

The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a person in a small wooden boat, seen from behind, navigating through a rough sea with large, white-capped waves. The person is wearing a dark hat and a bright orange life vest. The sky is filled with heavy, grey clouds, creating a somber and intense atmosphere.

why
BAD THINGS
happen to
GOD'S
PEOPLE

Making Sense of
Trials & Tribulations
in Your Life



DEREK PRINCE

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a person in a lifeboat, seen from behind, struggling against a massive, crashing wave. The sky is dark and cloudy, and the water is turbulent with white foam. The person is wearing a brown jacket and a hat. The overall mood is one of adversity and struggle.

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INTRODUCTION

Why do tragedies happen to God's people, especially those who have lived an exemplary life of faith and service? If God is good, why is there so much misery, suffering, persecution, and injustice in the world? These are questions that, if you and I are honest, have troubled each of us at one time or another. Simplistic answers such as, "We live in a fallen world," "It is God's curse on sinful humanity," "It is the devil's fault," or, "It is God's permissive will," may contain elements of truth. But they do not always settle the deepest questions of our hearts.

In my experience, there are two chief reasons why we go through very difficult times—and both of them are for our ultimate good. The first is a condition we can do something about—the sin of independence. The second is something we have no control over—God's initiation of hardship out of His desire to raise us up to a new level of intimacy with Himself. This second reason is at the very core of the story of Job.

This book is an attempt to explore, though not necessarily answer, some of these questions. We will address the issue in two parts as mentioned above. Initially, we will explore the common yet sinful problem of seeking independence from God. From that platform, we will turn our attention to a brief study of the Book of Job. My hope is that the fresh perspectives from this study will open your heart and mind to the unexpected ways God chooses to deal with us.

Right from the beginning, I want to say very emphatically that I cannot give you all the answers. Even when you are finished reading this book, you will have some questions for which you have not found an answer. This should not surprise you—for none of us will ever fully understand God and His ways. If we could, He would not be God.

TWO HELPFUL VERSES

Two Scriptures shed light on this issue of unanswered questions. In Romans 11:33, Paul says of God:

How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

If you try to search the judgments of God, you will never reach the bottom. Similarly, if you try to know all the ways of God, you will discover that they are past finding out. Recognizing this reality will help you immeasurably, just by coming to the awareness that events and circumstances will happen in your life that you may never understand and for which you may never know the reason.

The second Scripture, which is very familiar to most of us, is Proverbs 3:5:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.

Some years ago my wife, Ruth, was having a problem with her neck. In the process of seeking the Lord about it, He showed her from this verse in Proverbs that she was actually disobeying Scripture. Instead of trusting the Lord, she was trying to understand what was going on with her neck and what she should do about it. Have you ever done that? I certainly have, and yet this tendency on our part is actually contrary to Scripture.

The Scripture says we are to trust in the Lord with all our hearts and not to lean on our own understanding. It is not wrong to want to understand. But our understanding must be secondary to trusting in the Lord.

Thus, when we approach some of the difficult questions of life, we must begin with this basic understanding—for the most part, God and His ways are beyond our finding out. Therefore, trust, not understanding, is the only secure basis of our walk with the Lord.

LEARNING FROM THE WORD

I would suggest at this point that if you have never read the entire Book of Job, you might want to familiarize yourself with it. I realize Job is not high on many Christians' reading list. But I believe in many ways it is one of the more important books in the Bible. Reading the Book of Job before you start Part 2 of this book will stand you in good stead and will help to give you a much clearer context for the teaching shared in that section.

When I face my own problems or challenges of any kind, I like to read and meditate on those characters in the Bible who have walked a similar path. I find it helpful to ask myself questions like: What was their response to this challenge? Was it ultimately a good response? Can I learn from their mistakes? Was there a sin in their life that God is seeking to highlight in mine? If I follow the right path, what will I experience at the end?

A TOTAL BOOK

If you are the sort of Christian who sticks to the familiar passages in the Bible or steers away from subjects you feel you don't understand, let me remind you that the Bible says:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete [or perfect], thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

If you only read half the Bible, you are never going to be a complete believer. Why? Because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God—even the genealogies!

A friend of mine once told me about a man he met in India. When my friend asked this man how he came to the Lord, the man said it was through reading the genealogies in the Bible.

Puzzled, my friend asked, “Why?”

“Well,” he said, “in our culture our gods have no background. They just appear. We never know what the background of anybody is. I was so interested to find out that you could know somebody’s background.”

You see, even the genealogies are inspired—and it is possible they might be the precise answer to someone’s problem.

Now let’s turn to the one basic problem facing each of us—the sin of independence. If we do not come to grips with this issue, we will not be able to resolve a multitude of other problems in our lives. Nor will we be able to understand the significance and meaning of many of the circumstances we end up facing in life.

Part 1

THE SIN OF INDEPENDENCE

Chapter 1



SATAN'S TRAP

What is the one basic problem we all face? What is the one issue with which we must all come to grips? To answer those questions, we must go back to the beginning of human history—to our first parents, Adam and Eve. From their story we will establish a basic truth that concerns every one of us.

Why must we go back to this story? Because we are all descended from Adam. Many contemporary Christians may not believe the Genesis account of the beginnings of the human race. But I do. As a philosopher, I had studied many theories about the origin of man and the universe. But when I turned to the Bible and read it with faith, I discovered it did something no other theory had ever done: *it explained me to myself.*

I discovered what kind of a creature I was, the different elements in my personality, why I behaved the way I did, and why I felt the pressures I did. This understanding all came to me from Genesis and the description of the creation of Adam and Eve. The Genesis account is a very exact, accurate description of the origin of our human race.

The Bible talks about *the sons of Adam* in many places, even though it is not obvious in the English translations. Always bear in mind that the truth of the Bible and the hope of salvation are all directed toward Adam and his

descendants. For some amazing and incredible reason, God has a special concern for Adam and his descendants. I sometimes wonder why God should bother Himself about this particular area of His creation. However, God's concern is evident. The Bible reveals it, and I believe it.

OUR PROBLEMS BEGIN

In Genesis 3:1-7, we read the description of the fall of Adam and Eve.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1)

A friend of mine once commented that all the problems of humanity would have been avoided if Eve had only said to the serpent, "I never talk to strange serpents without my husband." That would have been the right answer, but Eve didn't say that—so here we are today.

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die'" (Genesis 3:2-3).

Can you see how unwilling Eve was to admit that there was something they could not do? She said, "Well, we *may* eat of all the trees of the garden, but there's just one exception." How reluctant we are to acknowledge our own limitations!

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings (Genesis 3:4-7).

DISCREDITING THE SCRIPTURES

In these brief verses, we have the essence of what we need to know about ourselves, about our problems, and how to avoid them. The serpent, who was an incarnation of Satan, had one supreme objective: *to remove Adam and Eve from their foundation in the Word of God*. The enemy knew that if he could do that, they were at his mercy.

It is important for us to realize that whoever we are as believers, the supreme objective of Satan is to undermine and discredit the Scripture. When the enemy has brought us to a place where we no longer believe and accept the authority of Scripture, we are sunk. At that point, we have already become casualties.

Satan always proceeds in a very subtle way. The Bible says he was craftier than any of the beasts of the field. He took two approaches. First, he questioned the Word of God: “Has God really said?” As soon as Eve entertained that question, she was already defeated. When she engaged Satan on that topic, he immediately followed up with a denial: “You will not surely die.”

Satan has never changed his tactics. He operates today in precisely the same way *because it works* and his tactics have brought him endless success. Therefore, take it as a warning for your own life. Never be moved away from your faith in the Scripture as the Word of God.

The deceiver usually will not start by attacking God’s Word directly. He will start by questioning it. Simply questioning the accuracy of the Scriptures is what he did in most of the Protestant European nations in the late 1800s. As a result, today we have professing churches and ministers in those nations, and in America as well, who are total unbelievers. He did not start by denying God’s Word; he started by questioning it. If you and I entertain the enemy’s question about the Word, we will have the same problems as Eve.

A DOWNWARD PROGRESSION

Eve’s response can be summed up in three words, all of which happen to begin in English with the letter “D.” First, she *doubted* the Word of God.

Then, having doubted it, she *disbelieved* it. Having disbelieved it, she *disobeyed* it. Those were the three downward steps—to doubt, to disbelieve, and to disobey. When she disobeyed it, she was lost. That was the point where she was totally defeated.

I want to emphasize again that this process is exactly the same with us. No matter who we are and where we have come in the Lord, if we take those three downward steps—to doubt, to disbelieve, and to disobey—we will be just as lost as Eve. If we let that happen, Satan will have won a major victory in our lives.

Satan used a very subtle form of persuasion on Eve. First, he gave her cause to distrust God's goodness. Then he suggested that she and Adam could be like God. The clincher he delivered was his suggestion they could be like God *without* depending on God.

INDEPENDENT OF GOD?

What I have just stated is the essential truth we must understand if we wish to progress in our relationship to God. The problem was *not* that Adam and Eve wanted to be like God. Actually, that is not a bad motivation. However, they wanted to be like God *without depending on God*.

Satan always begins by discrediting God's character. He implied God was a tyrant. "He's put you in this beautiful garden. True, it's a lovely garden. You have everything you need, and you're doing wonderfully. But...think what it would be like if you were free—if you could just do whatever you wanted. What if you could find your own answers, without having to depend on God? God is treating you like second-class citizens. He's not treating you like the important people you are. You deserve more than that."

So Eve responded, driven by the motivation to be like God but without depending on God. The root error Adam and Eve experienced was their desire to be good on their own—*independent of God*. Their motivation was not bad, but they could not be like God without depending on God. Adam and Eve are our first parents from whom we inherited our spiritual nature, which is why we must begin with them.

THE ROOT OF OUR PROBLEM

When the Bible talks about “the old man” it is not referring to the old European man, the old African man, the old Jewish man, or the old Gentile man. This reference in Scripture is taking us back beyond all that to our first parents—to the first man, the first Adam (see 1 Cor. 15:45, 47). Adam never had children until he was a rebel—and every descendant of Adam from that day to this has been born with rebellion inside. Always remember, the essence of rebellion is the desire to be independent of God. What’s more, may I suggest to you that this desire to be independent from God is actually the root of all your problems.

This is the reality you and I must face—our desire to be independent of God is the root of humanity’s problem. It is my problem and, likewise, it is yours.

In the course of ministry and counseling, I have met people who have traveled halfway around the world to get away from some problem in their lives. I often end up telling them, “You can’t run from your problem, because you take your basic problem with you wherever you go. It is inside you and you can’t run away from it. You can travel all the way around the world—but you take it with you.”

This basic problem we all face is what the Bible calls “the flesh,” “the carnal nature,” or “the old man.” It is our desire to function independent of God. As you read this, you may suddenly realize you may never have really been confronted with this issue. If you never have, I pray that the Holy Spirit will help you confront it head on as you read on in this book.

INDEPENDENCE THROUGH RELIGION

There are many different ways of being independent of God. One of the most common is *religion*. Without realizing it, most religious people use their religion to make them independent of God. I believe this is a major issue of Judaism today. Judaism does lip service to the Law of Moses, but in actual fact it uses the Law as a basis for *not* depending on God.

The same is true of multitudes of Christians as well. Many have a legalistic religion with many different rules. The truth is—they are actually

not depending on God; they are depending on their rules. As a result, their hearts become alienated from God. Unfortunately, the more religious they become the worse their problem. Never imagine that religion is a solution to the world's problems. In truth, I think most of the major problems in the world have been *caused* by religion.

OUR BASIC SUPPOSITION

The solution to this problem of the sin of independence is really quite logical. Before I was a preacher, I was a logician. One aspect of the Bible I love is that it is the most logical book I have ever encountered. You do not have to feel intellectually inferior for believing the Bible. The most logical treatise I have ever encountered is the Epistle to the Romans.

People think the Bible is illogical because they do not start with the basic presuppositions or fundamental facts. Logic is like a computer. The results given by a computer are no more accurate than the information you feed into it. If you feed error into a computer you will get a well computed error coming out of it! It is very accurate, but it is wrong.

In Part 1 of this book, we are dealing with the basic presuppositions of the Bible concerning the nature of man and the root of his problems. When people start with the supposition that man is basically good and when left to himself he will do what is right and good, it is contrary to the Bible. It is a lie of humanism, and any computed information that comes out of it is a deception.

The good news for you and me is that if we accept the Bible's basic premises about ourselves and our condition, it also offers us a solution for our basic problems. We will address this solution in our next chapter.

Chapter 2



REVERSING THE FALL

If the problem of all humanity is one of seeking to be good independent of God, what is the solution? The solution is to reverse the process of the Fall. The Fall started when Eve and then Adam distrusted God's goodness and tried to be independent of God. One reason they fell into this trap was that they trusted their senses more than the Word of God. Genesis 3:6 tells us:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food...

What happened? She discarded her faith in the invisible Word of God and trusted her senses instead. This is when she actually fell—when she *saw* that the tree was good. Her great mistake was mistrusting the goodness of God, desiring to be independent of God and relying on the senses rather than on the Word of God.

TRUSTING GOD'S GOODNESS

Here is our first step in reversing the effects of the Fall: *we must believe and trust in God's goodness*. I am continually amazed at the number of people I encounter who call themselves Christians but do not genuinely trust God. They really do not believe God will do them good. They believe

that if they surrender to God, He's going to ask something awful of them or allow something terrible to happen.

Ruth and I were once ministering deliverance to a young woman in Munich, Germany. She was a trained nurse, but she had serious demonic problems. Although she really wanted peace with God, she did not want to surrender herself completely to the Lord. Every time we identified a demonic entity afflicting her, she made a bolt for the door. Frequently, we had to block the door so she could not get out. At one point in the process of praying for this woman's release from demonic torment, she suddenly lost the ability to speak. When that happened, I said, "Now listen, there is only one solution. You have got to surrender to the will of God *without* knowing what His will is. If you surrender, I want you to put your hands up."

It must have taken half an hour for her to lift her hands up. In her case, I saw vividly what kind of a fight people encounter when they decide to surrender completely to the will of God. She finally surrendered and received her full deliverance. A little later, she got happily married. We did not promise her a happy marriage—but that is one of the provisions God had in store for her. However, she could not receive it until she trusted God to do what was best for her.

