

In-Depth Commentary for *Explore the Bible* Leaders and Learners

# EXPLORE THE BIBLE

A photograph of a person standing on a beach, looking out at the ocean. The sky is overcast and grey. The person is a small silhouette in the distance, standing on the wet sand where waves are washing in. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

## JOB, ECCLESIASTES MAKING SENSE OF LIFE

ADULT COMMENTARY  
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SUMMER 2013

LifeWay | Adults

# EXPLORE THE BIBLE

**Summer 2013**

Volume 6 , Number 4

## ADULT COMMENTARY

### Job, Ecclesiastes Making Sense of Life

Wayne VanHorn

# ADULT COMMENTARY

This periodical is designed for all adults using the Explore the Bible Series

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Printed in the United States of America

*Explore the Bible: Adult Commentary* (ISSN 1092-7174; Item 005075123) is published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Thom S. Rainer, President. © 2013, LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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\*Evangelistic Lesson

# IS THIS REALLY HAPPENING TO ME?

*Background Passage: Job 1:1–2:13*

*Lesson Passages: Job 1:1-3,8-11,20-22; 2:7,9-10*

## INTRODUCTION

As a young participant in our church's Royal Ambassador program some years ago, I was encouraged to keep a spiritual journal. Our R.A. leader asked us to take sermon notes and to enter personal comments as we completed our daily devotionals. The whole exercise was an attempt to help us develop strong spiritual disciplines.

Recently, I came across my journal in a box of stuff I have lugged around the country during the intervening 40 years. My entry for January 3, 1971, was as follows: Today Pastor Blythe preached on New Year's resolutions. He said, "Three things in life are always easy. First, it is easy to roll a ball down a hill. Second, it is easy to stay mad at someone who has hurt you. Third, it is easy to keep your faith when everything is going well." Unfortunately, as a 14-year-old boy, I did not have sufficient interest to record the rest of the sermon. I did note in my journal, "Brother Blythe said a well-developed faith will give you sustenance in hard times." The only other entry in my journal for the day was a question mark above the word *sustenance*.

Four decades later, I am far more familiar with the blind sides life can throw at any of us at any time. I have come to appreciate the comments from Brother Blythe's sermon. A mature faith can sustain us through life's most difficult and challenging times.

During a recent trip to Israel, one woman in our group wept silently as she sat on a rock on the hillside of the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount. I asked if I could help. She responded by saying her husband had died one year to the day of our visit to the site of Jesus' well-known sermon. I asked her if she was OK. She said, "Oh yes. My tears are tears of joy, knowing Bob is with Jesus now."

Their marriage of 58 years had been an important aspect of their lives. When Bob died, Camille was left with all the things widows face: being lonely, living in an empty house, and trying to figure out one's identity as an individual after one's husband is gone. Understandably, Camille faced the grief and sorrow others face under the same circumstances. However, as she related to me on that Galilean hillside, she and her husband had dedicated

their marriage to the Lord. Her faith in Jesus proved the one constant in her life when her personal world seemed to be caving in around her.

As Camille listened to her pastor read the Beatitudes with their repeated emphasis on God's blessing, tears welled up in her eyes. She reflected on her first year as a widow. Her faith in God had provided the sustenance she needed to pull through her ordeal.

Human suffering and life's unexpected difficulties can cause even the strongest of believers to doubt the reality of God's love and His power. They may rationalize that when difficulties come, especially to godly people, somehow God's love and power are negated or insufficient. Some skeptics point to human suffering in an attempt to justify their unbelief. Some professing Christians who have experienced personal tragedy and heartbreak drop out of church, abandon prayer and/or choose to live as cynics of religion and of a loving God. God wants His people to maintain their trust in Him, even when things go wrong.

In this week's lesson we focus on a man who lived approximately four thousand years ago and who was forced to endure an ordeal far greater than most of us can imagine. Job responded to his great losses with faith. From his godly example, we can learn to respond to adversity by trusting in the Lord.

