

The Character¹ of Job



SABBATH—DECEMBER 17

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Job 1:1, 8; Job 29:8–17; Job 31:1–23; Exodus 20:17; Matthew 7:22–27; Matthew 5:16; Ephesians 3:10.

MEMORY VERSE: “So you see that what he [Abraham] believed and what he did were working together. What he did made his faith complete” (James 2:22, NlrV).

WE HAVE STUDIED ALL THE MAJOR THEMES in the book of Job. But we must not forget another important theme: that of Job himself. Who is this man whom the Lord trusts so much that He challenges the devil over his faithfulness? Who is this man who does not understand why all these terrible things are happening to him? He knows that what is happening to him is not fair. He shows anger and frustration over it all. But he stays faithful right through to the end.

The book of Job covers Job's experience after the terrible events of chapter 1 happen. But from his story we can pick up information about his earlier life. And what we learn about Job's past and the kind of man he is gives us a greater understanding of why Job stays faithful to the Lord, even during all his terrible suffering, even during everything Satan does to turn him away from God.

What is Job like? What can we learn about how he lives that can help us become more faithful followers of the Lord as we live our own lives?

DEFINITIONS

1. character—who a person is. The thoughts, feelings, and actions make up a person's character.

THE MAN FROM UZ (Job 1:1, 8)

Read Job 1:1 and Job 1:8. What do these verses tell us about the character of Job?

Job's friends tell him all through their conversations (talks) with him that he must have done something wrong for all this evil to come upon him. But the opposite appears to be true. It is Job's goodness and faithfulness that make him the special target of Satan.

How good and how faithful is Job? First, the verses tell us that he is "perfect." This word does not have to mean "sinless." Only Jesus is. The person who is "perfect" in God's mind is the person who has reached the level of growth Heaven (God) expects of him or her at any given time. The Hebrew word for "perfect," *tam*, "is equal to the Greek word *teleios*, which is often translated 'perfect' in the [New Testament]. But it is better translated 'full grown' or 'mature.'"—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary [Explanation]*, volume 3, page 499. Job's later experiences show that he has not reached the full perfection of character. He is faithful and upright, but he is still growing.

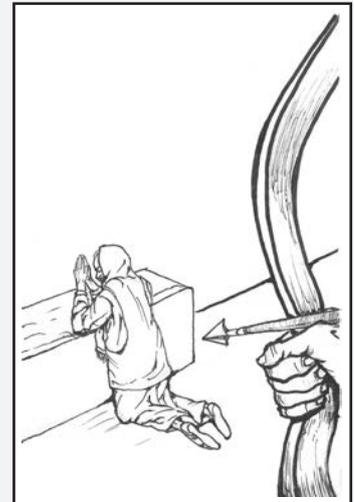
Second, the verses say he is "upright." The word means "straight," "level," "just," "right." Job lives in a way that he could be called "a good citizen."

Third, the verse says Job "feared God." The Old Testament pictures "fearing" God as part of what it means to be a faithful Israelite. But these words also are used in the New Testament for Gentiles (non-Jews) who faithfully serve the God of Israel (read Acts 10:2, 22).

Finally, Job "eschewed," or avoided, evil. This description of Job's character is supported by the Lord Himself, when He says to Satan, " 'Have you thought about my servant Job? There isn't [is not] anyone on earth like him. He is honest. He does what is right. He has respect for me and avoids evil' " (Job 1:8, NIV).

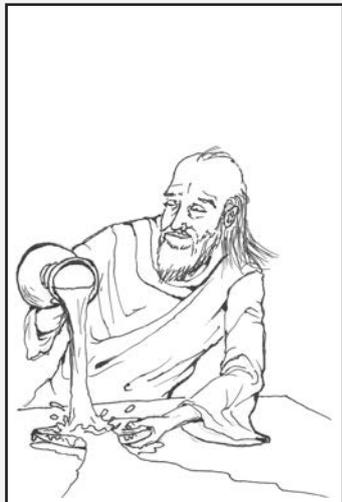
In the end, Job is a man of God whose faith is shown by the kind of life he lives. And he truly bears witness "to angels, and to men" (1 Corinthians 4:9) about what a person can be in Christ.

If the book of Job were about you, how would the opening line read? "There was a _____ in the land of _____ who was _____ and _____ and who _____ God and _____ evil."



It is Job's goodness and faithfulness that make him the special target of Satan.

A PATH LIKE SWEET CREAM (Job 29:8–17)



Talking about the earlier days, Job says that in this time “ ‘the path in front of me was like sweet cream’ ” (Job 29:6, NlrV).