I would estimate that at least twenty percent of professing Christians do not really trust God. They are afraid that if they really surrender to God, He will play a trick on them or send them as a missionary to some dark, foreboding place.

Their basic problem is the same as it was with Eve—mistrust of the goodness of God. There is no way to reverse the process of the fall until you are willing to trust God. It is the only real solution. You must be willing to trust God without knowing what He is going to ask of you. This is the first and most important step.

Many people say, "I'll trust God if He does this or that." That is not trust. Trust is surrendering when you do *not* know what He will do. I have trusted God time and time again for more than fifty years. My testimony and encouragement to you is that He will do better for you than you will do for yourself. We should have no reason *not* to trust the goodness of God. Why? Because God has already demonstrated His love. As Paul says, He

gave Christ to die for our sins (see Rom. 5:8). You need no other proof of God's love than that great act of mercy and love.

DECLARE YOUR DEPENDENCE

The second step for us in reversing the effects of the Fall is this: *we must lay down our independence*. If we could only see our demand for independence in the light of full truth, it is both ridiculous and terribly sinful to desire to be independent of God. He is the Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, the Lord of millions of angels, the One who controls the stars, the sea, and the seasons. He runs the universe. In contrast, here we are like a little ant somewhere on the floor saying, "I want to be independent." If we could only see how absolutely absurd it is, we would soon realize how ridiculous our quest for independence is.

When God has finished with His plan for history, there will be nobody left in heaven or earth who is independent of God. Those who hold on to their independence will end up in outer darkness. There will be no room in this created universe for anything or anybody who wants to be independent of God.

There are only two kinds of creatures who have desired to be independent of God. One group would be the portion of angels who followed Satan. The other was the human race. The rest of the universe is happily dependent on God. The stars and the earth do not want to be independent of God. None of the plants and animals wants to be independent of God. It is silly people like you and me who seek independence. The more you meditate on this fact, the more ridiculous it becomes.

It is a wonder God does not simply put His foot on us and stamp us into the ground. Amazingly, however, God has a special love for the descendants of Adam. Just think of it. We have been a source of problems for thousands of years and we have nothing to commend us to Him. We are not that beautiful; we are not that strong; and we are not that intelligent. For the most part, we have been unthankful, unholy, rebellious, and stupid. Yet, God loves us!

The Bible never explains the love of God. You can look for an explanation from the first page to the last, but you will look in vain. The Bible never explains why God loves people. Yet He does. It is the great unexplained mystery of the universe. However, I want to assure you it is true—God loves people like you and me, even when we have made an awful mess of our lives.

BELIEVING THE WORD

The third step in reversing the process of the Fall is: *believing the Word of God more than our own senses*. We must reverse Eve's mistake. She looked at the tree and thought, "Well, that looks good. No matter what God's Word says about it, I'm going to eat of that tree."

It is important to remember that we are not necessarily called to *understand* everything in the Bible—but we are called to *believe* it. We sometimes tend to approach this concept the wrong way around. We say, we will believe a truth when we see it. However, Scripture tells us just the opposite in John 11:40: "Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?'" (NIV).

If we fail to believe God's Word, it follows that we can no longer trust in God's goodness. Why? Because we will refuse to believe He is telling us the truth. If He is not telling us the truth and does not have our best interests at heart, then we no longer feel able to live in full dependence on Him.

To summarize, here are the three steps which reverse the Fall: First, we must trust God's goodness. Second, we must lay down our independence. Third, we must believe the Scripture rather than our senses.

Chapter 3



LEARNING TO WAIT

God's desire is to bring us out of our independence and back into a joyful dependence on Himself. After all, God is the only totally dependable factor in our lives. Wouldn't it be absurd for you and me to trust anything or anyone else and not trust God?

I believe there are two primary approaches God uses to move us out of our independence. The first is waiting. Whenever I preach about *waiting*, a stillness often descends upon the congregation at the mention of that word. Nobody enjoys waiting, least of all contemporary Americans. It is totally contrary to our present culture to wait because our consumer society is built around instant gratification. However, nothing will come to us in our Christian walk until we learn to wait. Why? Because God insists on it.

In the Old Testament, there are two examples of great men of God who had to wait—Abraham and Moses. God had a destiny for each of them. He knew what they were going to do, so He chose them and set them apart.

ABRAHAM

The very center of God's whole program for Abraham was for him to have a special son by his wife Sarah. God made that promise to him when

he was seventy-five years old. However, Abraham had to wait another twenty-five years for the fulfillment.

Why could God not have given him a son immediately? Because He had to bring Abraham to the place of total dependence on Himself. You are probably very familiar with the story. After twelve years, Abraham must have believed he had waited long enough. At this point, his dear wife Sarah gave him some bad advice. She suggested, “Go on and have my servant Hagar (which means ‘a stone’); I’ll let you have a child by her” (see Gen. 16:2). The result was Ishmael.

I do not want to go into controversial, political issues nor cast bad light on any group of people. But I believe one of the main problems of Isaac and his descendants, the Jewish people, for four thousand years has been Ishmael and his descendants. That should be a warning to us against taking matters into our own hands. Because if we do, what will be produced will not be an Isaac but an Ishmael. Many of us have produced Ishmaels in our lives because we have not been willing to wait for God’s timing.

I find this story very interesting because the Scripture tells us that Sarah gave Abraham two pieces of advice. The first time she said, “Go on, have a child.” The second she said, “Cast out the son *you’ve* had” (see Gen. 21:10). When you get carnal advice, it tends to contradict itself.

Abraham had to learn to wait—and as a result, he came to the place where he was totally dependent on God. He had no alternatives; he had exhausted every other possibility. Finally, when Abraham had reached that place of dependency, God met him there. It was then that Abraham had the son whom God had promised.

Clearly, God tested Abraham in a way He would never test most of us. After Abraham had the son God promised, God told Abraham to now offer him as a sacrifice. Once again, Abraham had to be totally dependent on God. He was prepared to kill his son and depend on God to raise him up as the Scriptures indicate (see Heb. 11:17-19). What was God’s ultimate purpose toward which He was working in Abraham’s character? One result—*total dependence on Him*.

MOSES

Let's next consider Moses, who had a very privileged upbringing in the court of Pharaoh. He was instructed in all the wisdom and culture of the Egyptians, the leading cultural empire of the day. However, when Moses realized he was really an Israelite and that his brethren were suffering, he thought, "I'm the one; I'll go out and deliver them." Moses was about forty years old at the time. As we know, his efforts ended up in a fiasco, which caused him to flee for his life.

As a result, Moses spent the next forty years in a rather barren wilderness, looking after a little flock of sheep belonging to his father-in-law. Truly, this was not exactly an exalted position. If you have ever tended sheep—I did for a little while—you know that this task in itself develops patience.

When Moses had reached the age of eighty—well past retirement age—his life was pretty much over with nothing to show for it. All his education, ability, and strength had produced nothing. But it was at that point that God said, "Now, Moses, we can begin." For the next forty years, Moses was, in my opinion, the most powerful human being history has ever recorded. If you consider what he did, it is astonishing. If you want to be a man or woman of power, here is one of the secrets found in Numbers 12:3, "Now the man Moses was very meek [humble], above all the men that were upon the face of the earth" (ASV).

Can you see that God cannot trust power to anybody except the humble? How do you achieve humility? Spend forty years in the desert with a flock of sheep! Somebody once asked Bob Mumford why Moses had to spend forty years in the desert. Bob answered, "Because God couldn't do it in thirty-nine!"

WAITING DEALS WITH INDEPENDENCE

God will keep you in a place of waiting until His process is complete. You can struggle; you can complain; you can pray. But, God is too merciful to answer those prayers. Why? Because He is not going to let you leave the place of waiting until He has fulfilled His purposes for you. *Waiting deals with our independence.*

Let's look at some Scriptures on this subject of waiting. Isaiah 64:4 says:

Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him (NIV).

God is a totally unique being. One of His unique features is that He acts on behalf of those who *wait for Him*. Do you want God to act on your behalf? If you do, then you must learn to wait for Him. Actually, in the process of waiting you will become increasingly dependent on God and less and less dependent on yourself.

In First Thessalonians chapter 1, Paul is writing about his original contact with the Christians in Thessalonica and how other people reported the remarkable impact on their lives. Paul says of these other people:

For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you [the Thessalonians], and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

Paul says the Thessalonians displayed two activities—*serving* and *waiting*. That is the Christian life. Some of us may be willing to serve, but how many of us are excited about waiting? The Christian life is not just serving. It is serving and waiting.

Why is waiting important? One reason is because waiting deals with that independent spirit in us. Waiting brings us to the place of saying, “God, there’s nothing I can do. I’ve come to the end. If You don’t do it, it won’t happen.” God is working on you and me to bring us to that place.

Not only do we wait, *God* also waits:

Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him (Isaiah 30:18).

God waits for us to meet the conditions so that He may be gracious to us. Please note that if we want to be blessed by His mercy, we must also wait for Him.

Do you find yourself in a season of waiting? Is God requiring you to wait? If so, please understand that God is doing it for your good.

Waiting is one way God uses to bring us into fuller dependence on Him. Another way is to bring us to a place of desperation where we cry out to Him. That is the topic we will explore in our next chapter.

Chapter 4



A CRY OF DESPERATION

In the previous chapter, we uncovered one of the ways God deals with our independence. Waiting. It was the way He dealt with His saints of old, and it has lost none of its effectiveness. Waiting is not meant to be easy. So many of us struggle with this principle. We are not content to wait, but God will not bypass the issue of character in our lives. He will take as much time as is necessary to forge our dependence on Him.

There is another way God deals with our independence. What is that second way? He waits to hear our cry of desperation. God asks us to expose our hearts to Him. As we will see in Part 2, He loves to hear how we feel—even when the words are not pretty. Crying out in desperation takes place when we have come to the end of ourselves. When we have tried everything and run out of answers, our only option is to cry out!

Though this option is contrary to our human nature, God sometimes requires us to cry out before He will act on our behalf.

For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you (Isaiah 30:19).

In this passage, Isaiah cites the second way in which God helps us abandon our independence to become dependent upon *Him*. God waits to show mercy until He hears the sound of our cry. Often He is waiting until we are desperate and have come to the place where nothing will suffice but His intervention.

Most of us are afraid of desperation. For me, an aversion to desperation is very typical of the British character. We like to have things arranged so that we do not get too intense, emotional, or lose control. However, God responds to us only if we cry out. That Hebrew word for “to cry” means “to cry out for help.” God may be waiting to bring you to a place of desperation where you will cry out for help.

RUTH’S EXAMPLE

I vividly remember an occasion when Ruth was seized with an intense pain. It could have been the indication of something quite serious. Finally, having done everything she could to alleviate the pain, she just laid on her back on the floor and cried out to the Lord to come to her help. And He did! There was a definite change when she began to cry out.

You may look back in your life and remember a point when you became desperate and God moved. The Lord is not some luxury we can take or leave whenever it suits us. He is essential to every aspect of our life and being. As long as anything else may be more important to us than God moving in our lives, He probably will not move.

ISRAEL’S DELIVERANCE

All through the Bible, God dealt with people to bring them to the place of desperation. One of the most obvious examples is Israel being delivered out of Egypt. Prior to their miraculous release, they had a wonderful Passover, during which time they were healed and strengthened. Consequently, the Israelites were able to march out with the spoils of Egypt. But, when they got to the Red Sea, they looked over their shoulders to see the Egyptian army pursuing them full force. We all know the phrase that describes “being between a rock and a hard place.” If anybody was ever between a rock and a hard place, it was Israel. There they were—with the

Red Sea in front and the Egyptian army behind. And what did they do? Exodus 14:10 tells us:

And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

There are results God will not bring to your life until you become desperate and cry out. Bear in mind, I'm not just talking about saying a nice prayer. I'm talking about being *desperate*. God always has a plan, but He may not release that plan until you are in a condition where you can receive it. To release His plan, God will often deal with our one simple, basic problem: *our desire not to have to depend on God*.

There is not one person, myself included, who really desires to be totally dependent on God. It is contrary to our old carnal nature, which has been imparted to us by Adam and Eve. The one trait God is looking for in us is to be totally dependent on Him—*having no other answer, no other future, and no other plans but Him*. God will not fully work out His plan in the life of any one of us until the issue of independence has been resolved.

PRAY FOR THE DESIRE

I want to share a story, which will somewhat illustrate this point. In 1990, Ruth was admitted to a local Catholic hospital for surgery. While she was going through all the tests in preparation for the surgery, she was visited by the oldest nun, the senior sister in the hospital, who was going around talking to the patients.

When this senior sister came to Ruth's bed and saw Ruth's Bible, she became interested. After introducing herself, she asked, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Ruth said, "Yes, would you please read my Bible to me because I can't read it for myself."

The sister asked, "What shall I read?"

Ruth replied, "Philippians chapter 2."

At that point, the nun became excited. She said, “That was the passage which was read when I took my vows.”

So the nun read this passage from the Bible and then she shared a testimony. This sister had been to a retreat where a Trappist monk gave a talk. Trappists are not allowed to speak inside the monastery. But every now and then, they are allowed to travel away from the monastery to share with people the truths they have learned in the silence of their community.

In the course of his talk, the monk said to the nuns, “Pray for the desire: not to be esteemed, not to be secure, and not to be in control.” When I considered his prayer, it caused me to shudder. I thought, “Well, being esteemed doesn’t really matter much to me in this stage in my life. But not to be secure and then not to be in control? How could I pray that prayer?”

What really impressed me about this encounter between Ruth and the senior sister was God’s way of bringing it all together. A Trappist monk who is not allowed to speak is allowed to speak, but he only shares his wisdom with a group of Catholic nuns. Then one of the Catholic nuns talks to my wife and shares the message with her. And it just so happens that Ruth is the wife of a preacher! She shares it with me, enabling me to share it when I preach, spreading the message all around the world! You see, God has a way of getting what He wants. I believe that monk was given an important message, and God saw to it that it was spread abroad by a man who was not allowed to talk! Here again is the message from this Trappist monk. As we pray “for the desire”—which is really our desperation—we lose our *self-esteem*, we lose our *security*, and we lose our *control*.