### **Job 1:1–2:13**

1. Wealth Test (Job 1:1-22)
2. Health Test (Job 2:1-10)
3. Effective Sympathy (Job 2:11-13)

## THE BACKGROUND

This week's lesson is set in the context of Job 1–2, often identified as the prologue or introduction to the Book of Job. The prologue and the epilogue or conclusion (Job 42:7-17) are written in prose. The prologue sets the stage for the drama unfolding throughout the book. Job is attested as the best of men. Unknown to him, an appearance of Satan among the sons of God in the heavenly court resulted in God's granting permission for the righteous Job to be stripped of the hedges of wealth, including his children, and health. Satan contended these hedges were the source of Job's faithfulness to God. By removing the hedges, Satan was convinced Job would curse God, thus exposing Job's piety as fraudulent.

Instead, Job responded to the loss of his wealth and his health with an exemplary trust in God. In neither instance did he curse God as Satan had predicted. Satan, or the Adversary, served the function of being a hedge remover. He never appears outside the prologue of the Book of Job. Job's wife beckoned her husband to "curse God and die" (2:9).

However, Job retained his integrity. The prologue closes with Job's three friends sitting in silence with him for seven days and nights.

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**Explore Further:** Read the article entitled "Job, Book of" on pages 924-928 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. What makes the biblical Book of Job unique among similar literary works of the ancient Near East?

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## THE BIBLE PASSAGE

### 1. Wealth Test (Job 1:1-22)

The first test Job had to endure was the loss of his wealth. To better understand what his loss entailed, let's take a closer look at who Job was and what he possessed.

**Verse 1: There was a man in the country of Uz [UHZ] named Job. He was a man of perfect integrity, who feared God and turned away from evil.**

Some Bible scholars think the land of Uz lay within or near the territory of Edom, but we have no way of being certain. We read that a man lived there whose name was Job. He is mentioned in Ezekiel 14:14,20 as a righteous man and again in James 5:11 as a man of endurance or patience. Both descriptions fit Job's portrayal in the prologue.

Job's moral fiber is identified in terms of several specific characteristics. First, he was an individual of **perfect integrity**. Other English translations render the Hebrew terms translated *perfect integrity* into two separate characteristics: blameless and upright. The concept of *perfect integrity* referred to Job's being true to himself and to others. We would regard such an individual today as being the same man with one person as he is with another individual. Job was beyond reproach in his personal character and conduct. He was upright in his actions, that is, he did not deviate from God's holy standards.

Second, Job **feared God**. Job's fear was not a debilitating, irrational fear, but rather a wholesome respect and worshipful submission to God. True fear of God is marked by awareness of God's attentiveness to human activity. The logical result of such an awareness of God's attentiveness was that Job **turned away from evil**. The poem about wisdom in Job 28 equates turning from evil with understanding (28:28). In Proverbs 3:7 Solomon also paired turning away from evil with fearing the Lord. To be right with God, each person must deliberately avoid evil. Simply stated, Job was wealthy in terms of spiritual maturity.

**Verse 2: He had seven sons and three daughters.**

The inspired writer of Job also wanted us to know about Job's family. Job and his wife had **seven sons and three daughters**. A family of this size with the specific number of children of each gender that Job and his wife had was considered the ideal family in ancient times. In addition to Job's wealth of spiritual maturity, he was also wealthy in terms of having an ideal family. Job later learned of the sudden death of all 10 children at the same time (Job 1:18-19). We can hardly comprehend the tremendous grief he experienced.

