

Job 3 • When Silence Comes to an End

Introduction

Probably the greater lesson to pay attention to in this chapter is that Job is upset, frustrated, and at the end of his proverbial rope not just where his physical suffering is concerned, but in not understanding God's motives. It is important to note that while Job provides the example that it is not wrong to cry out in times of suffering, he never crosses the line so as to curse God—that is, to blame and then reject Him for what is going on. Mature believers are always more concerned for what may be happening spiritually than what is taking place physically. And let's keep in mind that for a very long time—at the very least many months, Job has suffered in silence, bearing what has come upon him. He even continued in silence for another week after the arrival of his friends, even though that won't seem like much to them. In other words, this is not Job's first reaction, but comes after prolonged endurance.

¹Afterward Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. ²And Job said,

³“Let the day perish on which I was to be born,
And the night which said, ‘A boy is conceived.’

⁴May that day be darkness;
Let not God above care for it,
Nor light shine on it.

⁵Let darkness and black gloom claim it;
Let a cloud settle on it;

Let the blackness of the day terrify it.

⁶As for that night, let darkness seize it;
Let it not rejoice among the days of the year;

Let it not come into the number of the months.

⁷Behold, let that night be barren;
Let no joyful shout enter it.

⁸Let those curse it who curse the day,
Who are prepared to rouse Leviathan.

⁹Let the stars of its twilight be darkened;

Let it wait for light but have none,
And let it not see the breaking dawn;

¹⁰Because it did not shut the opening of my mother's womb,

Or hide trouble from my eyes.

[Read v.1-10]

Q: Based on what we know about Job in the opening two chapters, why might his cursing of the day of his birth be particularly disconcerting?

A: It would appear to be quite a change in attitude when compared to his previous characterizations of what happened to him.

²¹He said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked I shall return there.

The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the LORD.” — Job 1:21

¹⁰But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks.
Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips. — Job 2:10

Q: How long has Job remained silent, or at least since responding to his wife?

A: The fact that his three friends come from other lands, consulted with each other prior to undertaking the journey to visit Job, (Job 2:11) and that travel time by ancient means was involved, there had to have been at least a few months before they even arrived to experience a week of silent mourning with Job. (Job 2:13) There also seems to be a span of time between each of the two major actions by Satan, although the text does not specify the length.

Point: We must take into account that Job's personal suffering has been going on for quite some time. When he finally speaks in this manner, it is not a “knee-jerk” reaction, but the result of considerable endurance with no end yet in sight.

Observation: It may help to understand that in Hebrew thinking, “to curse” in this instance is used as the opposite of “to honor”. Job may not be calling down judgment or some kind of divine action against something inherently evil (like Balak attempted against Israel through Balaam, a different word there used for “curse”), but rather saying in a very dramatic way not to honor or give any kind of esteem to his existence. This may have more to do with an attitude as the result of being personally humbled rather than asking for the opposite of a blessing.

Q: Who else is a biblical example expressing such personal distress that they wish they had never been born?

A: Jeremiah

¹⁴*Cursed be the day when I was born;
Let the day not be blessed when my mother bore me!*
¹⁵*Cursed be the man who brought the news
To my father, saying, "A baby boy has been born to you!"
And made him very happy.*
¹⁶*But let that man be like the cities
Which the LORD overthrew without relenting,
And let him hear an outcry in the morning
And a shout of alarm at noon;*
¹⁷*Because he did not kill me before birth,
So that my mother would have been my grave,
And her womb ever pregnant.*
¹⁸*Why did I ever come forth from the womb
To look on trouble and sorrow,
So that my days have been spent in shame? — Jeremiah 20:14–18*

Observation: *What is common to both Job and Jeremiah is their undergoing severe physical hardship which is also a parallel of intense spiritual circumstances taking place simultaneously.*

Q: *In this list of expressions regarding his birth, did Job ever cross the line advocated by his wife and actually curse God?*

A: No. This is a series of dramatic ways to describe how he feels about the situation, what to this point must have been at least months of continuous pain and suffering emotional, physical and spiritual. It is more about the issues, "How long?" and "Why is this happening?" rather than belief.

