fits with what Job will later admit, namely, that he might not have known the sins he should confess because they are too many to know: "How many are my iniquities and my sins?" And this is why he asks God to reveal how he might have offended him: "Make me know my transgression and my sin" (13:23).

Whatever the case, the description of Job's scrupulousness is not intended to come across as spiritually neurotic (like Martin Luther before his conversion climbing the stairs of the *Scala Sancta* on his knees or quivering the first time he officiated the Mass) but as sin-sensitive (humans can sin even when they worship) and God-honoring. Job cleanses his children and sacrifices for their sins because he cares for their souls. Job's fatherly priesthood—his protection and provision—is put forward as something quite positive. Job takes seriously his household's right standing before God. "He is," as Christopher Ash states, "watchful in prayer, ever concerned as his highest priority in life to keep himself and his family in right relationship with God."[23] Thus, we may take verses 1 and 5 of Job 1 as an inclusio of admiration!

The point of this practice for us, however, is not that of direct imitation, namely, that we should kill animals and set them on fire for our children's possible sins. Due to Jesus' atoning death, there is no need for us to offer such sacrifices. That is not to say, however, that we shouldn't pray for our children and do all we can to "consecrate" them, that is, set them apart

23. Christopher Ash, *Trusting God in the Darkness: A Guide to Understanding the Book of Job* (Crossway, 2021), 23.

from the world and wholly dedicate them to God. Most mornings, I pray the Lord's Prayer *by* myself *for* my whole family:

> *Our* Father in heaven, . . .
> forgive *us our* debts. (Matt. 6:9, 12)

Other times, I have used Daniel's "prayer and pleas for mercy" on behalf of Israel (see Dan. 9:3–18) as a model in praying for myself, wife, and children:

> O Lord, *our* great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, *we* acknowledge that *we* have sinned and done wrong and turned aside from your commandments. Forgive *us*, God of mercy, for all the times *we* have rebelled against you and have not obeyed your voice. God, please listen to *my* pleas for mercy, and for your own sake make your face to shine upon *us*. For *I* do not present *our* pleas before you because of *my* righteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive.

A Second Sacrifice

We can, to some extent, imitate Job's consecration of his children. But again, the point of Job's priesthood, as it is presented here, is not merely imitation in some form. The text also foreshadows a second sacrifice scene in Job 42:7–9, where Job offers blood sacrifices for his foolish friends:

> After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them, and *the Lord accepted Job's prayer.*

This final sacrifice scene (the only other sacrifice scene in Job) is both the key that unlocks the book's themes and thesis and also the lens through which we are to read the whole narrative. But it is more than a lens that helps us

look backward; it also—like the lens on a telescope—helps us look forward to the ultimate scene of sacrifice in Scripture. As we will see, the book of Job in some ways prefigures the purposeful sufferings of Jesus Christ. That is, the story of God's servant Job (*a* suffering servant) prepares us for the story of Jesus (*the* Suffering Servant), who in his passion and death demonstrates how innocent suffering can show forth the justice and wisdom of God.

Our study of the drama of Job has just begun. We are only five verses into it. But by the end of the book (its *telos*), we will see a righteous sufferer vindicated, sinners atoned for through a costly blood sacrifice, and the sovereign freedom and justice of God upheld. In short, we will see what the New Testament calls the gospel. We will also see the Philippians 2 pattern of a man who starts with a blessed and exalted position, goes through undeserved sufferings and utter humiliation, and, in the end, receives "subsequent glories" (1 Peter 1:11); that is, Job (somehow!) receives greater blessings and an even more exalted position.

But for now, we pause. We are off to a good start. In the next chapter, we return to what Alfred, Lord Tennyson, called "the greatest poem of ancient and modern times"[24] and the greatest story ever told. Until then, let us be in awe of God, bow before his awesome providence, grasp something of his inexplicable wisdom, pray always and without ceasing, and claim his forgiveness through the sacrifice offered for our many sins.