**Verse 3: His estate included 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and a very large number of servants. Job was the greatest man among all the people of the east.**

Job's wealth did not only consist of having spiritual maturity and an ideal family. He was rich in the typical understanding of the term. In patriarchal times, wealth was measured in terms of livestock. Job owned huge numbers of all the important livestock necessary for an agrarian culture. He had **7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen** (or 1,000 oxen), and **500 female donkeys**. Sheep provided wool to make clothing and also served as a source of meat. Camels were associated with travel through desert regions and with caravans carrying goods to market. Job's possession of camels indicates he might have had a profitable business selling wool and other items in the marketplaces of distant lands. Oxen were primarily used for plowing, indicated also by the use of the word *yoke*. Thus Job was not merely a desert nomad but must also have been a farmer (see 1:14). Five hundred yoke of oxen could plow considerable ground. Possession of large numbers of female donkeys ensured the perpetuation of the herd. Donkeys, beasts of burden, were used for farming, for transportation of loads over short distances, and for cultivating. Thus Job was considerably wealthy as a man living in patriarchal times.

Job's personal piety and love for his family members led him to intercede on their behalf. The adult children regularly banqueted at one another's homes (1:4). When they finished, Job would offer sacrifices to God for them in the event they might have sinned (1:5). Job's role in serving as the priest of his family was a normal practice during the time of the patriarchs.

People of Job's time considered Job a great man because of what they observed about his character and his wealth. However, like people today, their earthly perspective was limited. Only God knew the full depth and breadth of Job's uprightness. Since our earthly perspective is limited, our perceptions of other people's character and faith in God often may be superficial since we do not know the whole story.

When we enter a season of difficulty and find ourselves asking, "Is this really happening to me?" we need to respond to adversity with trust in the Lord as Job did. Yet, as good a man as Job was, he had limits. Acknowledging our own limits helps us trust the Lord in times of adversity.

The stage shifts from the land of Uz and a focus on Job in 1:1-5 to God's heavenly council and a focus on God and Satan in Job 1:6-12. In the Hebrew text the definite article "the" is attached to the word translated "Satan." The term "Satan" is a transliteration of the Hebrew word. The basic meaning of the term is "adversary." The attachment of the definite article calls attention to the fact that Satan is the adversary. In Revelation 12:9, John reminded us that the serpent of Genesis 3, the adversary or Satan, and the Devil are all the same being, "the great dragon" to which John referred. However, we need to be careful not to make the primary message of Job a tug-of-war contest between God and Satan, the adversary. Satan is not mentioned again in the Book of Job after Job 2:7. We need to avoid any interpretation of the book that would view Satan as having power equal to the Lord's power over Job or equal claim on Job's life. In the Book of Job, Satan's true status is evident; he is a minor character in contrast to God. In Job 1:6-7, Satan is depicted as a supernatural being who busies himself patrolling the earth.

**Verse 8: Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? No one else on earth is like him, a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and turns away from evil."**

As part of the imperative to establish Job as the best of all possible men of his generation, God inquired of the adversary whether he had considered His servant Job. God seemed proud to refer to Job as "**My servant.**" God also declared Job was in a class by himself, **no one else on earth is like him.** Because of the wealth of Job's spiritual character, perfect integrity, fear of God, and turning away from evil, he was the very embodiment of godliness. Thus Job's character was not merely a matter of what other people thought; even God assessed Job's character to be of the highest quality and genuineness. Satan no doubt bristled when God reminded him Job was one **who fears God and turns away from evil.** As we will see in the following verses, Satan was the source of Job's later sufferings. Thus Job's suffering should not be viewed as divine punishment for some unknown sin. Instead, in God's eyes, Job was the most honorable man on earth.

What about you? Do you seek God-given honor? The only evaluation of our character and devotion to God of importance is the one given by God Himself. To know exactly what God thinks of our spiritual character would be both interesting and terrifying. In this most important of all assessments, Job was unimpeachable.

**Verse 9: Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"**

All persons who seek to live by faith in God can expect a challenge to their honor. Job was no exception. Satan called Job's integrity and faith into question. Still bristling from God's high regard for Job's faith, Satan responded, "**Does Job fear God for nothing?**" As noted in the comments on 1:1, Job's fear of God was a wholesome respect and worshipful submission to God. The adversary's question focused on Job's motive. Did Job revere God *for nothing*?

The phrase *for nothing* means “without cause” or “for no reason.” Satan accused Job of having an ulterior motive based on personal greed instead of on a genuine awe of God. Thus in one simple question, Satan cast doubt on the motive behind Job’s faith.