Our independence can be so cleverly cloaked with religiosity that it sounds respectable. Many people use their religion to avoid depending on God. Thankfully, He has two ways to deal with our religious façade: He will keep us waiting, and He will bring us to a place of absolute desperation. The place of desperation is that realm where if God does not do something for us, nothing is going to happen. It is the place where we then turn to God, agreeing to let Him do it *His* way.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Now I want to offer an application to the message in these chapters so far. Many years ago the Lord instructed me to encourage people to make an active response to what I teach. If we do not apply what we hear or read, that new-found truth may have no appreciable impact upon our lives.

In making this practical application, I wish to address two kinds of people, and it is up to you to determine which type you are.

First, there are people who really are afraid of losing their independence. You may not have much, and life may be a struggle—but at least you make your own decisions. They may be wrong decisions, but they are *your* decisions. Here is my question to you: Are you fully prepared to let God into your decision-making process? Are you willing to say to God, “I surrender. I lay down my independence. I don’t know what You’re going to ask of me, but I’m prepared to accept it in faith because I trust You.”

Then there is a second type of person. You are someone who has reached the point of desperation. As you read this, you have no answers. You are facing situations beyond your ability to handle, and there seems to be no way whatever to resolve them. What about letting God in? What about giving Him a chance? What does He ask of you? He asks of you what He asked of the Israelites at the Red Sea—cry out!

This is your moment to call to Him. It’s your moment to cry, “Help!”

Sometimes we are too respectable to cry out in desperation. However, if you read the psalms, they are full of cries of desperation. No one uttered them more often than David, that great warrior, who was a dynamic man of God. Time and time again he said in effect, “God, if You don’t help me I’m finished. I have no other help. God, come to my aid.”

If you were drowning in a river, how respectable would you be? If, as you were sinking, you saw someone on the river bank who might be able to get to you in time, would you formulate a carefully worded request for assistance? Would you speak in a polite whisper? Or, would you yell at the top of your lungs, “Help! I need it now!”

Some of you need to approach God as if you were a drowning person. You are not reading this by accident. God wants to help you now. But He is waiting for you to cry out, so you might as well do it now. Don’t wait any longer!

If you are in either of these two categories then I would encourage you to stop for a moment—unhurried and in full trust that it is God Himself who has brought you to this point in your journey. Rather than simply wishing you could do something, take action now. Take a step now—by praying the following prayer:

Father, as I have been reading, I have seen my reflection in the mirror of Your Word. Like Adam and Eve, along with every one of their descendants, I recognize that I have sinned against You by seeking to be good without being fully dependent on You.

Lord Jesus, I thank You that You died on the cross that I might be forgiven of my sin. I follow Your example, Lord Jesus, trusting in the Father's goodness in all things. Today I declare my full dependence on You. Help me not to slip back into leaning on my own understanding.

I know I can completely trust in Your goodness. Because You are good. I lay down my independence and begin now to depend on You for my life and my future. I cry out to You for Your help, Your mercy, and Your grace in my present situation.

Instead of murmuring and complaining when I face trials, I will cry out to You in my distress, believing that You will hear my cry and come to my rescue.

In faith, I pray for the desire not to be esteemed, not to be secure, and not to be in control. I choose a life of full dependence on You. Amen.

In this first part of the book, we have looked in some depth at the basic problem of all humanity: the desire to be good apart from God— independent of Him. This helps us to understand trials that come as a result of our attempted independence. But there are other trials that come in spite of our dependence on God. These will be the focus of the second part of this book.

Part 2

**TRIALS BROUGHT ON BY
RIGHTEOUSNESS**



INTRODUCTION TO PART 2

In Part 1, we looked at one very common reason why we face significant trials in our lives—our tendency to strive for independence from God. We came to see that such independence is never God’s desire for our lives—but rather full dependence on Him to enjoy the freedom and blessing He desires to give us.

But what if, even after we have surrendered our independence and are seeking to live a life of full dependence on Him, trouble still comes? What if we still face trials? Does that signify some hidden sin in our lives? Is affliction always the result of unrighteousness toward God? Or is there another reason?

Those questions bring us to the story of Job. Here is the saga of a righteous man who still had to go through tremendous trials—not because of sin but because of righteousness. Is that fair? Would God allow that? Please join me as we look together at Job’s life. My hope is that our study here will change your paradigms of God’s interaction with you and others, bringing you fresh hope and understanding.

Understanding how we can endure trials and testing as a result of outstanding righteousness is not for beginners. In His mercy, God only tests the mature in this manner. Almost paradoxically, such testing is actually a huge compliment—but it carries a correspondingly high price tag. For us to even study this story will require humility and a reverent fear of God.

As I said earlier, I don’t have all the answers. Nobody does. Let me prepare you for the fact that this part of the book is less about answers and

more about a new revelation of who God is.

Chapter 5



THE DOORWAY TO THE BOOK OF JOB

I came to a fuller understanding of the Book of Job in a rather unusual way. My wife, Ruth, and I read the Bible twice every day—once in the morning, when we read from the Old Testament, and once in the evening, when we read from the New Testament. In the course of our morning readings, one day, we found ourselves in the Book of Job.

When we read it through, frankly, we did not get much from it. So, we decided to read it through again. We read it the second time and still I did not feel we got very much from it. Then something came to my mind, which was the Lord's comment on Job's words as they are found in Job 42:7-8. When I read these verses (which we will examine in coming sections), they opened a door for me to understand the book.

As I said in the introduction to this book, I would strongly recommend reading through the Book of Job at least once before beginning the second part of this book. Having the full context will be like pegging out a ground-sheet before erecting the tent. No matter who is teaching you, always remember that the ultimate commentator on Scripture is Scripture itself, illuminated by the Holy Spirit. It may be challenging to work through the

poetic language in the Book of Job—but getting the full story by reading the Word is of ultimate importance.

JOB’S STORY AT A GLANCE

If, after reading the Book of Job, you still feel unfamiliar with the story, let me begin here by giving a brief overview.

There was a man of outstanding righteousness whose name was Job. He was also very wealthy, very generous, and a leader in his community. Early in his story, there is a dialogue in Heaven between God and Satan. God pointed Job out to Satan and said, “Have you considered My servant Job? A perfect and an upright man, there is no one like him in the earth.”

Satan was very cynical and replied, “No wonder—Job is thriving. You do everything for Job. You protect him, You provide for him, and he prospers. But if You will just take everything he has, he will curse You to Your face.”

Amazingly, God said to Satan, “Okay, you can take away everything he has. But don’t touch him personally.”

Following this interchange, a series of unnatural disasters hit Job and his family. All his children—seven sons and three daughters—were killed in a single accident. All but three of his servants were killed. All his wealth was stolen or destroyed. Behind this amazing series of disasters was Satan. Amazingly, Job did not blame God for the tragedies that had befallen him.

After afflicting Job, Satan turned up again in Heaven. Once again, God said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? You moved Me to smite him without cause, for no reason, and he hasn’t turned against Me. He has submitted himself to Me.”

Satan, the old cynic, challenged God: “Well, no wonder. If You’ll just touch his body, he’ll give anything for the sake of health. Afflict his body and see what happens.”

So the Lord said to Satan, “You can touch him. But don’t take his life.”

Then Satan went out and the Bible says, “He smote Job with boils from head to foot.” (That is another indication of the pain Satan can inflict. Some

people do not like to acknowledge this truth, but there it is.)

After this assault, we find Job sitting on the ash heap, having lost everything, with a potsherd scraping the pus off his boils. At this point, his three friends turned up with the intention to “comfort” Job. As we will see, it didn’t turn out so well. As we commonly say, “With friends like these, we don’t need enemies.” When they saw Job in his affliction, at first they just sat on the ground with him for seven days—nobody saying a word. Then they started in trying to fix Job. In the course of this study, we will examine what they said and how Job responded.

THE DOOR

Before we go any further in this study, I want to reveal the door which God opened to help me understand the meaning of this story. There are many aspects of Job’s story that I still do not understand. But the passage I referenced earlier—Job 42:7-8—gave me a way to begin to unravel some of the mysteries.

Near the end of the book, Job has said his piece, his three friends have given their advice, a young man named Elihu has offered his opinion, and God has moved in and spoken directly to Job. Finally, God addressed Job’s three friends:

And so it was, after the Lord had spoken these words to Job that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite [he was first of the three friends to “comfort” Job], “My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends [Bildad and Zophar], for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has” (Job 42:7).

According to God, these three men had said the wrong things concerning Him—and Job had said the right things. Then, in the next verse, this criticism is repeated:

Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you. For I will accept him, lest I deal with you according to your folly;

because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has (Job 42:8).

Here is the door—opening the question that came to me: “What did the friends say that God didn’t accept, and why did God accept what Job said?” Job said a lot of negative things about God. For instance, he actually said, “God has taken away my justice; He’s not treating me right.” But God did not object—He said Job had spoken correctly.

In contrast, God said of Job’s friends, who came with a long list of religious platitudes, “They have not spoken of Me what is right.”

As a result of this observation, I discovered the way to approach the Book of Job. The key was to find out why God took exception to the words of the friends and why God accepted the words of Job.

In most cases, the average religious person would have reacted just the opposite of the way God responded. They would have agreed that what the friends said was right and what Job said was awful! However, God did not react that way. He said Job was right. This, then, will be the pattern we will use to try to understand the meaning of the Book of Job.

Are you ready to make those discoveries together?

Chapter 6



FACTS ABOUT SATAN

Before we consider Job—his personality and his responses—we first need to note some important facts revealed about Satan through this story. In this chapter and the next, we will examine some of these attributes of Satan’s activity.

AN UNEXPECTED TRANSFORMATION

First, the story of Job reveals that Satan can take his place amongst the angels of God. This fact is stated twice, first in Job 1:6 and again in 2:1.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. And the Lord said to Satan, “From where do you come?” So Satan answered the Lord and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it” (Job 1:6-7).

In this context, the sons of God are the angels—they are also mentioned in Job 38:7. This passage also exposes one of the activities in which Satan engages—he goes to and fro in the earth. He walks back and forth on the

earth, making all the trouble he can for everybody he encounters. First Peter 5:8 tells us:

Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Then in Job 2:1, the reality of Satan being in the midst of angels is repeated:

There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord.

How did Satan manage to include himself with the angels? In Second Corinthians 11:13, where Paul is speaking about false apostles, he writes:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.

Paul indicates that there are deceivers—false apostles—who will “transform” themselves into the appearance of true apostles for the intent of deception. This is important to understand because it is still happening today. Also, we are told that Satan himself is able to transform himself into an angel of light (see 2 Cor. 11:14).

From these and other verses, it is my opinion that Satan came among the other angels looking just like them, and very probably the other angels did not recognize him. After all, there are at least a hundred million angels because Revelation tells us there were ten thousand times ten thousand angels around the throne of God (see Rev. 5:11). That calculation gives us the figure of a hundred million.

Among these millions of angels, there was this beautiful, shining figure. It does not seem that the other angels discerned anything different about him. But of course, God certainly knew him, and He said to him: “What are you doing here, Satan? How did you get in among this crowd?”

OUR ACCUSER

I believe that to some extent even today, Satan still has access to God's presence. Revelation 12:10 says he accuses us—the people of God—before the throne of God day and night. This means that Satan must have some kind of access to God's throne room.

One of the most important truths we must understand is how to handle Satan's accusations. Revelation 12:11 gives us the answer:

And they [the believers on earth] overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

Very simply, these believers testified to what the blood of Jesus does for us. (A more complete study on this topic is the subject of my book *Spiritual Warfare in the End Times*, available from Derek Prince Ministries.) It takes a certain kind of person to overcome Satan—one who is so committed as not to love his or her life to the death. My definition of this type of person is *one for whom doing the will of God is more important than staying alive*.

What does that mean for you? It means that if given the choice you will do the will of God and die for it rather than compromise and stay alive. Although I seldom quote him, Lenin, the Communist revolutionary, once said, "Communists are dead men on furlough." In other words, when a person becomes a member of the Communist party, it is a death sentence for him or her. Death may come in a jail, on a gallows, or at a roadblock. But that person has reconciled himself or herself to the fact that they *are* going to die.

I believe that, in a certain sense, this should also be true of Christians. Christians are dead men and women on furlough. We have not died yet. But we can anticipate the possibility of a sentence of death that, in the years ahead, may be an increasing possibility if the world order and spiritual climate continue on their present course.

We see then that Satan has some kind of access to the presence of God and that he can disguise himself as an angel of light. The reality is that there have been a number of examples in recent decades of people being deceived by beings who appeared as angels of light but were actually messengers of error.

Having seen the access Satan has as an angel of light, we will examine in the next chapter how God deals with him.

Chapter 7



GOD'S INITIATIVE

In our last chapter, we noted that the Book of Job opens a window of unexpected information about Satan. In particular, our study made us aware of Satan's ability to pose as an angel of light, obtaining some degree of access to accuse us before God's throne.

The second item of interest in the early part of Job's story is that God took the initiative. God actually pointed out Job to Satan. We read this in Job 1:8:

Then 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, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

You might feel honored if God would say those words about you. But bear in mind that a lot of problems can go with such attention. When the Lord pointed Job out to Satan, Job became Satan's number one target. The Lord has spoken to me personally about being very careful concerning praising people. Sometimes by doing so you can create problems for them in two ways: first, you tend to give them an inflated ego; and second, you may make them targets for Satan's attention.

In Job's case, *God took the initiative*. It was not Satan who said "that man Job." It was God who said, "Have you considered My servant Job?" I want to say reverently—*God was proud of Job*. It may be good for you and me to ask ourselves, "Is God proud of me? Is there anything in my life to make God proud?" In light of what God said about Job, these questions are worthy to consider.

GOD ESTABLISHED BOUNDARIES

A third and very important point the Book of Job teaches us about the enemy is that Satan can only go as far as God permits in relationship to God's people.

And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he [Job] has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person" (Job 1:12).

