

Last time we looked at a number of issues that suggested the path of evil is a necessary part of God's purpose of raising man to his destiny of becoming "in the image of God".

- ◆ We can't leave the subject of evil without taking a closer look at the story of Job as we get a unique insight into what is going on behind the scenes in the spiritual realm.
- ◆ This is usually something we are not privy to, yet as we will see, can have a serious impact on each of our lives.

The book begins with God calling a heavenly council to which Satan is also commanded to attend.

- ◆ ***Job 1:6-12 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them.***
- ◆ This account gives us an important insight into the spiritual hierarchy of the cosmos.
- ◆ Although Satan has enormous power, he cannot thumb his nose at God; he is obligated to present Himself to God when God commands it.
- ◆ So the first thing we should realise is, God ultimately is in control of events.
- ◆ ***7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it." 8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."***
- ◆ Now I don't know about you, but I'm not sure I would appreciate God turning the spotlight on me in his conversations with the devil.
- ◆ But as the book unfolds we begin to see why God has set in motion events that are designed to address a particular spiritual problem Job has.
- ◆ Although God draws attention to Job being blameless and upright, there appears to be an important underlying spiritual problem that needs to be addressed.
- ◆ As we saw in our earlier sessions, there is always a higher purpose for what transpires, and as we shall see, in this case it will lead to the development of a healthier and closer relationship between God and Job.
- ◆ Through Job's response to his dilemma we will see he has a distorted view of God and how He runs the universe.
- ◆ But this scenario again raises the perplexing question, "Why would God, who is all powerful, allow the tempter to continue his work unless there is a purpose for it all?"
- ◆ In the same way God could have shielded Adam and Eve from the devil, He could just as easily have shielded Job from the temptations of the devil, but He doesn't.
- ◆ Instead, we see God drawing attention to Job and the devil being used to fulfil God's purpose.
- ◆ This account confirms our earlier point that both good and evil are something we have to experience in God's higher purpose of creating us in His image.
- ◆ Satan has a part to play in the process but it is always under God's control.
- ◆ It's also interesting that although God perceives Job has a spiritual problem Satan seems to be unaware of it or the fact He is being used by God to fulfil His purpose in Job's life.
- ◆ He is so bent, wicked and twisted he simply sees it as an opportunity to inflict evil on Job and destroy Job's relationship with God.
- ◆ We will later see the same blind spot revealed in the crucifixion of Jesus.
- ◆ While Satan saw the crucifixion as an opportunity to destroy Jesus, His death instead resulted in the salvation of the world (1 Corinthians 2:8).
- ◆ In the final analysis God will work things out to fulfil His purpose even if it means turning lemons into lemonade (Romans 8:28).
- ◆ In each case, God uses the devil to further His purpose of bringing salvation to humanity.
- ◆ Meanwhile, while this heavenly conference is going on, poor old Job is blissfully unaware he is on the heavenly council's agenda and has absolutely no control over events about to transpire.
- ◆ But as we shall see, God is in complete control of the situation.
- ◆ ***9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land."***
- ◆ Couple of things we should note here.

- ◆ First, God is very much involved in the lives of His people in that He does bless those who are faithful to him both spiritually and physically.
- ◆ Spiritually He puts a hedge around his people to protect them from the wiles of the devil and his demons depending on circumstances although as we see in this case, that hedge can be removed.
- ◆ Then He can choose to bless us physically, although these blessing will take a backseat to spiritual blessings as ultimately He is more concerned with our spiritual development than our physical well-being.
- ◆ And this is why as this story goes on to show, Christians are not immune from the evil in the world as it is part of the process of creating us in the image of God.
- ◆ This unfortunately is a message that fails to resonate with Christians in our modern materialistic societies where the false theology of the “prosperity gospel” has been peddled on unwary believers.
- ◆ The book of Job is a classic example of this principle in action.
- ◆ Job’s spiritual development takes precedence over his physical well-being.
- ◆ Throughout scripture, we don’t see too many examples of God’s people developing godly qualities by God showering them with physical blessings.
- ◆ As we witness in our own affluent world, wealth and success usually results in people forgetting God (Matthew 13:22).
- ◆ In fact, Jesus gives more instruction on the dangers of the misuse of money than about almost any other subject.
- ◆ Nearly two thirds of His parables deal with its use (Luke 15:11-32; 16:19-31).
- ◆ In contrast, the Bible is littered with examples of spiritual lessons being learned as a result of suffering and evil.
- ◆ Christians should always remember God is primarily concerned with His stated goal of creating us in His image, and this will be His main focus in His relationship with us.
- ◆ We will come back to this subject later.
- ◆ ***V.11-12 But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” 12 The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.***
- ◆ “Okay,” God says, “Do your worst!”
- ◆ What we see here is what we saw earlier in the garden, and that is, there will come a time of testing where the genuineness of our faith is tested and Satan is given permission by God to be His instrument in that test.

But the test is only allowed to proceed based on three important criteria.