24. Tennyson, quoted in Lawrence Boadt, *The Book of Job: Why Do the Innocent Suffer?*, Classic Bible Series (St. Martin's Press, 1997), 32.

2

God's Servant into Satan's Hands

Job 1:6–12

And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." (Job 1:12)

The Great Courses are a series of recorded lectures on a variety of topics given by experts in the field. As I watched astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson's course "The Inexplicable Universe," wherein everyone's favorite astrophysicist (as he is dubbed) lucidly explained what we know and don't know about the universe, two thoughts came to mind. First was an observation: as much as we have learned about the universe, we still know so little. Second was the question "How do we know anything about the Creator of this amazing universe?" I did not ask that question in ignorance. I have theological training and know that the Bible's answer is that God has revealed himself to us through creation, the incarnation, and written revelation. Reciting those realities strengthens my faith. But what the book of Job so often does is to take our faith to new heights. It helps us peer into the heavens!

What is recorded in Job 1:6–12 is unusual in this regard. There are so few places in the Bible where we get a front-row seat to the cosmic chamber room of God and get to listen in and learn something about who God is and how he works in this world—a revelation that might be different than we imagined or were likely taught in Sunday school or seminary.

Into the Heavens

We start with an obvious, but important, observation. The scene has shifted from earth (Job 1:1–5) to "heaven" or "the heavens" (e.g., 16:19; 22:12) and "the presence of the LORD" (1:12): "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them" (v. 6). Other observations may follow. The author moves from "[all] the days" (v. 5) to "a day" (v. 6) and from Job and his family to God and the "sons of God." Here we learn that Job's God is the covenant God of Israel, as the name Yahweh ("the LORD") is used here—the first of thirty-two times in the book total. We also learn that there are supernatural beings, here called "the sons of God," who are "heavenly beings"[1] (commonly translated "angels") and who serve on God's "divine council" (Ps. 82:1), or what could be labeled the parliament of the universe. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, such a gathering is called "the assembly" or "the council of the holy ones" (89:5, 7), and they gather to render judgments (82:1), give reports (Zech. 1:10), and receive orders to carry out (1 Kings 22:18–23).

Within this cosmic cabinet that enjoys access to God, has his ear, and helps him govern the world,[2] we are introduced to someone who is, or will become, the least honorable character in the Bible—the Satan. This Hebrew noun (*satan*), joined to the definite article (*ha*),[3] could be translated "the adversary," but he seems to function here not as a direct enemy but as an opposing ally. John Goldingay sees him in Job as functioning something like a prosecuting attorney or the political party in the British parliament

1. For example, the ESV renders the phrase "the sons of God" (*bene ha 'elohim*) as "heavenly beings" in Psalms 29:1 and 89:6.

2. It is also possible (likely!) that Satan is not a member, but an intruder. See Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Job: The Mystery of Suffering and God's Sovereignty*, Focus on the Bible (Christian Focus, 2017), 23.

3. The definite article used in Job is later dropped by biblical authors (e.g., 1 Chron. 21:1), and by the time of the New Testament, the title Satan becomes a proper name. Thus, following the ESV and other translations, and to make a connection to New Testament usage, I will call "the Satan" (*hassatan*) merely "Satan."

known as the monarch's "loyal opposition." Just as the prosecuting attorney is not an opponent of the judge and the loyal opposition is not set against the government, so Satan's role in "Yahweh's cabinet" (so to speak) is to serve Yahweh by making sure that his rule and law are properly upheld.[4]