God limited Satan. He told him he could take all of Job's property, but he could not touch his body. Satan could not go one inch farther than God permitted. Later, when Job had stood firm, Satan came back at God and said, "Well, that's fine and good. But he still has his body intact." Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life" (Job 2:6).

Satan could afflict Job's body, but he could not kill him. As a result, Job broke out with boils from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. Boils are very painful and they are also very humiliating. Who caused the boils? Satan. Satan has a degree of power—but he can go no farther than God permits.

Power over Human Agents

Within those limits which God has set, Satan has certain areas of power. First, to some extent, he has power over human agents. He stirred up the Sabeans and the Chaldeans to raid all of Job's flocks. Certainly, it is not difficult for us to believe that Satan still can stir people up and make them enemies of God, His people, and His purposes.

Power over the Elements

Second, and this is perhaps more surprising, Satan has a measure of power over the elements.

The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them (Job 1:16).

Satan was responsible for the fire which fell from heaven. Revelation 13:13 affirms that the false prophet, a servant of Satan, will call down fire from heaven. We may need to adjust some of our thinking, because many Christians automatically assume that anyone who does something supernatural represents God. But that is not necessarily true. You are a candidate for deception if you accept any supernatural manifestation as automatically coming from God.

Also with regard to Satan's control of the elements, verse 19 says:

Suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead.

All of Job's children perished in one abnormal climactic experience when a wind came and struck the four corners of the house. Satan *has* that power. Whenever a wind strikes all four corners of your house at once, you may be sure it is from Satan. He could control the fire from heaven and he could control the winds up to the point God permitted.

Power to Inflict Sickness

Satan also has power to inflict sickness. God gave him permission to attack Job's body and he smote Job with boils from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. Not all sickness is from Satan. But some sickness can be directly from Satan. I have learned that in many cases, if you can eliminate the Satanic element in a sickness there will be immediate healing.

SATAN TARGETS OUR CHARACTER

The final fact I want to point out about Satan is that he attacks the character of God's servants. He is a cynic and he can always find some way

to question the integrity of God's people. Therefore, we find him saying to God in chapter 1, verses 9-11:

Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!

In other words, Satan impugns Job's motives before God, "He gets all the good. Why shouldn't he fear You?" Then also in chapter 2, verses 4-5:

Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

Satan always has a way to attribute the worst motives to God's servants. This contains a warning for us because there is much negative being said about the church and servants of God today. Unfortunately, some of what is being said is true, but we should not help Satan do his job. He is the accuser of the brethren and we do *not* need to assist him. Please consider this if you have become an accuser of leaders, ministries, and churches—you may need to repent. Just remember that when you are engaging in such accusation, you are doing Satan's job—and he does not need your help.

As a personal application, if you are in a spiritual struggle and you feel that Satan is oppressing you (and frankly, I find myself in that situation frequently) it is legitimate to resist Satan. The Bible tells us to resist him and he will flee from us (see James 4:7).

Nonetheless, if you go on resisting him and he does *not* flee, then the wise thing to do is stop and ask, "God, is there something You are trying to teach me?" This is very important to understand because if this is the case, until you learn the lesson God will not call Satan off. Do not go on bombarding God with prayers that will get you nowhere. Stop praying for relief and ask God to teach you what He has for you to learn. Remember, Satan cannot do anything if God does not permit it.

Now that we have received some helpful insights on how Satan works, let's continue with the next phase of Job's story in the coming chapter.

Chapter 8



JOB’S “COMFORTERS”

We have looked at the beginning of the story. We have seen where Satan approaches God, disputes God’s pleasure at His servant Job, and receives permission to afflict him in two separate waves. In this chapter, we will be introduced to three of Job’s friends—Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad.

When these three men arrive and see Job’s misery, they sit for seven days speechless. It is difficult for Westerners to imagine such a setting. But for me, having lived in the Middle East, I can easily picture Middle Easterners acting like that today. In many ways, if you know the culture of people from this area, you understand the Word of God better—because the Bible is a Middle Eastern book.

I became familiar with Arab culture when I lived in the town of Ramallah. This town was located in what was then Palestine after World War II. In many ways it was almost the same as it had been in the days of Abraham. If you wanted to buy a sheep you would not approach the owner and say, “Is that sheep for sale? What’s the price?”

You would talk with the man and talk about his family and ask him about the health of his children. Then after a little while, you would begin to refer to the sheep. You had to plow your way through a lot of social formalities before you could discover the answer. We can think that the

behavior of the people in Job is unusual—but in actuality it is Middle Eastern.

THE ACCUSATIONS

After a week, Job's friends finally spoke up—and as it turned out, they were men of many words. They had been silent for seven days, and now they were going to let out all they had been thinking. I will give a short summation of what they said, so that we can understand Job's reaction.

You Have Sinned

First, they said in a very roundabout way to Job, "You have sinned, and that's why all this has happened to you." They did not come right out and say it, but Job knew well enough what they were implying: "This wouldn't have happened to you if you hadn't sinned."

In response Job continually argued, "But I haven't sinned!" And he was right—he had not sinned. From beginning to end God never charged Job with sin. He was righteous at the beginning, and he was righteous at the end. That is one of the facts that makes the book puzzling. Many religious people just will not make room for that because they, like Job's friends, think that bad things happen because of sin. This is not necessarily so.

You Have Been Wicked

In the end Eliphaz came out and accused Job of all sorts of things he never did.

*Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquity without end?
For you have taken pledges from your brother for no reason,
and stripped the naked of their clothing (Job 22:5-6).*

Those accusations were not true. Job had never done those things.

*You have not given the weary water to drink, and you have
withheld bread from the hungry. But the mighty man possessed
the land, and the honorable man dwelt in it. You have sent
widows away empty, and the strength of the fatherless was*

crushed. Therefore snares are all around you, and sudden fear troubles you (Job 22:7-10).

In other words, “Job, you’ve been wicked and that’s why all this is happening.” (Remember that the Lord said Job’s friends spoke the wrong things about God and Job spoke the right things.) Then Job’s friends said, in effect, that God never lets the wicked prosper.

Some people believe this is true. However, criminals, atheists, and all manner of evil people prosper. Job’s friends, however, believed that if evil befell someone, it was because they were evil.

You Have Sown Evil

Eliphaz told Job in Job 4:7-9:

Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off? Even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of His anger they are consumed.

In other words, if you have sown evil you will be cut off. But that was not true—as Job continually argued very carefully and emphatically. This is an issue that is important for the Church to face today. Does God always judge the wicked? Job argued that God does not. Does God sometimes let the wicked get away with their evil? The answer is yes, He does—not always, but sometimes. Job’s friends told him that if he would acknowledge and repent, then everything would go right with him.

It is very easy for religious people to say such things.

You Are Not Right with God

These three friends gave Job a lot of religious talk, which God later told them was wrong. As an example, Job 8:3-7 says:

Does God subvert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice? If your sons have sinned against Him, He has cast them away for their transgression. If you would earnestly seek God and make your supplication to the Almighty, if you were

pure and upright, surely now He would awake for you, and prosper your rightful dwelling place. Though your beginning was small, yet your latter end would increase abundantly.

In other words, “Job, if you were really right with God, you’d be prospering. The fact that you’re not prospering shows you’re not right with God.” Have you ever heard that teaching? The Lord says it is *wrong*.

Then Eliphaz preached what I call the “prosperity” gospel, which is—God blesses everyone who does or believes the right things. This is how it is expressed in Job 5:

Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty (Job 5:17).

Eliphaz inferred that Job was being chastened by the Almighty, but it was not true.

For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole. He shall deliver you in six troubles, yes, in seven no evil shall touch you (Job 5:18-19).

Is that *always* true? Unfortunately, if we are realistic about our experience of life, it is not. The issues of Job are right up to date. They faced issues that we are facing today.

In famine He shall redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword (Job 5:20).

In other words, Christians should never be killed in war. Again, unfortunately, it is not true—Christians often perish in battle. As another example, much of Africa is wracked by famine—and Christians are not exempt.

You shall be hidden from the scourge of the tongue, and you shall not be afraid of destruction when it comes. You shall laugh at destruction and famine, and you shall not be afraid of the beasts of the earth (Job 5:21-22).

Job's friends were preaching what I call "the prosperity gospel" to Job. They were telling him, "If you hadn't sinned you wouldn't be sick." I have known people who have said something similar to these words. Actually, such words are very cruel because to the problem of sickness it adds the problem of guilt.

Many Christians today begin to feel guilty when they get sick because they have been fed an incomplete doctrine. It is not altogether wrong, but neither is it altogether right. The problem with that teaching is it works often enough that people can go on teaching it as if it should work all the time in every situation.

In light of the prominence of this "prosperity gospel"—both in the story of Job and also in the church today—we need to explore this truth further. In the next chapter, I will further examine the biblical position on prosperity and how Job's story challenges a common, yet errant, doctrine.

Chapter 9



THE “PROSPERITY GOSPEL”

Having referred in the last chapter to what I call “the prosperity gospel” as it appears in the Book of Job, it is important for us to consider what the Bible actually says about prosperity. I want to state up front that the Bible clearly promises prosperity. But in the context of the Western church, prosperity requires qualification.

THE PROMISE OF PROSPERITY

Psalms 1:3 says this of the person who loves and lives by the word of God: “Whatever he does shall prosper.”

God told Joshua that if he was careful to follow His commandments, “For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8). There are many other such promises, but I want to suggest that American culture has perverted the meaning of the word *prosperity*. What we call prosperity is *not* what the Bible means by prosperity.

The word *prosperous* comes from a Latin word, *prosperus*, which means “doing well.” One of the ways it was frequently used in Latin was to describe a general who had conducted a successful military campaign.

When he returned to Rome it would be said in Latin, *re prospere justa*, meaning he has “prosperously carried out his assignment.”

BIBLICAL PROSPERITY

If you want a biblical picture of prosperity, it does not match the modern American view—which often includes a Mercedes Benz car, designer clothes, Rolex watches, and a lot of money. I am not against any of those items, but they do not represent the prosperity talked about in the Bible. In the Scriptures, prosperity is successfully accomplishing your assigned task. Like the Roman general who was sent out, defeated the enemy, and added territory to the empire, it could be said that he prosperously carried out his assignment. If you understand that as the meaning of prosperity, then you may begin to expect biblical prosperity *if* you meet the conditions.

If the contemporary picture of prosperity were true, then Jesus and His apostles were the most awful failures. Why? Because they never prospered according to American standards.

CAN YOU MEET THE CONDITIONS?

I was preaching in Ghana some years back on the ministry gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. There were a lot of fine young men listening, so I asked, “How many of you would like to be apostles?” Many of them put their hands up and some even stood to show their enthusiasm.

“Well,” I said, “before you volunteer let me give you the job description.” Then I read First Corinthians 4:7-13. Paul, writing to the Corinthian Christians, says:

For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that

you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena (1 Corinthians 4:7-9 NIV).

Paul paints a picture of a line of prisoners being led out to the arena to be put to death—and the apostles are in the line at the end.

We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world (1 Corinthians 4:9-13 NIV).

After reading those verses to those young men, I then said, “Now, how many of you want to be apostles?” A considerable number of them still stood up—but not nearly as many as the first time. Knowing the truth of those verses, how many of us would want to be apostles?

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF PROSPERITY

Let’s ask the question then: what kind of prosperity did the apostles have? It was not what Americans would call prosperity. But the apostles prospered because they successfully accomplished the task assigned to them by God. That is prosperity!

Here are three other places where prosperity is used in Scripture. As already mentioned, Joshua 1:8b:

Do according to all that is written in it [the Law]. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Joshua was a military commander. He did not ride in a Cadillac; he probably rode a horse or donkey. He did not sleep in first-class hotels; he slept out in the open. He had a tough, exacting, and demanding job that required all his strength and determination. But he prospered, not in the American sense but in the biblical sense. How? By completing the task to which God had appointed him.

PAUL'S EXAMPLES OF PROSPERITY

In Romans 1:9-10, Paul writes to the Romans,

I make mention of you always in my prayers; making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you (KJV).

The word for *prosperous* is the same Greek word used in Third John 2, where John writes:

Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

How did God answer Paul's prayer for a prosperous journey to Rome? He did not travel first class on a luxury liner with all his meals provided and waiters to serve him. He traveled as a prisoner in chains on a ship that went through a most remarkable fourteen-day storm where they never saw the sun. Then, when they got out of the storm, Paul and all the other passengers were shipwrecked on the island of Malta.

When they got on to the shore they kindled a fire. As Paul was gathering fuel, picking up a stick, a viper fastened on his hand. Was that a prosperous journey? It was prosperous in the sense that he did not die—first in the storm, then by snake bite. Then Paul prayed for the father of a leading man of the island and he was healed of dysentery. As a result, many other people on the island came to receive healing. After three months, they eventually were able to resume their journey and sailed on to Rome.

By our popular Western standards, we would have to say that was not a prosperous journey. However, it *was* a prosperous journey—because Paul

accomplished the purpose of God. Not only that, two hundred and seventy-seven other people were saved and many were healed because of Paul!

I trust you are beginning to understand what the Bible means by *prosperity*. It is the will of God for us to prosper. But there is very little in the New Testament to suggest that we are destined to prosper by contemporary, materialistic standards.

RECALIBRATION REQUIRED

We stated earlier that if success is marked by prosperity as we understand it today, then Jesus and His apostles were the most abysmal failures. Jesus ended his life on a Roman cross—naked, scoffed, beaten, and forsaken. It is very interesting to me that Jesus on the cross was the last the world ever saw of Him. God never tried to correct that picture. The only people who saw Jesus afterward were witnesses chosen by God. God has allowed that final, awful picture of Jesus to persist throughout history.

Consider Paul and Peter, the two most well-known apostles. Paul was executed in a Roman jail and Peter was crucified upside down. That was not success and prosperity by our standards. What Christians habitually have done all through the ages is to take the language of the New Testament and apply it to their own lifestyle. They allow themselves to believe that their perceptions are what were meant by the New Testament. But they rarely are. Throughout history, rather than comply with the standards of the New Testament, Christians have lived as they pleased and given Christian titles to what they do.