1. The test is always under God’s control and can only go as far as God allows.

- ◆ ***V.12 “...but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”*** God is in control of the situation from start to finish.
- ◆ We have the assurance God is in control, even if we fail like Peter did (John 13:38).

2. The test is only allowed to proceed when there is an important spiritual lesson to be learned by the individuals involved.

- ◆ As the story unfolds, the spiritual lesson for Job is given precedence over his abundance of physical possessions including the physical lives of his children and servants.
- ◆ The rest of chapter one tells of Job losing not only his children and servants, but also all his physical possessions.
- ◆ They become collateral damage as events unfold.
- ◆ To fair-minded people, this appears completely unfair for which we don’t have an adequate explanation at this time.
- ◆ However, this is not the first or last time where we will not get an adequate explanation for other events that occur in scripture where we do not get a justification for what happens.
- ◆ However, this is also one of the primary lessons of this book as we will see.
- ◆ But imagine poor Job in this situation. He is not privy to the scenario being played out in the heavenly realm, all he knows is he has lost everything in one day.
- ◆ He is sitting there dumbfounded at the sudden change of events with no explanation.
- ◆ The chapter finished with the bewildering statement ***v.22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.***

- ◆ Job is trying to reconcile the confusing signals he is receiving with his perception of how his relationship with God is supposed to work.
- ◆ In theory, he wants to believe in a just God who should be blessing him for being righteous, but all the physical signals are pointing to something very different.
- ◆ “Here I am being blameless and upright, yet it appears God has hung me out to dry.”
- ◆ From Job’s perspective his relationship with God was based on a quid pro quo relationship.
- ◆ **Job 35:2 “...‘What profit is it to me, and what do I gain by not sinning?’**
- ◆ Then to add insult to injury, God and Satan have another meeting, again without Job’s knowledge.
- ◆ **V.3-6 Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.” 4 “Skin for skin!” Satan replied. “A man will give all he has for his own life. 5 But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.” 6 The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.”**
- ◆ Again we see God’s limitation placed on how far Satan can go with this test.
- ◆ **V.7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. 8 Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.**
- ◆ Job is left contemplating his standing with God, scraping his boils while sitting on a dung heap.
- ◆ We aren’t going to take the time for a blow by blow account of the rest of the story other than to say, not only does Job learn a great deal more about His relationship with God, but so do his wife and his friends, all of whom have a distorted concept of how their relationship with God is supposed to work.
- ◆ Job’s wife wanted him to curse God, his three friends considered God as an ATM machine who dispensed good and evil depending on one’s actions.
- ◆ So it is important to consider the spiritual component behind the test and this leads us to the third point on why the test is allowed to proceed.
- 3. No test is allowed to proceed without first of all going through the hands of a loving God.**
- ◆ God did not deliberately draw Satan’s attention to Job without a reason.
- ◆ It has to be looked at from the perspective of a loving Father who wants His children to mature into His “image.”
- ◆ God as a loving Father knew exactly what Job needed in his spiritual development as one of His children.
- ◆ And He looks at each one of us in the same way.
- ◆ So there is always a higher spiritual purpose in the tests and temptations of life.
- So what exactly was Job’s Spiritual Problem?**
- ◆ What we see through Job’s reaction to his suffering is that he has a warped and immature relationship with God and how He runs the universe (Job 32:1-2).
- ◆ As the story unfolds, Job first of all argues with his friends then turns his sights on God and it’s not a pretty picture.
- ◆ Elihu sums up Job’s long argument maintaining his integrity with his friends this way.
- ◆ **Job 34:5-6 “Job says, ‘I am innocent, but God denies me justice. ⁶ Although I am right, I am considered a liar, although I am guiltless, his arrow inflicts an incurable wound.’**
- ◆ Job’s words reveal the type of relationship he had with God.
- ◆ It was one based on fairness and justice, with an emphasis on right and wrong and an obligation on the part of God to bless him as a result of his obedience.
- ◆ Although God welcomes our obedience, He wants that obedience to flow from a personal relationship with Him, not from one’s own puffed up righteousness or to be selfishly showered with blessings for our good behaviour.
- ◆ Jesus later confronted a similar attitude with the Jewish religious leaders who had a similar problem (Matthew 23:1-36).
- ◆ They related to God through the law and refused to relate personally to God when He stood face to face with them.

- ◆ When God does finally respond to Job, it's to remind him of his place in the scheme of things, and for his wrongful accusation of Him running an arbitrary and unjust universe (Job 40:2-8).
- ◆ He also sternly corrects Job's three friends for their false accusations against Job based on their faulty reward and punishment theology for some undisclosed sin (Job 42:7-9).
- ◆ They mistakenly thought they could trace evil back to God or human sin.

In His response to Job, God's argument centres on the two comprehensive claims He has on His creation.