Job works hard to understand the terrible events that happen to him. He thinks about his past and how he has lived and how good it has been for him. Talking about the earlier days, Job says of that time, “ ‘The path in front of me was like sweet cream’ ” (Job 29:6, NlrV).

For example, in Job 29:2, Job talks about the time that “ ‘God [has] watched over me’ ” (NKJV). The Hebrew word for “watched over” comes from a common word used all through the Old Testament to talk about God’s watchcare for His people (read Psalm 91:11; Numbers 6:24). No doubt, Job had the good life. The important thing, too, is that he knows that he had the good life.

Read Job 29:8–17. What do these verses tell us about how others judge Job and how he treats those who are going through a hard time?

We can read here just how much Job is respected. The wording about Job’s taking his “ ‘seat in the open square’ ” (Job 29:7, NKJV) suggests a local government. Job clearly has an important part in it. Such seats usually would be given to the senior and respected members of the society. Among them Job is honored highly.

But we find out that even the “lowest” members of society love and respect him. The poor, the dying, the blind, the widows, the fatherless, and the lame—those people who have not been blessed as Job has been blessed. But they are the very ones to whom Job gives help and comfort.

“God has given in the Bible a picture of a successful man—Job. His life was in the truest sense a success. He was a man whom both heaven and earth delighted to honor.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 142.

Verses like these and others (as we will find) show us why Job has been a very successful person in every way. Both God and people have a high opinion of him.

It is easy to be kind and respectful to the rich and the powerful and the famous. But how do you treat those who have nothing to offer you at all?

HEART AND EYES (Job 31:1–23)

At first glance (look), in the verses below, it might sound as if Job were boasting. He seems to be showing off how holy and good he is. This attitude (thought or feeling) is not the kind that the Bible approves (read Matthew 23). But that is not what is happening here with Job. Again, it is important to remember the theme of the story: Job is being told that his past is the cause of his suffering. But Job knows that this thought simply cannot be true and that nothing he has done has made him deserve what has come upon him. So he spends this time remembering the kind of life he has lived and the kind of person he is.

Read Job 31:1–23. What else does Job say about how he lived before the terrible events happened to him?

Notice, too, that Job is not dealing only with his outward actions. The verse “‘my heart followed my eyes’” (Job 31:7, NASB) shows that Job understands the deeper meaning of holiness, the deeper meaning of right and wrong and of God’s law. Job clearly knows that God cares about the heart, about our thoughts, and about our actions (read 1 Samuel 16:7; Exodus 20:17; Matthew 5:28). Job knows that it is wrong to lust after a woman just as it is wrong to commit² adultery³ with her. (Again, what powerful proof that people already knew who God was long before the Lord called the nation of Israel to be His covenant⁴ people and to witness of Him.)

Read what Job says in Job 31:13–15. Why is this message so important?

Here Job shows an amazing (wonderful) understanding, especially for his time, that all humans are equal. The world in Bible times was not a place where people understood and followed universal rights and universal laws. People groups thought of themselves as greater, or better, than others. But here Job shows just how much he understands about human rights and that these rights come from the God who made us. In some ways, Job is ahead of his time and ours too.



Job shows an understanding that all people are created equal.

DEFINITIONS

2. commit—to do (something that is illegal or harmful).

3. adultery—sex between a married person and someone who is not that person’s wife or husband.

4. covenant—dealing with the agreement and promise between God and His people.

A HOUSE ON THE ROCK (Job 31:24–34)

Read Job 31:24–34. What else can we learn about Job?

No wonder the Lord says what He does about the life and character of Job. Here is a man who clearly lives out his faith. He is a man whose works show how really good his relationship is with God. His faith also makes his complaint all the more bitter: *Why is this happening to me?* And it makes the arguments of his friends appear as cheap and useless as they really are.

But there is a deeper and more important message that we can take from Job's faithful and obedient life. Notice how closely his life in the past is tied to how he acts when the terrible events happen to him later. It is not by chance or luck or strong will that Job refuses to "curse God, and die" (Job 2:9). No, it is because of Job's many years of faithfulness and obedience to God. They give him the faith and character that help him to trust in the Lord, no matter what happens to him.

Read Matthew 7:22–27. What is found in these verses that makes clear the reason why Job stays faithful?