Let me be clear at this point. I believe it is the will of God for Christians to prosper in a material sense. However, I also believe that today, in much of the church, there is a totally incorrect interpretation of prosperity. This is highly relevant, because if I understand what God seems to be saying through His Word, the Church may be coming into challenging times. In America, and perhaps in much of the world, circumstances may emerge that will be the very reverse of what is normally called prosperity.

If that happens, how will we react? Will we say the Bible is not true and God has failed us? Are we going to be like Job's comforters and use a lot of

religious language to gloss over the hard questions? Or, are we going to be a realist like Job and tell it like it is?

Chapter 10



DISCERNING THE SOURCE

Some of the advice offered to Job had touches of “the prosperity gospel” in it. Therefore, it was necessary in our previous chapter to offer some clarity regarding the biblical perspective of prosperity. Like the advice of Job’s friends, much of what is taught in the church today is incomplete. Such erroneous teaching can bring condemnation to those who are suffering—not as a result of sin, but according to God’s will and for their eternal benefit.

Well-meaning friends can be prone to focus on perceived fault rather than true need. Job had three such friends who did the right thing in coming to comfort him. But instead of communicating God’s perspective, they focused on their own soulish thoughts. That mistake, as Scripture infers, can actually have its roots in the occult.

THE SOURCE OF ELIPHAZ’S TEACHING

It is very interesting that Eliphaz reveals one of the sources of his teaching as an evil spirit. Here are his own words:

“Now a word was secretly brought to me, and my ear received a whisper of it. In disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, fear came upon me, and

trembling, which made all my bones shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair on my body stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes; there was silence; then I heard a voice saying” (Job 4:12-16).

This was a visitation of an evil spirit that brought great fear with it. What the spirit said in this encounter is really the crux of the Book of Job:

‘Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker? If He puts no trust in His servants, if He charges His angels with error, how much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before a moth?’ (Job 4:17-19)

The spirit’s message was that it is ridiculous and presumptuous for anyone to claim to be right with God, nor can any person be righteous in the presence of God. This, of course, was not true. Job *was* declared righteous by God Himself. Additionally, it is the clear teaching of Scripture that saints in both the Old and New Testaments were declared righteous by God because of their faith.

ZOPHAR SLAMS JOB

In the course of their words, Job’s friends set forth a fearful catalog of all the terrors that await the wicked. It is as if they were telling Job what he should expect. Zophar spoke the following in Job 20:20-29:

“Because he [the wicked] knows no quietness in his heart, he will not save anything he desires. Nothing is left for him to eat; therefore his well-being will not last. In his self-sufficiency he will be in distress; every hand of misery will come against him. When he is about to fill his stomach, God will cast on him the fury of His wrath, and will rain it on him while he is eating. He will flee from the iron weapon; a bronze bow will pierce him through. It is drawn, and comes out of the body; yes, the glittering point comes out of his gall. Terrors come upon him; Total darkness is reserved for his treasures. An unfanned fire

will consume him; it shall go ill with him who is left in his tent. The heavens will reveal his iniquity, and the earth will rise up against him. The increase of his house will depart, and his goods will flow away in the day of His wrath. This is the portion from God for a wicked man, the heritage appointed to him by God.”

Zophar was saying, in so many words, “Job, this is what happens to the wicked and it is happening to you.”

BILDAD’S RELIGIOUS SPIRIT

Then Bildad added similar thoughts, recorded in Job 25:1-6:

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said: “Dominion and fear belong to Him; He makes peace in His high places. Is there any number to His armies? Upon whom does His light not rise? How then can man be righteous before God? Or how can he be pure who is born of a woman? If even the moon does not shine, and the stars are not pure in His sight, how much less man, who is a maggot, and a son of man, who is a worm?”

Bildad said it is a ridiculous presumption for any man to claim to be right with God. Please take note—this is the basic issue that Satan resists. He could have spoken the very words of Bildad, ridiculing any claim to be right with God. We need to realize that these accusations came from an evil spirit—*not* the Spirit of God. I believe the spirit that gave these impressions to Bildad was a religious spirit.

A religious spirit is one of the hardest to deal with—and there are many of them in all expressions of Christianity. They use wonderful sounding language to beat down other people, and that is precisely the way Job’s friends operated.

Something we should recognize about religious spirits is that they are too good to be true. They use their apparent goodness, righteousness, and spirituality to make others feel guilty and spiritually inferior. They are very deceptive because, like Job’s friends, they use all the right language.

However, they cause no end of trouble, and they are more religious than God Himself.

The Scripture's answer to, "Can a man be right with God?" is found in Romans. Righteousness, in fact, is the whole issue of Romans. In that New Testament book, Paul declares that we are made righteous by faith, not by any good works or merit on our part.

God clearly declares that we may be righteous before Him. But Satan argues continually that we cannot, and he usually uses religious arguments to make us feel guilty. The enemy will dig up everything you have ever done wrong and point out every shortcoming to convince you that you cannot possibly be righteous in God's eyes. Isn't it amazing that this is a major issue in the case of Job? That book, which is possibly 4,000 years old, is exactly relevant to the situations in which we find ourselves today.

We have seen Job suffer unspeakable tragedy. We have listened to the religious arguments of his friends condemning him. How does Job respond to all this? In our upcoming chapter, we will explore the answer to that significant question.

Chapter 11



JOB'S RESPONSES

To read what happened to Job and then to hear what his “friends” said to him is a rather disturbing experience. We do know, however, the end of the story. God declares that in the final outworking, Job had spoken what was right about Him. For all who might tend to look at Job’s situation with a religious mindset, along the lines of Job’s friends, we need to remember the key to Job. As I suggested in the beginning, I believe the key to our understanding is approaching the Book of Job from this angle: Job spoke rightly about God.

Let’s examine just how Job responded—both to the enormous personal tragedies that he suffered as well as to the unwelcome accusations from his friends. As we watch how Job responded, may we learn from his example!

JOB’S REVERENT SUBMISSION

When Job lost his children and all his possessions, his first response was *reverent submission*. He said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

When Satan afflicted him with boils and he was sitting on the ash heap, his wife advised him, “Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God

and die!” (Job 2:9).

But Job replied, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” (Job 2:10) The Scripture tells us that in all his trouble, Job did not sin nor charge God foolishly. His initial reaction was totally righteous.

The death of my first wife, Lydia, was the hardest experience I have ever been through. However, Job’s response gave me an answer to my loss: “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away.” If we can trust God to give, then we must also trust Him when He takes away. For me, this resolved the doctrinal problem of my loss. I still needed to deal with the personal emotional crisis. But I was not upset with God over what had happened with Lydia.

A LONG LAMENT

Job’s second response was a long lament in which he makes statements that are difficult to understand (see Job 3). In this discourse, Job really releases his feelings—and I believe that is absolutely the right reaction. We are not intended to be unemotional stoics who never let anything affect us. Our goal is not to avoid anything that is going to hurt us. Stoicism is an alien, un-Christian doctrine.

I have met Christians who are somewhat stoical, and I have seen that usually there is a reason behind it. Most likely these stoics were hurt once by someone or something. Their inner attitude became, “I’m never going to let anybody get close enough to hurt me again.”

I can understand that response. But it is the wrong reaction—because you cannot afford to shut up your feelings. Consider King David, who was a great man of action, a mighty warrior, and a man who loved God. David poured out his feelings in tremendously powerful language. If instead of expressing our feelings we bottle them up, we suffer and something inside us goes sour.

It is appropriate to mourn our losses. When Moses died the children of Israel mourned thirty days for him. It is appropriate to let emotions out. It is OK to tell God exactly how you feel—even if it is not in nice, pretty, religious language. Recently, I read an interesting article by a medical

doctor on the theme of lamentations. He basically said lamentation and grieving are a necessary part of the healing process. We cannot stifle our hurts and griefs. We must let them out. To do so is biblical.

JOB WANTED TO DIE

Third, Job wanted to die. In various places he says, “What’s the good of living. I’ve got nothing to live for. Let me get out. Let me get to a place where I can have peace.”

In one particularly low moment, Job says in chapter 7:15-16:

My soul chooses strangling and death rather than my body. I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone, for my days are but a breath.

JOB AFFIRMS HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Job’s fourth response was to affirm his righteousness. He would not back down in the face of all his critics and their accusations. Talking about God, he declares:

Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him (Job 13:15).

Apparently God liked that response. He does not want religious hypocrisy or religious platitudes. He wants people to be honest. Job said, “I’ve done nothing wrong and nobody is going to make me say I’ve done something wrong when I haven’t—not even God.”

Listen to Job’s declaration of righteousness:

As long as my breath is in me, and the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. Far be it from me that I should say you are right; till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live (Job 27:3-6).

His friends could continue accusing him, but Job would not accept it. He continued to maintain he had done nothing wrong and that these tragedies had not happened because he had sinned. Was he right? Do you know why these things had happened to him? This may shock you, but it was *because* he was righteous. That overthrows a whole lot of theories about God.

God never did anything but uphold Job's righteousness. It staggers me to believe Job's problems did not come because he had sinned but because he was *righteous*. If God had never brought Satan's attention to Job's righteousness, these problems would not have occurred. Had God not allowed Satan to challenge Job's right standing, none of these things would have ever happened.

TREATED UNJUSTLY

Job's fifth response was that God had not treated him justly. This is really astonishing, because God said at the end that Job had said what was right concerning Him. Let's examine what Job said in chapter 27, verses 2-5:

"As God lives, who has taken away my justice, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter, as long as my breath is in me, and the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. Far be it from me that I should say you are right; till I die I will not put away my integrity from me."

Job *knew* he was righteous. He was not going to change, and He said God had not treated him justly. Was that true? It may shock you, but it *was* true.

Let's look again at the beginning of the story:

"Then 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, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you [Satan] incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause'" (Job 2:3).

At this point it appears that God's treatment of Job was unjust. This can raise some questions if we really think about it. A prevalent attitude among Christians has been that when you went to church, you could safely leave your mind at home. Why? Because you would not need to think in church! However, that is an unscriptural perspective.

The Scripture tells us that we shall love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. We need our minds because Christianity is not a mindless euphoria. In many ways, it is the ultimate challenge to intelligent thinking.

Some of the questions raised by the story of Job are difficult. Yet we should not brush them aside. These questions should challenge us to delve more deeply into the Scriptures and to ask the Holy Spirit to give us understanding. I am not pretending to offer answers to all the questions raised by Job. Frankly, I do not think it possible to answer all our questions, which is part of the mystery of knowing God.

LONGING FOR A MEDIATOR

Job's sixth response was the declaration of his longing for a mediator between himself and God. This is how he expressed it in Job 9:32-35:

For He [God] is not a man, as I am, that I may answer Him, and that we should go to court together. Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand on us both. Let Him take His rod away from me, and do not let dread of Him terrify me. Then I would speak and not fear Him, but it is not so with me.

One of Job's frustrations was that he could not come into the presence of God and have a direct interview with Him. He complained, "If only we had a mediator." The difference between Job and us is that we have a mediator. Paul tells us, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). For this we can thank God.

WE MUST BE PREPARED

In chapter 7, verses 17-18, Job said something I had never seen before, but which has changed something in my attitude. He said:

“What is man, that You should exalt him, that You should set Your heart on him, that You should visit him every morning, and test him every moment?”

Let me ask you a question. Will you be ready for His visit tomorrow morning? He will be there. You may not be aware of it, but He checks on you every morning. Job also says He tests us every moment. There is not a moment that God is not testing us. Everything we do is undergoing a test.

We might think that is an awful way for God to treat us. However, here is what I believe: *God tests us because He is proud of us and wants to bring the best out of us.* I believe other passages bear out the fact that God is confident in us. He has a much higher goal for us than we have for ourselves, and He will not lower His standards. (See James 1:2-3 and Romans 5:3-5.)

Many times you might want to beg God to loosen up a little: “God, please take the pressure off.” However, God will not do it. Why? Because He has a purpose for your life, and He is going to work it out. You could absolutely turn your back on God and cancel the process if you chose to. But I trust you would not wish to do that.

Here is the conclusion of this matter. If you want God’s purpose fulfilled in your life, then you must be prepared to be visited every morning and tested every moment. This may shock you, as I know I was shocked when I realized it. Nevertheless, it is true. When you wake up tomorrow morning, be prepared for God’s visit—because He will visit you and test you whether you know it or not.

SET UP AS A TARGET

Remarkably, Job also complained that God used him for target practice. In Job 7:20, he asked this question:

*Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men?
Why have You set me as Your target, so that I am a burden to*

myself?

Job protested, “God, You’re using me as a target and all Your arrows are sticking in me!” As we observed, God said that Job spoke rightly about Him. However, if we talk to God like Job did, we need to make sure our character is similar to his.

NO JUSTICE

Job also contended that there is no justice on earth. Job 9:24 says:

The earth is given into the hand of the wicked. He covers the faces of its judges. If it is not He, who else could it be?

There is a great deal of unjust judgment in our courts. Often the legal systems will have mercy on the criminal, yet they do not even consider the victim. The courts also favor those who can afford expensive lawyers, abandoning the poor to less adequate defense attorneys.

One trait we must admire in Job is his honesty. He “tells it like it is.” I believe God liked it as well. Throughout the Scripture you will never find God being offended or condemning anyone for speaking honestly. He may correct them, but He never condemns them.

Through Job’s honest handling of his situation, we see some amazing revelation that springs forth. That will be the subject of our next chapter.

Chapter 12



FRESH REVELATION

In the midst of all Job's misery, he had some glorious flashes of prophetic revelation. This is so characteristic of what can happen to us. We may be down, depressed, and complaining, having lost our victory. Right at that moment, for no reason on our part, we receive a glorious revelation of truth that changes our whole outlook in an instant.

RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

One of Job's revelations was composed into Handel's "Messiah" as one of the most beautiful arias ever written. We read in those well-known words in Job 19:25-27:

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

In other words, no matter what happened to Job's body, he knew it would be resurrected. Job knew he was going to come back with that body.

This should stir hope within us. Unless the Lord returns first, our bodies will decompose. But one day, they will be raised up. We shall see the Lord with these same physical eyes we now use, but in completely transformed bodies.