- ◆ He is our Creator and He is our Father, not to be treated as an equal as Job seems to think.
- ◆ God's arguments revolve around His role as Creator and the Father in whom Job should learn to put his trust and love.
- ◆ In His response, God sometimes patiently and sometimes angrily goes to great lengths to remind Job who created and controls the universe (Job 38:1-41:34).
- ◆ The underlying message in God's argument is this; If I am the ONE (Creator) who has carefully designed and created the physical universe, which includes rolling out the heavens, of hanging the earth in space, and creating the animals like the fearsome creature Leviathan, then you should learn to trust and love the same ONE (Father) who is dealing with you and rolling out his spiritual creation of sons and daughters.
- ◆ Through it all, God never directly answers Job's question of WHY this is happening to him.
- ◆ The only answer Job gets from God is WHO? Who he is dealing with, a loving Father who wants to share His existence with him.
- ◆ He wants Job to relate to Him based on love and trust, not on some business relationship where one favour is granted in return for another.
- ◆ It is only when confronted with this argument that Job finally changes his tone and reflects on his arrogance in accusing God of being unjust.
- ◆ ***Job 42:1-3 Then Job replied to the LORD: 2 "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 3 You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.***
- ◆ It's clear from this verse that God has a clearly defined plan and that plan is to make both Job and us in His image.
- ◆ ***V.4 "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.'***
- ◆ In the face of this questioning, Job recognises how foolish he has been in his relationship with his Creator and Father.
- ◆ He had heard about God and formed his own distorted perceptions of what God was like.
- ◆ But now after this severe test, and in a face-to-face confrontation with God Himself, he came to realise where he stood in the scheme of things.
- ◆ ***V.5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."***
- ◆ So finally at the end of the story we see God's purpose in allowing Satan to test Job.
- ◆ And it boils down to a simple lesson in faith and love, Job didn't trust the One on whom his spiritual development rested.
- ◆ He marvelled at God's creative ability with the physical creation, but lacked faith in God's creative ability with His spiritual creation.
- ◆ However as a result of allowing Satan access to Job under conditions entirely controlled by God, Job grew in spiritual maturity and the story ends with Job having a closer, healthier and more loving relationship with God than he had prior to his ordeal.

So in this book we have the revealing example of how God uses Satan and his temptations to further his purpose of creating "man in His image."

- ◆ But the message to Job also applies to us.
- ◆ We don't always see the big picture from where we sit just as Job had no idea of what was going on at the heavenly council yet it had a dramatic impact on his life.
- ◆ This is the caution God delivers to Job in His scathing critique of Job's misguided worldview that God runs an arbitrary and unjust universe (Job 40:2-8).
- ◆ God reminds him of his place in the scheme of things.

- ◆ By confronting Job with the vast complexity of the world, God shows that simplistic models are an inadequate basis for understanding what He is doing in the world.
- ◆ But it all ended for the better, both spiritually and physically.
- ◆ At the end of the story, God restored Job's physical blessings by blessing him with twice what he had before (Job 1:2-3; 42:10).
- ◆ But there was one exception; God did not double the number of his children.
- ◆ This would suggest there was a future time coming when those that had suffered collateral damage in the exchange would be raised to life again to see both their earthly and heavenly Father, thereby doubling the number of Job's children.
- ◆ But more importantly, on the spiritual level, after experiencing evil, we see a reconciliation happening between the two parties as Job has grown in spiritual maturity and has a better appreciation of WHO he is dealing with.

Now before we get too concerned about God allowing Satan to inflict a severe trial such as the one Job faced on you and me, let me reassure you.

- ◆ First, under normal circumstances, most of us have enough problems dealing with the normal cut and thrust of life without being subjected to this type of trial.
- ◆ Second, this type of severe test is usually associated with the great men of God, those God is dealing with directly throughout history, Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, Jesus, Peter, Paul, etc.
- ◆ ***2 Corinthians 12:7 Or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.***
- ◆ Most of us don't fall into this category of patriarch or apostle.
- ◆ Third, as we read at the beginning, God does put a spiritual hedge around his people and this hedge is only removed when it is in God's purpose to do so.
- ◆ In other words, like Job we have to learn to trust our heavenly Father with our spiritual development and He knows exactly what we need.

Just a footnote on the question of Evil.

- ◆ The question of evil is a difficult one for theologians to answer, and scripture doesn't give us a full explanation.
- ◆ However, looking at "evil" through the prism of "making man in His image" gives us a context to help us understand its purpose.
- ◆ And sometimes, as in the case of Job, God doesn't always give us the "WHY," He only gives us the "WHO" and asks us to trust Him with His spiritual creation.
- ◆ For instance, we aren't given an adequate explanation as to why Job's family became collateral damage in the ordeal.
- ◆ But one day, we will be given a suitable justification as to why this happened to them.
- ◆ Until then, like God's advice to Job, we need to be content with WHO, not WHY!
- ◆ What we can know is that in the end it will all make sense.
- ◆ This is a healthy perspective to have as mentioned above; we humans have a limited perspective from where we sit.
- ◆ We have a heavenly Father who knows us intimately and knows what is best for us spiritually in order to mould and shape us into His image.
- ◆ And like Job we need to learn to trust Him with this process.