This more positive view of the Satan of Job makes sense of the honest dialogue and contractual agreement between Satan and Yahweh in Job 1:7–12 in regard to Job. But this view disconnects the character of "Satan" from characterizations of him in Chronicles and Zechariah (see 1 Chron. 21:1; Zech. 3:1),[5] as well as throughout the New Testament (the title "Satan" is used thirty-six times in the New Testament) and interchangeably for "the devil": "he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil [*diabolos*] and Satan [*Satanas*]" (Rev. 20:2). Moreover, "the devil" (1 John 3:8) or "Beelzebul" (Matt. 12:24) or "the evil one" (Eph. 6:16) or "the accuser of our brothers" (Rev. 12:10), whose power and ploys are strikingly similar to Satan's activity in Job (Matt. 4:1–11; Acts 10:38; Rev. 12:10), is the ultimate enemy of God and his kingdom (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). And as we will see next in Job 1:7, this "Satan," who perfectly reflects the same tone as the serpent in the garden (Gen. 3:1–5), also walks (or "prowls") about the earth "like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Yet as powerful as this evil angel is, what is clear in what follows, as well as in the New Testament's view of Satan, is that he is subservient to God's will. This is what Martin Luther means when he says that the devil is God's devil.

With that said about Satan, we return to the story of Job, which means getting back to heaven in order to overhear one of the most curious conversations in the cosmos. What is curious is that the Lord seems limited in his knowledge ("The Lord said to Satan, 'From where have you come?'"), whereas Satan seems boundless in his abilities ("Satan answered the Lord and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it,'" Job 1:7). We shouldn't read God's question the wrong way, for the question here is of the same type as the one asked to Adam after the fall, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9). Just as God knew where Adam was hiding, he well knew where Satan had been. The point of such language is not to say

4. See John Goldingay, *Job for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone (Westminster John Knox, 2013), 12. Cf. Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Westminster, 1985), 89.

5. The Hebrew for "Satan" is rendered "devil" (*diabolos*) in the LXX.

that the limitless God of the universe is limited. Rather, it is to say that the transcendent God of the universe is personal. He listens to his creatures. He even clearly communicates to them, such as what he says to Satan in Job 1:8: "And the LORD *said* to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?'" What is also curious is that God is impressed not by Satan's extraordinary abilities but rather by Job's character. Instead of praising Satan for his world speed-walking tour, he commends Job. Echoing the narrator's fourfold commendation (Job 1:1), the Lord agrees that Job is "a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil" (v. 8). Moreover, in God's estimation, Job is more than merely "the greatest of all the people of the east" (v. 3); he is unlike any other ("there is none like him on the earth," v. 8). If anyone has traveled east, west, north, and south, as Satan has, he certainly knows the worth of this wise man. Just as "there is no God like you [Yahweh], in *heaven* or on earth" (2 Chron. 6:14), so there is no man like Job on *earth*.

Notice finally, from what God says in Job 1:8, the addition of the designation "servant." The LORD labels Job "my servant," with the sense being "Satan, have you taken a good look at my servant Job?" We will say more about the importance of this title when we come to Job 42. For now, we should not miss the fact that Job joins Abraham (Gen. 26:24), Moses (Ex. 14:31), David (2 Sam. 7:5), and Isaiah (Isa. 20:3) in receiving this rare and significant title.

So we might say, with the compliments God gives in Job 1:8, that Job receives the highest commendation that any human receives in the Bible—besides our Savior, of course, who received the honor of the Father's acclamation, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Yet Satan, as we see in Job 1:9–11, is not overly impressed with Job—or with Jesus, for that matter.

Two Interrogatives, an Indictment, and an Invitation

Satan believes that God's appraisal is an overstatement because he surmises that Job's faithfulness is shallow and superficial. In fact, he suggests that it is but a refined form of selfishness,[6] for he answers Yahweh's inter-

6. William Henry Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded* (1873; repr., James & Klock, 1977), 74.

rogative invitation—"Have you considered my servant Job?" (Job 1:8)—with two interrogatives, an indictment, and an invitation of his own:

> Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason [interrogative]? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side [interrogative]? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land [indictment]. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has [invitation], and he will curse you to your face." (Job 1:9–11)

Of the many commendations that God offered in Job 1:8, Satan focuses only on the fear of the Lord: "Does Job fear God for no reason?" (Job 1:9). The sense of Satan's question is this: "Does Job respect, worship, honor, trust, obey, and love God because God is God or only because God bestows blessings?" Satan not only questions Job's heart religion; he also questions the Lord's overprotection and overindulgence: "Have *you* [emphatic] not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side?" (v. 10). The hedge is an "image" that connotes "protection and safety from human and non-human marauders," such as the depiction of Israel as a vineyard with hedges around it (see Isa. 5:1–7, esp. v. 5).[7] Of course, Satan believes that God has and that Yahweh's protective hedge is made not of short shrubbery but of tall stone. He thus calls God to stop the providential pandering and to blow the trumpet, so that the walls of Job's mighty fortress might fall to the ground.