**Verse 10: Haven’t You placed a hedge around him, his household, and everything he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.**

The same wealth described earlier and viewed as a sign of God’s blessing on Job was viewed by Satan as evidence of a **hedge** around Job. From Satan’s point of view, Job had the luxury of serving God because God had built a protective barrier around Job, **his household, and everything he owned**. The attack on Job’s faith and God’s honor recorded in 1:9 is here stated more explicitly. Observe how not only Job’s integrity and honor are being attacked, but also God’s integrity and honor. God allowed Satan to test Job for His own good reasons, which are not completely spelled out in the Book of Job. God reveals to us what we need to know rather than what is required to satisfy our curiosity. God’s ways may seem mysterious to us (Isa. 55:9), yet we can continue to trust His love, justice, and wisdom. Satan is challenging not only Job’s reputation but also God’s character.

**Verse 11: But stretch out Your hand and strike everything he owns, and he will surely curse You to Your face.”**

Satan insisted Job’s faith was propped up by the artificial crutch of wealth the Lord had provided him. The adversary implored God, **“Stretch out Your hand and strike everything he owns.”** Satan was convinced the removal of the wealth hedge would expose the superficiality of Job’s faith. As a result, Satan contended, **“Job will surely curse You to Your face.”**

Would Job survive the wealth test? Satan challenged the genuineness of Job’s faith by asking God to remove the hedge of wealth protecting him. What about us? Has the economic downturn, high unemployment rate, or loss of retirement funds of recent years challenged our faith in the Lord? We fare better when we expect to experience challenges to our faith. As in the case of Job, Satan can deliberately attack us by threatening our economic well-being. Is the strength of our faith tied to the sum of our bank account? Terrible adversity, including loss of income or retirement funds, can challenge our faith in God. We may find ourselves asking, “Is this really happening to me?” At such times, we can avoid incorrect responses to our adversity such as questioning God’s love or goodness, or casting doubt on His integrity and honor as Satan did. Instead, our experience of adversity can become the perfect opportunity to trust the Lord even more.

In Job 1:12-19, Satan brought four successive disasters on Job, depriving him of his property and children. First, Sabceans [suh BEE uhnz], a band of nomadic marauders, stole Job’s oxen and donkeys, killing his servants in the process. Only the messenger who reported to Job had escaped (1:13-15).

Second, a lightning storm struck Job's sheep and the servants tending them. All but one servant were devoured (1:16). Third, the Chaldeans [kal DEE uhnz] stole Job's camels and killed the servants who were taking care of them, with only one servant escaping the calamity (1:17). Fourth, a desert wind swept across the house where Job's sons and daughters were eating. The house collapsed upon them, killing all 10 children instantly (1:18-19). In all four instances, a single servant escaped the disaster to report to Job. The rapidity of Job's loss of wealth is emphasized by the repeated refrain indicating that while one servant was still relating a disaster to Job, another servant appeared on the scene to report the next catastrophe.

**Verse 20: Then Job stood up, tore his robe, and shaved his head. He fell to the ground and worshiped,**

How did Job respond to the sudden and complete loss of his wealth? His response is captured graphically by the piling up of five verbs: he **stood up, tore his robe, shaved his head, fell to the ground, and worshiped**. Job stood up presumably from a seated position as he listened to one report of catastrophe after another. When he tore his robe and shaved his head, he was exhibiting customary practices of mourning and self-abasement. Similarly, when he fell to the ground and worshiped, he was displaying a posture of humility and of dependence on the Lord.

No doubt Job experienced the emotional shock and the resultant numbness all people feel when confronted with severely bad news. Over a lifetime of humbling himself and worshiping God, Job had assumed the same posture of lying prostrate on the ground before the Lord. His personal discipline of daily reverence through the years of his life provided the basis of his response in the face of extreme adversity.