My personal belief is that the coming of the Lord is as near for each one of us as the day we die. When we die, we pass out of time into eternity where there is no time as we experience it. We will close our eyes in death and enter a timeless world. Immediately, we will be in the presence of the Lord, and the first person we see will be the Lord. For us, the Lord will have come.

When the New Testament saints like Paul and Peter believed the coming of the Lord was imminent, they were right. It is as imminent as the day you die, if the Lord does not first return.

Job is perhaps the oldest book in the Bible. Yet it has this absolutely clear and unmistakable affirmation of the resurrection of his body in connection with somebody Job calls “my redeemer.” How could a man in Job’s situation at that time have such a clear understanding apart from a prophetic revelation from the Lord?

Please be encouraged that in the midst of your discouragements, your problems, and your pressures, God may suddenly give you a flash of prophetic revelation. What He shows you will change everything. Maybe not permanently, but for that moment when you need it. When that revelation occurs, you will be transported, as it were, out of time into an eternal situation. Then you will be able to see yourself face to face with your Redeemer.

DRY WADIS

The next statement Job made to his friends was “you have failed me.” I think we would all agree. He said it in many different ways. But we will look at just a few of those statements. First, Job 6:14-17:

“To him who is afflicted, kindness should be shown by his friend, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty. My brothers have dealt deceitfully like a brook, like the streams of

the brooks that pass away, which are dark because of the ice, and into which the snow vanishes. When it is warm, they cease to flow; when it is hot, they vanish from their place.”

When Job spoke of a brook, he was referring to a Middle Eastern *wadi*, which is a dry river bed. It is filled with water in the winter season from the rain and the melting snow. But when the weather turns hot and the water is really needed, there is none in the wadi because it has dried up. Job accused his friends of being like a wadi. When he really needed “water” they were “all dried up” and had nothing to give him. A similar thought came in Job 16:2-5:

I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all! Shall words of wind have an end? Or what provokes you that you answer? I also could speak as you do, if your soul were in my soul’s place. I could heap up words against you, and shake my head at you; but I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the comfort of my lips would relieve your grief.

Job was telling them they were not giving him what he needed. They were merely adding to his problems. In this verse, Job stated that the function of a friend is to comfort, not to accuse. How many Christians need to learn that lesson?

TWO AREAS OF PRESUMPTION

In his ongoing defense in response to his friends, Job next rejected the “prosperity gospel” as unrealistic for two reasons.

First, he rejected the premise that innocent people are not afflicted. This is what Job said in Job 21:23-26:

One dies in his full strength, being wholly at ease and secure; his pails are full of milk, and the marrow of his bones is moist. Another man dies in the bitterness of his soul, never having eaten with pleasure. They lie down alike in the dust, and worms cover them.

Two people both die. One never had a day's problem, while the other never knew a day's happiness. However, who can say that one was more righteous than the other. Throughout my life and ministry, I would continually meet people who never seemed to have known a day's happiness in their lives. I could not say they were wicked sinners worse than all the rest. I could not give them the reason because I did not have the answer. I could tell them about God's love, and sometimes we could see reasons why misfortune had come to their lives.

My book, *Blessing or Curse: You Can Choose*, gives several reasons why tragedy befalls some people. But it does not explain all the reasons by any means. One of the tendencies we must guard against is thinking that we can explain everything. Whenever we have that attitude, we will quickly discover we are wrong.

Job was dealing with the suggestion that the wicked are always punished and the righteous always prosper. Basically he replied. "It's nonsense; it just isn't true!" Thank God for somebody who tells it like it is! It is bad enough to suffer. But then to be told you are suffering because you are unrighteous just makes it worse. This is what Job said in chapter 24:

Since times are not hidden from the Almighty, why do those who know Him see not His days? Some remove landmarks; they seize flocks violently and feed on them; they drive away the donkey of the fatherless; they take the widow's ox as a pledge. They push the needy off the road; all the poor of the land are forced to hide. Indeed, like wild donkeys in the desert, they go out to their work, searching for food (Job 24:1-5).

This verse describes the treatment of the poor, the oppressed, and the people who do not get a fair deal from society. There are people who fit that description—not only in poor, third-world nations but also in developed nations.

The wilderness yields food for them and for their children. They gather their fodder in the field and glean in the vineyard of the wicked (Job 24:5-6).

Job was saying that the poor and oppressed just get what is left over after the wicked have gathered all that they want.

They spend the night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and huddle around the rock for want of shelter. Some snatch the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge from the poor. They cause the poor to go naked, without clothing; and they take away the sheaves from the hungry. They press out oil within their walls, and tread winepresses, yet suffer thirst. The dying groan in the city, and the souls of the wounded cry out; yet God does not charge them with wrong (Job 24:7-12).

APPARENT INCONSISTENCIES

The first area of presumption we have been dealing with is the premise that innocent people are not afflicted with suffering—which is clearly not true. The second presumption we often make is that everything is fair—and if people get a bad deal, it is because it is their fault. People have asked me why God does not intervene in the awful genocide and persecutions that have marked recent decades. What the world witnessed in Rwanda and Yugoslavia are situations that seem to be vividly described in the passages we have been studying from Job. Why doesn't God intervene? My answer would be: *what would you expect God to do?* To blot out the whole company of people? To drop some kind of nuclear weapon on one side? In the absence of such actions, it seems apparent that God does nothing.

This is a serious problem for many—especially younger people. In the face of suffering and misery, they wonder, “Where is God?” Job wondered the same thing 4,000 years earlier. It is not an out-of-date question. Job argued that the righteous do not always prosper nor are the wicked always punished. Truly, he was seeing things the way they really were.

I believe this is one of the great questions humanity struggles with: Where is the justice of God? Why do the wicked prosper? Not only do the wicked prosper—sometimes they are applauded for it.

This was the question that was on the mind of the psalmist when he wrote Psalm 73. We begin in verse 2:

But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They [the wicked] are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth (Psalms 73:2-9).

The psalmist complains that the wicked are getting away with their evil. As a result he nearly lost his faith. But then he says in verse 15:

If I had said, "I will speak thus," behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me—until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end (Psalms 73:15-17).

The only one who can explain the apparent inconsistencies of life to you is God. When the psalmist came into the presence of God, then he began to see things from a different perspective. Then he understood the end of the wicked:

Surely you set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors (Psalms 73:18-19).

When the psalmist saw the people who were evil and prosperous flourishing in their wickedness, he wondered if God cared. But God says that the moment these wicked people step out of time into eternity, they will be plunged into everlasting darkness. It does not happen in this life—but in the judgment. It takes place not in time but in eternity.

CONTINUED TESTING

The final phase of Job's defense is his memory of his former prosperity and glory. The whole of chapter 29 is a description of how he flourished and prospered. We will look at just a few verses.

Oh, that I were as in months past (Job 29:2).

Job then went into all the details of how he was respected, honored, and prospered—how he was able to help a variety of people by ministering to their needs in many different ways.

It is bad enough having to suffer, but it is worse still when you have previously prospered. The psalmist, speaking to God, said in Psalms 102:10:

For You have lifted me up and cast me away.

It hurts deeply when you know the Lord has lifted you up and suddenly He seems to forget you. When that seems to happen we must remember that *it is a test*. Let me encourage you, though, that God will not test you above what you are able to bear. You and I are not the same as Job, and God will not put us through the same tests as Job. Job was a very unusual person in God's purposes, and God dealt with him in a very unusual way. God knows each of us. He will put you through the tests that are needed to make you what He wants you to be.

Job then described how he was despised and mistreated in his own community.

But now they mock at me, men younger than I (Job 30:1).

In the Middle East, it is terrible for the younger person to mock the older. Then Job described in verses 9-10 how the lowest people in the community treated him:

And now I am their taunting song; yes, I am their byword. They abhor me, they keep far from me; they do not hesitate to spit in my face.

Another feature of Middle East culture is that people who are regarded as failures get continually reminded that they are failures. People do not use tact; they tell them straight out. Job continued this description in verses 11-13:

Because He [God] has loosed my bowstring and afflicted me, they have cast off restraint before me. At my right hand the rabble arises; they push away my feet, and they raise against me their ways of destruction. They break up my path, they promote my calamity; they have no helper.

Job was treated like the lowest of the low in his own community where he was formerly honored and esteemed. He had blessed and helped many people, yet the same people he had helped were the ones who were now treating him with contempt. This had to be one of the most difficult experiences for Job to endure.

Over the course of this book so far, we have made some interesting observations. There has been a new, perhaps unexpected, revelation of Satan; an appreciation of God's initiative; Job's personal tragedies; Job's "comforters"; and Job's response to it all.

Now we move on to the climax of the story—the moment when God appears in a whirlwind and begins to set everything straight. There is something fearful about being challenged by God, but we will learn that an encounter with God brings resolution to our questions.

Chapter 13



GOD CHALLENGES JOB

In the previous chapters, we have examined how Job steadfastly declared his righteousness and his innocence of sin throughout his interactions with his three friends. Finally, after thirty-one chapters they gave up. Scripture says, “So these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes” (Job 32:1).

Then a young man named Elihu speaks for the next six chapters of Job. We will not discuss what Elihu had to say, not because it is unimportant but because our main concern is now what God’s response will be to Job and his three friends.

Beginning in chapter 38 the Lord speaks directly to Job out of a whirlwind. It must have been a frightening experience for them when the whirlwind approached and God Himself spoke to them in person. Here is a paraphrase of God’s first statement to Job, “You’ve been talking about things you just don’t understand. Your words were absolutely out of place, irrelevant. But I’ll help you anyhow.”

Do you know people who, every time they open their mouth, seem to put their foot in it? If you should be one of those people, bear in mind the Lord still loves you and He has an answer for you. Here is my summation of what God said to Job and his friends for the next four chapters. God

described to Job and his friends how He runs the universe and about what is involved in the job. Then He challenged Job, “Do you want to take over? Can you do a better job than I do of running the universe?”

PENETRATING QUESTIONS

Following His opening statement to Job, God ran through a rather long and interesting list of what is involved in running creation. Here are a few things God dealt with, all the while asking Job, “Could you handle this?” For example, in chapter 38, He began:

- At the creation of the earth, were you there? (Job 38:4-7)
- Can you control the sea? (Job 38:8-11)
- Can you control the sunrise and the sunlight? (Job 38:12)
- Do you know the dimensions of the earth and do you know the nether world, which is Hades and the abode of the dead? (Job 38:16-18)
- What can you do about light and darkness? (Job 38:19-21)
- Can you control the elements—the sun, the rain, the frost and the cold? (Job 38:22-30)
- Can you control the constellations and the heavenly bodies? (Job 38:31-35)
- Can you control the rain and the snow, are they under your command? Do you know how to manage them? (Job 38:34-38)

In chapters 38 and 39 through chapter 39, God described a number of living creatures, all of whom He watches over continually. The list is quite interesting—lions, ravens, mountain goats, deer, the wild donkeys, the onager (which is another kind of donkey), the wild ox, the ostrich, the stork, the horse, the hawk, and the eagle. With regard to the deer He asked, “Do you know the time when they bring forth? Can you be a midwife to the deer? Can you count the months for them?”

Job briefly responded in chapter 40:4-5, saying, in effect, “I’ll shut up!”

Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.

DEALING WITH THE WICKED

The Lord continued His dissertation in chapter 40, verses 8-14, asking Job a penetrating and significant question: “Can you take over dealing with the wicked?” As I have meditated on these verses I have thought about the appalling wickedness that is rampant in the earth today. I have often said to myself, “Thank God I don’t have to deal with it!” But this was what God said to Job:

Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Then adorn yourself with majesty and splendor, and array yourself with glory and beauty. Disperse the rage of your wrath; look on everyone who is proud, and humble him. Look on everyone who is proud, and bring him low; tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together, bind their faces in hidden darkness. Then I will also confess to you that your own right hand can save you (Job 40:8-14).

I believe the challenge God made to Job is a challenge to the church today. Can we deal with the wickedness that is in the earth today? Do we know how to treat the wicked? Do we know how to bring them into subjection? The answer is definitely, “No!” I am thankful that God knows how to deal with the wicked, and we should be prepared to leave the job to Him.

BEHEMOTH AND LEVIATHAN

Following this, beginning in chapter 40, verses 15-24 and through the end of chapter 41, God dealt with two particular creatures. In chapter 40, verse 15 He said:

Look now at the behemoth, which I made along with you.

We do not know what a behemoth is. Some believe it is the elephant, which is quite possible. He went into quite a lot of detail about the elephant, asking Job, “Can you deal with the elephant?”

Then God mentioned an amazing creature he calls Leviathan (see Job 41). I do not think anybody knows for sure what a Leviathan is. But if you read the description it seems to be a dragon because it has fiery breath that can set objects on fire. Also, it is totally impervious to any kind of weapon.

There are many mythologies, especially in China, with vivid pictures of the dragon. Personally I believe there may be some reality behind them. I believe there is a Leviathan and the Bible speaks about him in various places (see Job 3:8; Ps. 74:14; 104:26; Isa. 27:1), and apparently Leviathan lives mainly in the sea.

In the 1950s, I came across a book in England that recorded reports from the British navy of a creature that had been seen on several occasions in the sea. It was very long and it curled up in many different ways. These were official naval reports, not hearsay. I believe those probably were sightings of Leviathan. Be that as it may, God challenged Job, “Can you deal with Leviathan?”

It is very interesting because this entire chapter was given to describing Leviathan, so he must be of some significance. In the final verse, verse 34, God said of Leviathan:

He beholds every high thing; he is king over all the children of pride.

This is clearly a description of Satan. He is the king over all the children of pride. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:1-2:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.

Being the “spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” has the same meaning as the one who is “king over all the children of pride.”

Therefore, in a certain sense God was saying to Job, “Can you deal with Satan?” I am glad God has accepted that responsibility. I would not want to take that job out of His hands!

ASKING OURSELVES THE QUESTIONS

When Job was confronted with this challenge, he said, in so many words, “Lord, far be it from me.” There is a very important lesson here for us. Many people today impugn the way God is running the world with all manner of criticism. Why doesn’t He stop war? Why doesn’t He stop famine? Why doesn’t He stop disease? It seems to me that God’s reply to those questions would be the one He gave to Job: “Are you prepared to take over? Can you do a better job than I’m doing? If not, let Me run My universe My way.” Do you see the important message here for all of us—not just for Job?