Then in the second half of Job 1:10, this so-called son of God uses the Word of God—the distinctly Deuteronomic phrase "You have blessed the work of his hands" (cf. Deut. 28:12; 33:11)—to further challenge God, even to attack God's character. The sense of the verse below is something like this: "Lord, you are not only an overprotective Father but also an overindulgent one."

> **You have blessed** *the work of his hands*, and
> *his possessions* **[you] have increased** in the land.

Satan thinks of God as a Father, but an overprotective and an overindulgent one, who has built a wall around Job and provided him, within that wall,

7. J. Gerald Janzen, *Job*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (John Knox, 1985), 39.

a plethora of paradisaic provisions. In such a situation, Satan surmises, it's easy to be righteous.

Satan's solution to God's overindulgence is simple: he dares God to smite his saint. In the language of Exodus,[8] he asks God to take away the land flowing with milk and honey and bring on some of Egypt's plagues—bestow boils, eliminate the animals, kill the firstborn son, and so much more. Or, in the language of Job 1:11: "But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has," he suggests, "and he will curse you to your face." What a bold, brazen, and blasphemous challenge from "the challenger."[9] The last picture we saw of Job was of his offering God sacrifices for his children's sins. He was loving God and loving others. Satan forces us to envision a very different scene. He wants us to see this blessed man eye-to-eye with God, cursing him to his face. To curse God is "the gravest sin of all,"[10] which according to Old Testament law rightly deserves the death penalty (see 1 Kings 21:10); to curse God "to [his] face" (Job 1:11) connotes a direct confrontation, rejection, and even hatred of God,[11] the greatest imaginable transgression.

Whatever we make of Satan's attitude and accusations, we should not make little of his challenge. We should reflect on why we trust and treasure God. Is it solely for his protection and provisions? Are we treating God as a cosmic Santa Claus—if he stops bestowing gifts, will we no longer believe in him? Will our faith waver if we face adversity? Will tribulation undermine us? Is our trust in God shallow like a seed sown on rocky ground? Are we in a contract with God based on the blessings he bestows, or are we in a covenant with God based on his sovereign calling of us, our genuine relationship of love, and our dutiful but delightful glorifying of him? However we understand this challenge of Satan, we ought not to underestimate its richness for matters of practical theology. Why do we trust and treasure God? Good question! Do we fear God for no reason?

In theological terms, this concept is called *disinterested love*. Jonathan Edwards defines *disinterested love* this way: "God is loved for himself and for his own sake; and men are loved not because of their relation to self,

8. See Ex. 3:20; cf. 9:15; Ps. 138:7.

9. John H. Walton suggests the translation "the challenger" for "the Satan." See *Job*, NIVAC (Zondervan, 2012), 20.

10. David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, Word Biblical Commentary 17 (Word, 1989), 16.

11. "In contrast to the curse which Job's sons may have spoken 'in their hearts' (v. 5), Job's curse is expected to be a blatant public utterance in God's face." Habel, *Job*, 91.