Satan had erroneously believed Job would curse God to His face once the crutch of wealth had been knocked out from under him. The adversary envisaged Job "falling flat on his faith." Instead, Job fell flat on his face in reverence to God. He maintained his faith in God even after experiencing the loss of his wealth. Such perseverance of faith in the face of adversity was a testimony to the genuineness of his faith in God. Faith and a close personal relationship with God cannot be bought with great wealth, nor are genuine faith and relationship with the Lord lost when wealth quickly disappears.

**Verse 21: saying: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will leave this life. The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away. Praise the name of Yahweh.**

In his face-to-the-ground posture, Job acknowledged his total lack of wealth when he first entered the world and accepted the fact he would leave the world with nothing of material value. He expressed the total lack of wealth by using the term **naked**. Just as a *naked* person has not so much as a thread on his body, Job entered this world naked and he would leave it the same way. Job viewed wealth as something God gives for a season and then

takes away according to His purposes. The most important thing to Job was not God's wealth, but God Himself. As long as Job had a relationship with God, he was not worried about the loss of wealth. Job expressed worship with the statement, "**Praise the name of Yahweh.**" In the original language the form of the term rendered *praise* indicates continuing activity. It comes from a verb literally meaning "to bless." Thus Job's expression of reverence conveys the following concept: "Let the name of the Lord always be blessed."

**Verse 22: Throughout all this Job did not sin or blame God for anything.**

The bottom-line summary of Job's response to the loss of all his wealth was that he **did not sin or blame God for anything**. The Hebrew term translated *sin* means "to miss the mark." Job did not miss the mark or goal of holding fast to his integrity in spite of the great economic disaster that befell him. Neither did he *blame* God. The phrase rendered *blame* literally means "to give unseemliness (unsavoriness)" to God. Though Job's economic collapse was swift and complete, he did not use his economic woes to utter negative or false things about the God he worshiped. He did not accuse God of wrongdoing. His response is further proof that God Himself was more important to Job than God's wealth.

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**Explore Further:** Read the article entitled "Wealth and Materialism" on pages 1661-1662 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. According to the author, what attitude should Christians consistently display toward wealth and material possessions?

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## 2. Health Test (Job 2:1-10)

Satan, the adversary, who is not omniscient or all-knowing, no doubt was surprised by Job's resolve. Therefore he decided to attack Job on another front. The second test Job had to endure was the loss of his health. In 2:1-6, we read of the second appearance of Satan in God's heavenly council. The adversary's description of his own action of "roaming through the earth" and "walking around on it" (1:7; 2:2) reminds us of Peter's description of the Devil (1 Pet. 5:8).

As in the earlier meeting (Job 1:6-12), the Lord gave a high assessment of Job's faith while the adversary cast doubts on Job's genuineness. Earlier, the adversary had queried whether Job served God "for nothing" (1:9). In this second meeting, the Lord rebuked Satan for moving against Job "without just cause" (2:3). The phrases "for nothing" and "without just cause" render the same Hebrew word. Thus the Lord was throwing Satan's false charge back in his face. Job's piety had proved the adversary false. Undaunted by Job's worship of God even after losing his wealth, Satan insisted Job would curse God in the event Job lost his health (2:4-5).

God, who is omniscient, allowed the removal of the “hedge of health.” The adversary would be proved false again; more importantly, Job, the man who loved the Lord so much, would experience an exponential growth or rapid increase of his faith.

**Verse 7: So Satan left the LORD’s presence and infected Job with terrible boils from the sole of his foot to the top of his head.**

The mention of Satan leaving the presence of the Lord marked his final appearance in the book though we have 40 more chapters to explore. How fitting the last statement about Satan is that he **left the LORD’s presence!** Though he does not appear again, the suffering he inflicted on Job remains. The statement he **infected Job** literally means he “smote Job.” Job’s suffering came from Satan. We are never told why God allowed this evil adversary to attack Job; what we do know is, in the end, the adversary is shown to be a loser, Job’s faith and understanding of God deepened appreciably, and God’s character was vindicated.