The secret of Job's important victory is found in all the "smaller" victories he had before (read also Luke 16:10). It is Job's strong faith that gives him the strength to refuse to compromise.⁵ What we find in Job is an example of what the book of James says about works in a life of faith: "So you see that what he [Abraham] believed and what he did were working together. What he did made his faith complete" (James 2:22, NIV). What an important principle (rule) of the Christian life is shown in this verse. In the story of Job we find him living out this principle in a powerful way. Job is made of the same flesh and bone as all of us. But through the grace (mercy and forgiveness) of God and his own faithful choices, Job lives a life of faithful obedience to God.

What choices do you need to make in order to live as faithfully as Job does?

DEFINITIONS

5. compromise—a change that makes something worse and that is not done for a good reason.

THE GREAT WISDOM OF GOD (Matthew 5:16)

Earlier in the book of Job, amid the back-and-forth discussions between the characters, Eliphaz the Temanite says: “ ‘Job, what pleasure would it give the Mighty One [God] if you were right? What would he get if you were completely honest?’ ” (Job 22:3, NIV). That is a very puzzling question. It is especially true when we know about what is happening behind the scenes in heaven. Yes, it is a pleasure to God if Job is righteous. And yes, again, it is gain to God if Job lives blamelessly. And this is true both with Job and with all of those who claim to be followers of the Lord.

Read Matthew 5:16. How do those words help to answer the question that Eliphaz throws at Job?

The important issue in the book of Job is, Would Job be faithful? Satan says Job would not. But God says he would. Job’s faithfulness then gives God an advantage in this battle with Satan.

But this story is just a small part of a bigger picture. The first angel’s message tells us, in part, to “give glory [praise and honor]” to God (Revelation 14:7). And Jesus explains in Matthew 5:16 that by our good works we can bring glory to God. Bringing glory to God is what Job does. And it is what we can do too.

Read Ephesians 3:10. How is this principle shown in the book of Job in a smaller way?

This verse and the book of Job are examples of the fact that God is working in the lives of His followers. He is changing them for His glory into His own image. “The very image of God is to be remade and shown in humans. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection [full growth] of the character of His people.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 671. The life of Job is an example of how humans may show this principle. Job lived many thousands of years ago. But God’s people in every period of history still have the honor of living in the same way too.

What in your life brings glory to God? What does your answer tell you about yourself and how you live and what you might need to change?



The first angel’s message tells us to give glory to God.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: The Protestant Reformation⁶ brought back to life the great truth of salvation by faith alone. This truth was first recorded in the Bible back in Eden itself (read Genesis 3:15). Then it was made clearer in the life of Abraham (read Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3). Afterward, it was more and more exposed in Bible history up through Paul. The truth of salvation by faith alone always includes the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. In the life and character of Job, we find a great example of what this work looks like.

Bible thinkers sometimes call this work “sanctification,” which means “holiness” or “holy living.” This basic idea appears in different ways in both the Old and New Testament. But it deals with what God does in us. It can be seen as Christian growth in goodness and toward goodness. It is “a growing experience of moral⁷ change by the power of the Holy Spirit in cooperation with the human will [wish; desire; strength of mind].”—Adapted from *Handbook of SDA Theology*, page 296.

The work of sanctification, or holy or right living, is something that only God can do in us. But we are not forced into sanctification. And we are not forced into justification.⁸ Instead, we give ourselves to the Lord, and the same Lord who justifies (cleanses and forgives) us by faith also will sanctify (make holy) us. He changes us, as He did with Job, into the image of God until we become mature in Christ. So Paul writes: “My dear children, I am in pain for you. Once again I have pain like a woman giving birth. And my pain will continue until Christ makes you like himself” (Galatians 4:19, NIV). And Ellen G. White writes: “Christ is our pattern. He is also the perfect and holy example that has been given us to follow. We can never equal Him. But we may copy and follow His example as much as we can.”—Adapted from *That I May Know Him*, page 265.

DEFINITIONS

6. Protestant Reformation—the religious movement in the 1600s. Its goal was to bring about change for the better in the Roman Catholic Church. Martin Luther was one of the great reformers (bringers of change) for that time.

7. moral—knowing the difference between right and wrong.

8. justification—forgiveness and cleansing that makes us holy and pure.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What choices can we make that will allow the Lord to do more and greater work in us? We know that only God can change the heart. But we must cooperate. What does that cooperation look like? How is it shown?
- ② Colossians 2:6 reads: “You received Christ Jesus as Lord. So keep on living in him” (NIV). How do these words help us to understand what it means to live in faith and obedience?
- ③ How can we as a church, not just as persons, bring glory to the Lord before humans and before angels?