but because of their relation to God, either because they are the children of God, or because they have either the spiritual or natural image of God."[12] So do we love God "for himself and for his own sake," or do we love him simply because God is intrinsically worthy to be loved? Such a question, if we take it at face value and face it directly, should cause tension in our own Christian lives. On the one hand, there is the reality that too many of God's blessings can (and such is the deceitfulness of the human heart!) turn us from loving our Creator to loving his gifts, or erase the need we have for him because we take such blessings for granted, or think they are self-generated rather than God-given. On the other hand, a lack of blessings or, worse, the persistence of trials and losses can turn us from fearing God. For example, reflecting on the blessing of family, and in the context of reflecting on Job 1:9, Eric Ortlund writes: "What if I had to bury a member of my family—or all of them? Would I give up on God? Would it be seen that what I really love was my family and was interested in God only as long as my family was safe? Would it turn out that all my years as a Christian had actually been a way of dishonoring God by treating a person of infinite worth as a means to some other end?"[13] Ortlund continues:

> Job loses every reason to be in a relationship with God outside of God himself—God gives Job every earthly reason to give up on him (1:12). A little reflection will help us see why God allows this instead of rebuking the accuser and sparing Job this agony. After all, the only kind of relationship with God that will save us is one where he is loved for who he is, for his own sake, irrespective of what secondary, earthly blessings we gain or lose because of our relationship with him. . . . Furthermore, although it is a good and healthy practice to affirm our love for God when our health is good and our family safe, some affirmations cannot remain theoretical forever. God occasionally proves the reality of our relationship with him by means of extreme suffering. When God allows these ordeals, he is not torturing us with pain when he already knows the outcome of the test. Job-like suffering is actually a matter of saving our souls by delivering us into and sealing us in the only kind of relationship with God that will make us happy in heaven, one in which we love God for no reason external to himself.[14]

12. Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey, vol. 8 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Yale University Press, 1989), 264.

13. Eric Ortlund, *Suffering Wisely and Well: The Grief of Job and the Grace of God* (Crossway, 2022), 42.

14. Ortlund, 45.

Doubtless part of the final point that Ortlund makes is true, and true of the testing of Job, and that "God put Job in a position in which he has every earthly reason to give up on God; the only reason left for Job to endure in a relationship with God is God."[15] This also is true: "If God loves us, he will at some point put us in a position where we must worship him for his own sake, in the midst of agony,"[16] and that "what God wants from us in Job-like suffering is neither repentance nor deeper spiritual discipline," but "for us to hold onto him—not to curse him and walk away from him, but just to maintain our relationship with him through tears and sackcloth."[17]

That admitted, we are saved not by our disinterested love in God, but through faith in Jesus and his perfect disinterested love toward his Father and perfect obedience to his will. And while there are times when God tests us to help us move toward the perfect disinterested love that we will obtain *in glory*, our love for him, as Gerald Janzen argues, progresses in stages. Thus, Janzen rejects the view that Job 1:6–12 teaches that "true piety . . . must be totally disinterested in causal considerations or in prospects of reward" and that "piety and uprightness must exist for their own sake, or purely for God's sake, or forfeit any claim to be called piety," or what the author of Job calls "fearing God." Janzen does so because he believes that "such a view . . . approaches issues of piety and morality in altogether too rational and intellectually abstractive a manner, divorced from the dynamics of human development." He uses the illustration of a child's relationship with a parent in different stages, arguing that a toddler's "devotion and loyalty" to his parent based on the benefits she receives are no less acts of genuine love than a college student's selfless sacrifice for others, with no benefit to self. Janzen favors instead the way that the medieval saint and scholar Bernard of Clairvaux illustrates the progress of our affections:

> According to Bernard, one begins by loving oneself for one's own sake. . . . Becoming aware that one is not sufficient unto oneself, but depends radically upon God, one begins to love God for one's own sake. This is the love of dependence and gratitude and expectation. . . . In the course of loving God for one's own sake, one may discover the intrinsic worthiness of God apart from all interested considerations; or, rather, the nature of one's interestedness

15. Ortlund, 48.
16. Eric Ortlund, *Job: A 12-Week Study*, Knowing the Bible (Crossway, 2017), 16.
17. Ortlund, *Suffering Wisely and Well*, 49.