GOD’S INTIMATE CONCERN

Another very important issue is evident in God’s answer—something which is often overlooked: *God is not remote and indifferent in regard to His creation.* He is continuously and intimately concerned with all His creatures, whether it is a donkey, goat, raven, eagle, or lion. God is not some remote deity viewing His creation from afar. He is involved. He is interested in the time the deer gives birth, actually watching over it. This is a very different picture than most people have of God.

Jesus gave us a picture that, in a way, says it all:

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will
(Matthew 10:29).

I prefer the old King James Version, which translates it correctly, “One of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.” God the Father is interested in every sparrow that falls to the ground. I heard a preacher once say, “God takes time out to attend the sparrow’s funeral.”

Jesus' teaching is even more impressive if it is read together with Luke 12:6, where Jesus said:

Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.

If you have one copper coin you can buy two sparrows. But if you have two copper coins, you can buy five. In other words, an extra sparrow is thrown in free of charge. Jesus said that God is interested even in that extra sparrow. Nothing could more emphasize God's intimate concern in the smallest details of His creatures.

He is *not* unaffected by what happens in His creation. He is concerned about the very smallest of His creatures. He watches over them all with intense interest. As Christians, this should say something to us about how man has, in general, abused and mishandled all of God's magnificent creation. I believe it grieves Him deeply.

JOB'S ENCOUNTER

After God had made His case, Job responded:

Then Job answered the Lord and said: "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You" (Job 42:1-2).

It is important to know that God can do *everything* and not one of His purposes will ever be frustrated. That is a powerful Scripture to lay hold of and it should give us great comfort and hope. Job continued:

You asked, "Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, "I will question you, and you shall answer Me." I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:3-6).

When Job had a personal encounter with God, his whole attitude was radically changed. We might well wonder why when Job says he was righteous he could also say, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

My personal answer to this matter, and you are free to make your own decision about it, is that there are two spiritual dimensions—the horizontal and the vertical. When Job looked horizontally, by all human standards, he was righteous. But when he looked vertically and saw God in His holiness, he saw how utterly base and vile he was by comparison with God.

Therefore, the question becomes: *With whom do you compare yourself?* God never disputed that Job was righteous right from the beginning to the end of the book. But when Job saw God he said, “I’m vile. I’m not fit for Your presence; I’m unworthy.” Job had not changed. He simply saw himself from a totally different perspective.

AN END TO THE QUESTIONS

Once when I was discussing the Book of Job with a close friend who is a Jewish believer in Israel, he made a casual comment that really registered with me. He said, “After Job saw the Lord, he had no more questions.” That is remarkable! When Job encountered the Lord, it finished all his questions.

I want to suggest that if you have a lot of problems and questions, maybe the solution is for you to meet with the Lord. The purpose of that meeting is not to get all your questions answered—but to get to know God for who He is. The change in Job was dramatic. He had no problems left after he had encountered the Lord. He confessed, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You” (Job 42:5).

What a difference it makes when you have a vision of the Lord! Nothing else will answer your problems. Nothing else will resolve all your doubts. And nothing else will give you real, complete, settled peace but knowing the Lord.

Therefore, here is my suggestion to you: stop worrying about your problems and begin to seek the Lord. When you begin to encounter Him, you will wonder what happened to your problems. Why? Because they will not matter any longer.

RIGHTEOUSNESS AS A PERSON

As a professional philosopher, I was very interested in truth. I speculated a great deal about it. But the Bible says truth is a *person*, not an abstract principle. Righteousness is a *person*, not an abstract concept of being.

As Western thinkers, we have been influenced by Greek philosophy. We tend to think in terms of abstractions, principles, and laws. However, the highest form of truth and reality is not an abstraction. It is a person, Jesus Christ. We must change our way of thinking. It has taken me years to get out of my philosophizing, and I am not totally out of it. But I am a lot further out than when I began.

Chapter 14



A PRAYER OF RESTORATION

After Job repented, God addressed Job's friends. Do you remember what we stated earlier in this book? The doorway to understanding the Book of Job is that twice God says, "Job said what was right about Me."

First, God spoke to Eliphaz the Temanite:

My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has. Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you. For I will accept him [the Hebrew says "I'll accept his face"], lest I deal with you according to your folly; because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has (Job 42:7-8).

From the beginning of this study to the end, God never criticized anything Job said or did. Even though Job made several hard statements about God, the Lord did not criticize him. As I have already highlighted, Job had said, "God has taken away my justice" (Job 27:2). We would think God would have objected to that statement but He did not—because, as I

pointed out, it was true. In a certain sense, God really did not deal justly with Job.

Restoration Comes

After God spoke to Eliphaz, commanding him to offer a sacrifice, something remarkable took place, expressed in verse 10:

And the Lord restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends.

The Hebrew says literally, “the Lord turned again the captivity of Job.” That means God delivered Job from his captivity. One way to get healed is to pray for all your critics. If you have any resentment against your enemies, you may not be healed until you learn to pray for them. This is a lesson I have learned the hard way. Do not bear any resentment. Do not hold anything against others because it will hinder your healing.

God dealt with everybody in this story. Eliphaz and his friends had to humble themselves. They had to come to Job with their offering and say, “Job, pray for us.” After all their unkind remarks toward Job, they had to ask him to pray for them. But Job also had to humble himself. He was the one who had to pray for them, even after all the unkind things they had said. This is how God deals with relationships. He gets everybody sorted out in the end. The wisdom of God *always* impresses me.

Job's Latter Days

Then in Job 42:12, we read how God restored Job:

Now the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys.

God not only gave back to Job what he had lost. He restored to him exactly *double* what he had at the beginning. This should teach us that it is no problem for God to provide finances or material possessions. We often

stagger at the promises of God about His provision. We wonder how God can provide in our situation. However, God never has any problem with material provision.

God's Ability to Provide

Do not let your faith be hung up on the fact that there is a recession or that you may be short financially. These circumstances do not change God's ability to provide one iota. It was just as easy for God to provide a thousand camels as it would have been to provide five hundred camels. And it is just as easy for God to provide whatever *you* need in any financial or economic situation.

I have come to understand that there are no recessions in the Kingdom of God. Also, there is no inflation in the Kingdom; the prices never change. The price Jesus and His apostles had to pay is exactly the same price we have to pay today. God never has a sale and He never experiences inflation. He can handle material provision; it is no problem to Him.

Philippians 4:19 says, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Notice, He does not provide according to *our* riches—He provides according to *His* riches. One of our biggest problems is looking at what *we* have and calculating God's ability to provide on that basis.

Job's Children

One loss for which God did *not* restore double was Job's children. After Job's adversity, God merely gave him another seven sons and three daughters. He did not need to double the number of children. Why? Because the others were not lost. In Job 1:5, speaking of Job's children we read:

So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify 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 sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly.

It would be easy to think Job's intercession for his children did no good because they were all destroyed in one disastrous accident. However, God heard Job's prayers. The reason He would not need to double his children is because the others were not lost; they had just gone ahead. That should be very, very encouraging for those of us who have lost loved ones.

Chapter 15



JAMES LOOKS AT JOB

Thus far we have almost exclusively read about Job in the book that bears his name. But it is also very worthwhile to read James' comments on the story of Job. In James 5:10-11 we read:

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance [or the “endurance”] of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

James points to the prophets of the Old Testament as our example of two experiences—*suffering* and *patience*.

PICTURE OF A PROPHET

I want to reference two other passages about prophets because I believe much of the contemporary picture of prophets is not in line with the Scripture. Many people seem to think it is rather exciting and prestigious to be a prophet. However, it was not so glamorous in the days of the Bible. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

Blessed are you [the disciples] when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:11-12).

Would we count these persecutions a blessing? Jesus said we should. He says we are in the line of the prophets, so the challenges the prophets experienced are probably going to happen to you and me. But, rather surprisingly, Jesus says that when those challenges arise, we should *rejoice and be exceedingly glad*.

Also speaking about the prophets of the Old Testament, Hebrews 11:37-38, says:

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

I raised this question in an earlier chapter: *How many of us would want the job of an apostle after hearing the biblical job description?* Having heard these explanations of the treatment of prophets, how many of us would apply for the job of a prophet knowing the biblical description? The pattern for the prophet is suffering, affliction, and endurance. It is an issue of building character in His chosen ones. God has no problem giving revelation; God's problem is *building character*. Revelation can come at any moment. But character must be built over time.

In the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter—James 5:10-11—James directs our attention toward two elements in Job's story—first, Job's *endurance* and, second, *what God did for him at the end*. It is important to realize that if Job had not endured, he would never have come to that successful end.

CULTIVATING ENDURANCE

God has increasingly emphasized to me how essential it is to *cultivate endurance*. You never know how long a test will last. When God puts you into a test, He rarely lets you know if it is going to last six months or a year. So you are left wondering. However, if God intends for a test to last six months and you endure for one day less than that period, hitting the point of saying, “I can’t take any more. I give up,” you were just one day short of God’s blessing.

There is no way to develop endurance except by enduring. We see clearly in Scripture that there is no substitute for endurance. This is the key to progress in the Christian life—just as it is explained in Second Peter 1:5-7:

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance [“endurance”], to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

THE PROCESS OF ADDITION

The Christian life is a process of adding. It starts with *faith*—there is no other beginning than faith. Peter says we should add *virtue* to faith. The best translation for virtue is “excellence.” The Greek word means much more than moral virtue.

It is very important to add excellence to our faith. If you are a nurse, become an excellent nurse. If you are a teacher, become an excellent teacher. If you are a business person, become an excellent business person. Whatever you did before, do it now with excellence. That will be one proof of your faith.

Then Peter says to your virtue add *knowledge*. I do not believe he is speaking of the knowledge we learn through education. Rather, it is the knowledge of the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

Then to knowledge we add *self-control*. At this point, there is a kind of bottleneck. To self-control we add *perseverance*, or endurance. However, if we do not cultivate self-control, we will never achieve endurance. Why?

Because every time we are tested, our self-control will give way and we will give up. There is no way around these two. The rest of our progress in the Christian life depends on self-control and endurance.

After these, we move into the real treasures—*godliness, brotherly kindness, and love*. It encourages me to know that in this order, love is the ultimate goal. It is *hard* to have brotherly kindness. Even being kind-hearted toward fellow Christians is not always easy. Even so, brotherly kindness is not the end.

Love means loving *everybody*—even those who are not believers, even the unthankful and the unholy. It encourages me to know that love is the goal of our progress. It has taken me a lifetime to get as far as I have, and sometimes I feel like I have not gotten very far indeed!

AN ESSENTIAL CONDITION

The point we need to emphasize is that endurance is an *essential condition* of entering into God's provision. Once, when I was teaching quite a large congregation, I said, "Now, there's only one way to cultivate endurance."

I happened to be watching a woman and she brightened up, as if she was thinking, "Now I'm going to know the secret!"

Then I said, "It's to endure." Immediately, her face fell!

Challenging as it might be, this is the truth of the matter. There is only one way to cultivate endurance, and that is by enduring. Therefore, let me admonish you, wherever you are right now—endure, hold on, and do not give up! God has an end that He intends for your benefit.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to watch Christians in various stages of progress. Every now and then I will lose contact with a brother or sister and then ten or twenty years later I meet him or her again. Sometimes I say to myself, "How did they make such progress? They were not one I would have expected to come so far."

I have come to see that the main part of progress is just to hang in until the end. If you do not give up, God will bring you through. However, if you give up, you are sunk. Just when it seems the toughest, don't give up—

because you may miss God's intended end. You will not miss heaven, but you may miss the best God has for you in this life.

Maybe you know of a number of tough situations in your life where your endurance is waning. Maybe you know you're about to give up on some of those goals.

Let's close this chapter with a simple prayer together that aims toward greater endurance. Will you pray with me?

Lord, You know all the matters in which I am tempted to give up. Even though I may be close to completing them, I'm still tempted to quit.

I pray now for Your stamina for me. Help me, Lord. Give me Your strength. By Your grace I declare, "I will not give up. I will endure to the end." Amen.

Chapter 16



LESSONS FROM JOB

Having completed our journey through Job's life and experience, I want to share some personal responses out of my study of Job. These are important lessons I have learned. I am not necessarily implying that they will be the lessons that you will learn. It is up to you to apply the Scriptures to your own life. But they are valuable to me—and hopefully will be helpful to you as well.

LEARN TO TRUST

One of the primary lessons I have learned from Job is that we can never understand all of God's dealings with us or anyone else. Therefore, do not get discouraged if matters are not clear to you. You may not need to understand everything. What you *must* do is to trust. Proverbs tells us, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).

Ultimately, the real basis for most of our problems is mistrust of the goodness of God. Therefore, when we encounter the difficulties of life, we must begin with the understanding that much of God and His ways are beyond our finding out. We must first realize that trust, not understanding,

is the only secure basis of our walk with the Lord. Do not feel you must understand everything. You must trust in God's goodness.

GOD MAINTAINS SOVEREIGNTY

The second lesson Job teaches me is that God never surrenders His sovereignty. The word *sovereignty* has more or less dropped out of our Christian vocabulary, but it is a very important word. My definition of sovereignty is this: *God does what He wants, when He wants, the way He wants, and He asks no one's permission.* We must get adjusted to that reality in our thinking. We cannot tell God how to manage His universe or how He should manage our own lives.

God never allows Himself to be put in a little box of religious principles. I have seen people over the years try to put God in a box. They declare that God is a certain way, that you must follow these principles, and that you must live your life in a particular manner. Contrary to expectations, God invariably pops up somewhere else outside their box. Therefore, do not bother to try and put everything into a neat little package. It is a waste of time.

Legalism

Religious rules and principles are some of the biggest barriers to understanding God. There must be certain rules in the church because we have to conduct ourselves in a certain way. Otherwise, there would be total confusion. But remember that following the rules does *not* make us righteous. This is important because if another group follows rules that are different from ours, it does not mean they are less righteous than we are.