Having removed the hedges of wealth and health, Satan exited the stage never again to appear in the unfolding drama of this book. He stole the spotlight for a brief time. However, the pain he inflicted on Job was so severe Job found some comfort in scraping his boils with broken pottery (2:8). We learn here that Job was sitting among the ashes. He will be found there when his great trial of adversity finally ends in the last chapter (42:6).

**Verse 9: His wife said to him, “Do you still retain your integrity? Curse God and die!”**

We do not know what motivated Job’s wife to confront Job. Was she the loving wife who had seen too much of her husband’s suffering or was she the foil of Satan when she told her suffering husband to **curse God and die?** I agree with Bible scholars who caution us not to be too hard on Job’s wife, since she too suffered the loss of her 10 children and feared her husband would soon be dead. Perhaps she told Job to *curse God* in an effort to bring his severe suffering to a quick end. A loving spouse would rather let go of her husband than see him experience cruel pain every day. Her question, **“Do you still retain your integrity?”** may best be understood in light of her obvious amazement at her husband’s strong perseverance and persistent refusal to blame God for his troubles.

**Verse 10: “You speak as a foolish woman speaks,” he told her. “Should we accept only good from God and not adversity?” Throughout all this Job did not sin in what he said.**

Job’s response in this verse is crucial for three reasons. First, his response reveals his belief in God’s sovereignty. From Job’s perspective people received both **good** and **adversity** from God. Second, by his response, once again Job proved Satan false. Though Satan had infected Job’s skin with boils, Job did not curse God to His face. For all intents and purposes, the adversary has been shown for the limited creature he is. The rest of the account will be between

Job, his friends, and the Lord. Third, the statement that Job **did not sin in what he said** has been viewed by some as an inference to internal strife. However, Job retained his integrity. The statement Job *did not sin in what he said* does not suggest that Job sinned in his heart. Rather, Job maintained his faith in God even after experiencing the loss of his wealth, his children, and his health. Job's response was a true testimony to the genuineness of his faith in God.

What about us? Would we fare as well as Job if similar circumstances afflicted us? Trusting God even when we experience adversity of the worst kind is a testimony to genuine faith in God. Often hardships and adversity are the only accurate measurements of the true condition of our relationship with God. Sometimes suffering can be redemptive. Sometimes affliction can teach us how much we need God. As we grow spiritually and emotionally by depending on God, we can view adversity as a means of drawing closer to the Lord.

### 3. Effective Sympathy (Job 2:11-13)

For the first time we are introduced to Job's three friends, Eliphaz [EL ih faz], Bildad [BIL dad], and Zophar [ZOH fahr]. Bad news traveled fast, and Job's friends heard about all the adversity he was experiencing. Job's situation stirred their compassion, so with the best of intentions they set out to comfort their friend (2:11). From a distance, they saw but barely recognized Job. He was in such bad shape, the friends wept openly. They assumed the stance of mourners, tearing their robes and throwing dust in the air (2:12). The friends sat with Job for a week in total silence because they saw his suffering was so intense (2:13).

No matter how strong we might think our faith is, it will be tested by life's trials. Too often even the strongest believers may find themselves doubting God's love and power. Some Christians succumb to unexplained misfortune by dropping out of church, abandoning prayer, or becoming cynical. Many of us have already experienced situations where we found ourselves asking, "Is this really happening to me?"

The initial silence and inactivity of Job's friends might appear ineffective. Yet, sometimes just sitting where others sit is a way of telling them, "We are with you no matter how bad things are for you." Pastor Don Zuberer ministered to me in this way in Israel on December 30, 1992. My brother Harold had passed away unexpectedly at age 39 the previous evening. Don said, "Wayne, I learned a long time ago, the fresher the grief, the fewer the words." He then said a short prayer for me and let me work through my grief in silence. I have never forgotten his wisdom and kindness.

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**Explore Further:** List different ways you have observed people responding to adversity. Evaluate the appropriateness of each response. Did one response reflect trust in God more than any other?

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