> begins to shift, so that one begins to discover an interest in the love of God for God's own sake. . . . These modes of loving may arise developmentally; but they need not supersede one another, even though on a given occasion one or another may take the center of one's consciousness and intentionality. In such a view, not only can the earlier modes of piety be appreciated as praiseworthy or otherwise, within their own terms and relative to their own concrete circumstances, but they can and should persist alongside the latter modes. . . . A piety which has arrived at one or the other of the last two stages, therefore, may also contain within it appropriate motives of gratitude and of expectation.[18]

This perspective makes sense in light of both Christian experience and Job's experience. While Job's first responses to his inexplicable sufferings are remarkable and beautiful examples of disinterested love, he wavers, in various ways, on the ash heap. During his months of mourning, he complains to God and questions God. In the end, he will see afresh that God is God and that the Lord is to be feared simply for that fact, and yet one wonders why then God vindicates Job and bestows twice the blessings if the purpose of the whole ordeal was for Job to fear God purely for God's sake.

In Your Hand

As we return to Satan's questions of God's provision and protection of Job, we arrive at the final verse, where we read of God's immediate, and perhaps surprising, consent to Satan's suggestion: "And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.' So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord" (Job 1:12). This anticlimactic verse ("anticlimactic" in the sense that we might have hoped that God, the hero, would rescue chapter 1's hero, Job!) yields an observation, a surprise, and a final application.

The observation is to behold the "behold"—"*Behold*, all that he has is in your hand." It is hard to think of a time when we would use the word "behold" today. I doubt that I ever started a Sunday service, "Behold, the Lord's Day has arrived." But I'm glad that the ESV didn't erase this archaic word, for rendering the Hebrew particle *hinneh* as "behold" adds theological

18. Janzen, *Job*, 40–41. See Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*, with an Analytical Commentary by Emero Stiegman, Cistercian Fathers 13B (Cistercian, 1995).

stress. From Genesis ("and behold, it was very good," Gen. 1:31) to Revelation ("Behold, I am coming soon," Rev. 22:12) and from the incarnation announcement ("Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son," Matt. 1:23) to the empty tomb ("And behold, . . . an angel of the Lord . . . came and rolled back the stone," 28:2), the "beholds" of the Bible are there to catch our attention. The "behold" in Job 1:12 is no different; it announces that something important is to follow: a surprising announcement.

We might expect God to follow his "behold" with a "be gone," as Jesus ordered after his final temptation in the wilderness: "Be gone, Satan!" (Matt. 4:10). Instead, the "behold" is followed by an unexpected bestowal of power: "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand" (Job 1:12). It is not surprising that the brilliant author has used clever connecting metaphors:

- God has blessed the work of Job's *hands* (Job 1:10).
- Satan asks God to stretch out his *hand* against Job (1:11).
- God allows Satan to stretch out his *hand* against Job's possessions (1:12).[19]

What is surprising is his theology. Is God in the business of bargaining with Satan? Or, worse, is God in the business of giving authority to Satan? Worst still, is God in the business of giving Satan power to do evil to good people? Here we step over from the surprise into the application. The answer to those questions is yes. But the key to grasping why yes is the right answer is to understand and rightly apply the final phrase from our final verse, namely, "So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord" (Job 1:12b). This ending leaves little doubt who ultimately is in control of Satan, the world, and even what is soon to befall "a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job" (v. 1). As Christopher Ash summarizes, the book of Job makes it clear that the "Sovereign God who governs the world through the intermediate agency of a number of supernatural forces ('the sons of God'), some of whom are evil[,] . . . uses evil to work out his purpose ultimately to defeat evil," and that "Even Satan's will, which is distinct from and opposite of God's, is only part of a larger plan in which God's purposes are coming

19. Eric Ortlund, *Job: A 12-Week Study*, Knowing the Bible (Crossway, 2017), 16.

to pass. Job may be under Satan's power, but Satan is under God's power, and whatever comes to pass through evil intentions will ultimately suit the good purposes of God."[20]

If we do not understand or appreciate the sovereignty of God, the Wisdom Literature will help open our eyes. The book of Job will teach us that "the sovereignty of God is that golden scepter in his hand by which he will make all bow, either by his word or by his works, by his mercies or by his judgments,"[21] and that the world is the theater of God's sovereign glory, which is a concept that so few people (even Christians) understand.