If our righteousness depends on following rules and we are following the right rules, then nobody else can be righteous. The root problem is *legalism*, which is building your faith on keeping a set of rules or living by particular principles. Rules and principles never change people's hearts.

Politics

When we pray for the nation, it is good to pray for good laws. But do not imagine that good laws are going to change people. Laws can restrain

evil but they cannot produce good people. I believe many Christians are praying for the government to do the church's job. It is not the government's job to make people righteous. It is our job—and people are not made righteous by rules and laws. If we changed all the bad laws of a nation tomorrow, it still would *not* change the people.

My simple summation of the problems of any nation is this: There are a lot more bad people than good people. Furthermore, the bad people are getting worse and worse. The solution is not to make laws. The only solution will be for something to change bad people into good people quickly.

What is that solution? It is *the gospel of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ*. So let's not spend too much time praying for the government to make the right laws. Let's rather focus on praying for the Gospel to be preached.

Abortion

I have a strong feeling about this because of my sympathies for the pro-life movement. I believe that abortion is murder and I do not condone it. However, I do not believe the church is right to make enemies of the people who practice abortion. We are to love them and win them to the Lord—not to make war on them. Jesus said, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). The ministry of condemnation is the Old Covenant. The New Covenant is a ministry of righteousness.

Jesus did not come into the world to impute peoples' sins to them. The world has built up an absolute wall of hatred against us because we have insisted upon telling people how bad they are. Jesus never did that. The only people He ever condemned were the religious people—and they were the only people who made problems for Him. It is the same situation today. I have become deeply concerned about this issue because I believe much prayer power is being wasted. I believe people are working feverishly to get something to happen that, if it happened, would not solve the problem. The Gospel is the *only* real solution.

GOD TREATS US AS INDIVIDUALS

Another wonderful lesson from Job that I have also come to understand is that God deals with you and me as *individuals*. He does not have one blueprint for everybody. He has a specific, detailed plan for every life, including yours and mine, because we are all different. This means that it is foolish to compare ourselves with other Christians, as Paul tells us in Second Corinthians 10:12:

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

It is foolish to measure yourself by other Christians. You cannot say, “God did this for so and so; therefore, God will do this for me.” The fact that God did something for Brother George or Sister Mary is no reason to believe that He will do the same thing for you. The reason is because God’s will for you may be entirely different. You must find out God’s will in each matter for you as an individual.

God has a special, unique purpose for each person’s life. This is very clearly illustrated by an incident at the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry after His resurrection. In John 21, Jesus told Peter what was going to happen to him toward the end of his life. Then Peter, seeing John walking close by, said, “But Lord, what about this man?” (John 21:21). What was Jesus’ response to Peter? “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me” (John 21:22). In other words, it is not your business, Peter.

We are not to base our expectations on what God has done in somebody else’s life. Why? Because God has a special purpose for you and it is something exciting, specially tailored to you. God tailors His plans individually. He does not mass-produce suits or dresses—every one is made to a measure of its own.

GOD’S PURPOSES WILL BE FULFILLED

Another wonderful lesson from the story of Job is that God is tireless in pursuing His purposes. He will relentlessly follow the plan He has for your life. At any point you can say, “Stop, God, I don’t want any more!” In

response to that cry, He will back off. But for you to ask Him to do so would be very foolish.

God had a special plan for Job. He saw a unique man out of whom He could make something He could not make out of anybody else on earth. His plan necessitated the sacrifice of all Job's livestock, some of his servants, and all ten of his children. All of this sacrifice was for one purpose—that God might get His way in the life of Job. That is a staggering thought! In other words, God will stop at nothing to get the results He wants in your life.

As I said, you can ask Him to stop. It is possible that He may leave you alone. But that would be the biggest disaster that could ever happen to you. We cannot tell God how to deal with us. We cannot set the conditions on which God must operate. He is sovereign and He does not need us to tell Him how to manage our lives and our destiny in Him.

In the next chapter, we will see the eternal perspective for the lessons of Job and the lessons of our lives.

Chapter 17



ETERNITY IN VIEW

As we study God's dealings with Job, we begin to realize that *God's* priorities for us may be different from our own. We may think something is important, but God may see things very differently.

First, God puts the spiritual above the physical; second, He puts the eternal above the temporal. *God will never sacrifice anything eternal for the sake of something temporal.* He always works with eternity in view. Only when we get into eternity will we be able to look back and see what God did for us. We cannot see it all now. We must walk by faith and trust.

I have always been impressed by a wonderful passage that Hudson Taylor wrote. He was one of the great missionaries of the nineteenth century, the founder of the China Inland Mission and a man of God who had a vision for China. Somewhere near the end of his life he wrote, "I used to have clear vision of what I was going to do for God. But I don't now—I just move in trust." That is maturity. Maturity is not becoming more clever. It is becoming more trusting.

GOD ENJOYS OUR FAITHFULNESS

We can see from the story of Job that God can be proud of His faithful servants. I use the phrase cautiously because God is not guilty of pride. However, God is excited about the people who do His will. Consider again what He said to Satan in Job 1:8:

Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?

God was so pleased with Job that He pointed him out to Satan. God basically said, “Satan, you haven’t succeeded with him; he’s following Me.” We know what Satan said: “Well, just take away what he has and let’s see what will happen then.”

The scene is repeated the second time Satan appeared:

Then 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, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause” (Job 2:3).

Do you realize as you read this that God might be pointing at you? He might be saying to Satan concerning you, “Satan, have you considered that one? They’re faithful. They’ve been through a hard time. They’ve never given up. They’ve never denied Me. And they’ve remained faithful to their first commitment.” The thought that God could boast about us is exciting!

A HEAVENLY PERSPECTIVE

The Book of Job also gives us a heavenly perspective on earth’s events, which is unique to the Bible. When we read the story of Job, we read it in the light of what happened in Heaven before the story even started on earth. We have the scenario where God is pointing out Job to Satan and saying, “Satan, you haven’t succeeded with him. He still holds fast in his integrity. I’m proud of him.”

For many years I have made it a practice to proclaim the Word of God out loud. I have discovered that when I receive a new proclamation from

God and start to proclaim it, almost immediately something will happen to deter me. There will arise some distraction or obstacle aimed at setting that proclamation aside. Or there will be some attempt by the enemy at proving it is not true, or trying to convince me I cannot proclaim it as truth.

At that point, I am always faced with a decision—will I go on proclaiming it or will I let circumstances dictate to me? Whenever that happens I take it as a good sign, because one of the indications of something being in God's will is that Satan opposes it. When we meet the enemy's resistance, it means we are doing the devil some harm.

REVEALING OUR DESTINY

God had a plan and destiny for Job, and likewise God has a high destiny for us in Christ. God's destiny is staggering. It is almost unbelievable what God has planned for us. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:4-6:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together [resurrected us], and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

The Weymouth translation reads, “*enthroned us*.” We have been *made alive*. We have been *resurrected*. We have been *enthroned*. All of that is in the past, not in the future. Paul then gives us the reason in verse 7:

That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

This is an astounding thought! God says, “These sinners who were rebels, unclean, and lost—I’m going to save them, sanctify them, and raise them up. For all eternity, they’re going to be the demonstration to the whole universe of My grace.” If this is our destination, then it is no wonder we go through some tests.

When we see the lessons of Job from the perspective of eternity, we understand why we must press on to fulfill His purposes for us.

Chapter 18



A DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S WISDOM

God uses everything in creation to reveal Himself because He is a self-revealing God. Many aspects of creation reveal God in different ways. But when God wanted to reveal His grace, He chose sinners. It does not fit in with everyone's theology, but we *had* to sin in order that God might reveal His grace. Some will not agree with me, and they have every right to take exception to what I have just stated.

Nevertheless, God has chosen to reveal this unique aspect of His character, which is His grace, through redeemed sinners. Therefore, through all eternity, the angels are going to gaze at us in awe and admiration and they will say, "Look what God did with them."

Paul articulates this truth in Ephesians 2:10:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

I am blessed by the Greek word for workmanship, *poiema*, which gives us the English word *poem*. We are God's poem, His created masterpiece.

The amazing truth is that He went to the scrap heap for His materials just to prove what He could do as the Creator.

Paul affirms this truth in Ephesians 3:8-9:

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints [notice how Paul humbles himself; saying he is the least of all], this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.

Again, I find this stunning. God had a secret plan, which He did not unveil until you and I came on the scene. All previous ages did not know about it.

Paul finishes this passage by stating the purpose of God's plan in Ephesians 3:10:

To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

The word for “manifold” is a Greek word that means “many-sided.” We are to be the demonstration of the many-sided wisdom of God to all the heavenly beings. Each one of us is going to demonstrate a different aspect of God's wisdom. That is our destiny. Let me encourage you again to endure! Do not give up—because you will regret it if you do.

THE SPIRIT'S INSPIRATION

As you and I seek to apply the lessons of the story of Job to our own lives, there is one final point I want to make, which is very important. Second Peter 1:20 says, “No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (KJV). The word *private* means “individual.” We cannot provide our own personal interpretation of Scripture. There is only one authorized interpreter of the Scripture. Who is that interpreter? The Holy Spirit. We may have our little theories and theologies, but unless it is the

Holy Spirit who inspires our understanding and reveals the truth of the Word, it will accomplish nothing.

The longer I walk with the Lord, the more I see that we only know God's truth by revelation. We may study the Bible and know it by heart. But we will not truly see anything unless the Holy Spirit reveals it.

Let's look at a little parable that illustrates this vividly. We have two main agents of revelation for us—the Scripture and the Holy Spirit. If you consider a piano, it is a finite instrument. It has fifty-two white keys, thirty-six black keys, and it spans seven octaves. Therefore, it has definite limits. However, when an accomplished pianist sits down, there seems to be no limit to the music he or she can produce from the piano.

The piano is the Scripture and the pianist is the Holy Spirit. The only melodies of value are those the Holy Spirit plays. Clearly, there is no limit to His ability to give revelation—it is inexhaustible! We must never think we know everything about the Scripture because that shuts the Holy Spirit out. We can thank God for what we do know—but we must always make room for what we do not yet know.

REVELATION HAS A TIME COST

I have learned that it takes time to receive revelation. We must be prepared to wait before God and to meditate on the Scriptures. We cannot rush in to give Him ten minutes and think, “That's it. God hasn't spoken in ten minutes. I have to go.” This is not easy for some who have very busy schedules. But revelation requires time. Having said that, we will also find that revelation can come when we least expect it—so we must be prepared to respond to it. Strangely enough, revelation often comes to me when I am shaving.

For example, one day in 1966, I was thinking about the ministry of an evangelist. I was looking in the mirror and said to myself, “Of course, you're not an evangelist.” Immediately the Holy Spirit said to me very clearly, “You can be if you want.”

I would never have thought of myself in that way, but it was revelation. I accepted what the Holy Spirit said as God's Word to me. Now I can do the ministry of an evangelist if there is no other evangelist around. If there are

other evangelists around, I will do something else. Through that experience, God showed me that I was setting my own limits to what He could do with me. Never set any limits on yourself except those God sets.

TEN HELPFUL LESSONS

Here are the ten conclusions I draw from Job. Please feel free to apply them—or even add lessons of your own to them.

1. We can never understand all of God's dealings.
2. God never surrenders His sovereignty. He is never subject to a set of religious rules.
3. God deals with each of us as individuals.
4. It is foolish to compare ourselves with others.
5. God has a special, unique purpose for every life.
6. God is relentless in pursuing His purpose.
7. God's priorities are different from ours. He puts the spiritual above the physical, the eternal above the temporal.
8. God is proud of His righteous servants.
9. We have a high destiny. We are going to be the demonstration of God's grace to all the universe through all ages.
10. The only authorized interpreter of the Scripture is the Holy Spirit. The Scripture is the piano; the Holy Spirit is the pianist. If we want to hear a melody, we have to let the pianist play. Otherwise we just have an instrument.

As we come to the end of this study, you may be disappointed that I have not managed to answer all of your questions or resolve all of your dilemmas. However, as I said at the beginning, I cannot give you all the answers.

None of us will ever fully understand God and His ways. If we could, He would not be God and we would never need to learn to trust Him. As Job learned, God knows what He is doing—and that must be sufficient for us.

In closing, let us consider again the words of James who wrote:

You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful (James 5:11).

I trust that as you have read this study on the life of Job, you will find it within yourself to grow in your trust of God's goodness toward you. May you develop the endurance that leads to maturity—even if you do not understand all that may be happening in your life.

I encourage you to stand firm in your faith, knowing that in the end God's intent is to show you His compassion and mercy. He is in the process of making you a glorious demonstration to all the universe of His great grace and love toward you.

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About Derek Prince

Derek Prince (1915-2003) was born in Bangalore, India of British parents. Educated as a scholar of Greek and Latin at Eton College and Cambridge University, England, he held a Fellowship in Ancient and Modern Philosophy at King's College. He also studied several modern languages, including Hebrew and Aramaic, at Cambridge University and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

While serving with the British army in World War II, he began to study the Bible and experienced a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. Out of this encounter, he formed two conclusions: first, that Jesus Christ is alive; second, that the Bible is a true, relevant, up-to-date book. These conclusions altered the whole course of his life, which he then devoted to studying and teaching the Bible.

Derek's main gift of explaining the Bible and its teaching in a clear and simple way has helped build a foundation of faith in millions of lives. His non-denominational, non-sectarian approach has made his teaching equally relevant and helpful to people from all racial and religious backgrounds.

He is the author of over 80 books, 600 audio and 110 video teachings, many of which have been translated and published in more than 100 languages. His daily radio broadcast is translated into Arabic, Bahasa (Indonesia), Chinese (Amoy, Cantonese, Mandarin, Shanghaiese, Swatow), Croatian, German, Malagasy, Mongolian, Russian, Samoan, Spanish, and Tongan. The radio program continues to touch lives around the world.

Derek Prince Ministries persists in reaching out to believers in over 140 countries with Derek's teachings, fulfilling the mandate to keep on "until Jesus returns." This is effected through the outreaches of more than 45 Derek Prince offices around the world, including primary work in Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United

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