God Sovereignly Loves Through Suffering

The Japanese artist Goro Kakei's sculpture *Job* exemplifies our confusion about God's sovereignty. The artwork depicts three clay figures—Job, Satan, and God.[22] Job and Satan are on one flat surface (presumably representing earth) and Yahweh is on another (presumably representing heaven). Or perhaps the two foundations simply represent distance. God will now be distant from Job, and Satan will be too close for comfort, literally any comfort. It's as if they are stuck on a little island together—Job and his challenger. God is depicted as tall but having small hands. This gives the impression that God is unable to reach out and help Job, even if he desired to do so. Satan, though, has one huge hand that is half the size of Job, who is the smallest character. This hand is coming toward Job and Job is leaning away from it, as if he is saying, "No!" Satan's hand is not merely a symbol of the hand of affliction to come, but also a sign that Satan has won the victory. Satan's hand is not only larger than God's hand; it is also straight out. God's hand is clenched. The artist thus depicts Satan as winning the cosmic rock-paper-scissors game. Satan's "paper" covers God's "rock."

Of course, this is not a fair representation of the biblical text. God hasn't lost to Satan by entering into some schoolyard game. Nor is the dialogue and decision recorded in Job 1:6–12 a "crude representation of a divinity

20. Christopher Ash, *Trusting God in the Darkness: A Guide to Understanding the Book of Job* (Crossway, 2021), 139–40, 36.

21. Thomas Brooks, in *The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations*, comp. Martin H. Manser (Westminster John Knox, 2001), 142.

22. For a visual and comments, see C. L. Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*, Illuminations (Eerdmans, 2013), 257.

who cruelly permits the torture of his creation,"[23] as the psychoanalyst Carl Jung saw it. In fact, our text and the texts to follow present an image of a God who sovereignly rules but who also sovereignly loves through suffering. God allows the trials of Job not because he wants to *know* whether Job will continue to honor him (for God knows all things) but rather because God wants to *show* that Job will honor him despite his cataclysmic circumstances. God tests Job not to find out whether Job will succeed or fail but rather to reveal the essence of authentic faith and to demonstrate that his divine power is made perfect in human weakness. The Bible teaches that trials and testings can authenticate or refine faith and that divine love can show itself through suffering. It is a strange sovereignty, perhaps, but it is one that we see played out in the Bible over and over again—and ultimately in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the thought-provoking folk song "Show the Way," songwriter David Wilcox sings of "someone" (a God-figure in the song) writing a play in which he would "glorify" what is "stronger than hate." He would do so through love—the power at work behind the scenes—and through a hero (a Christ-figure) who seems to arrive too late and is up against the impossible odds of winning against a dark and evil world. Yet when he comes, the victory is his! The darkness dissipates, and love and light prevail.

Similarly, Scripture teaches that God (who is love!) wrote the play. What is more, in this play, so vividly illustrated in the book of Job, divine love could (would!) be glorified within "the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23) when Jesus was "betrayed into the *hands* of sinners" (Matt. 26:45) and "delivered up" to be "crucified and killed by the *hands* of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). When Jesus calls out with a loud voice, "Father, into your *hands* [his big, grace-filled hands] I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46), we see the perfect picture of love triumphing through suffering and of Satan's power being crushed once and for all by the sovereign love of God. If we struggle to believe this, we must see afresh the story of Job and touch afresh our Savior's hands: "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe" (John 20:27). The Son of Man suffered at the hands of sinful men to bring salvation through suffering.

23. See R. A. F. MacKenzie and Roland E. Murphy, "Job," in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown et al. (Prentice Hall, 1990), 467.

There is so little we know about the universe, and so little we know about God, the Creator of this amazing universe. But what we do know—indeed, what we are taught in this text—is that God can use even the schemes of Satan and the horrors of human suffering to show forth his sovereign love.