Observation: *Hebrew poetry employs a rhetorical device known as "parallelism". That which is stated in an opening line (or verse) is then repeated in a more intense and dramatic parallel in the following line (or verse) in order to provide a dramatic reinforcement of the thought, action or idea. This intensification is an important feature of Hebrew poetic literature.*

Q: *What are the dramatic terms of contrast and comparison which are used throughout this initial outburst?*

1. (v.3) Day and night.
2. (v.4) Darkness and light.
3. (v.5) Black gloom and a cloud.
4. (v.6-8) Night and day.
5. (v.9) Twilight and breaking dawn.
6. (v.10) Shut and hide.

Q: *How do these provide a combined yet common representation reflecting Job's feelings to this point?*

A: They mirror the fact that he is in the dark, not knowing why these things have been brought upon him. This serves as the basis for that which Job will repeatedly restate many times in his future responses recorded in the Book of Job, that the primary issue vexing him is not knowing.

Point: *It will be useful to revisit this foundational opening statement throughout all of Job's recorded statements to understand not just what Job is actually feeling, but in his responses to those who claim they know the reason, even though they are actually in the dark as much as Job.*

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Q: What is meant by the Hebrew term “curse”?

A: This must be understood in the context of the underlying Hebrew language because there are three different Hebrew words in chapters 1-3 which are all translated into English as “curse”, and they are not necessarily synonymous. (These are only three of six Hebrew words in Scripture which are commonly translated into English as “curse”.)

1. (1:11; 2:5, 9) The Hebrew word is “*barak*” (Strong’s #1288) This is used in the opposite sense of “bless”.
2. (3:8a) The first Hebrew word is “*qabab*” (Strong’s #6895) This word is most often used in the Old Testament in the infamous case of Balak and Balaam, and seems to describe a manmade incantation attempting to invoke a magical formula upon a divine entity.
3. (3:8b) The second Hebrew word is “*arar*” (Strong’s #779) This is the term used in the curses God pronounced in Genesis 3:14 & 17, and describes a binding in terms of being hemmed in or restricted.

Q: Who or what in v.8 is Leviathan?

A: Like many things in Scripture which often have both a literal and a greater metaphorical or spiritual meaning depending on the context in which it is presented, a leviathan is a literal creature (many expositors believe to be a crocodile) and metaphorically a monster with a spiritually evil nature.

Q: In either case, what is the meaning of v.8 when it states, “Who are prepared to rouse Leviathan”?

A: A literal interpretation would be along the lines of those willing to risk stirring up the fury of the fierce creature, whatever Leviathan actually describes; a metaphorical interpretation in light of the first part of v.8 would be someone stirring up a great power of evil by their sorceries.

Point: *It is important to note that Job is not calling on an occultic power against God, but in the context of this passage, against “the night”—that is, the origin of his conception.*

Q: How is v.9 actually a poetic parallel to how Job views his own current condition?

A: The call for celestial darkness parallels his own darkness where understanding of the reasons for what is taking place has been withheld.

Q: How does v.10 identify Job’s chief issue at the heart of this longer poetic passage?

A: His having to experience this “trouble”, this intense trial.

Q: Does he blame God for this trial?

A: No, in the context of the passage, especially in v.6-9, Job lays the blame on the night, on what are essentially earthly circumstances. Job’s complaint for what he is going through does not include any direct statements attributing anything to God.

Application: *Rather than curse God, as Satan predicted and Job’s wife advocated, Job deflects it to curse the day of his birth.*

¹¹“Why did I not die at birth,
Come forth from the womb and expire?
¹²Why did the knees receive me,
And why the breasts, that I should
suck?
¹³For now I would have lain down and
been quiet;
I would have slept then, I would have
been at rest,
¹⁴With kings and with counselors of the
earth,
Who rebuilt ruins for themselves;
¹⁵Or with princes who had gold,
Who were filling their houses with
silver.
¹⁶Or like a miscarriage which is
discarded, I would not be,
As infants that never saw light.
¹⁷There the wicked cease from raging,
And there the weary are at rest.
¹⁸The prisoners are at ease together;
They do not hear the voice of the
taskmaster.
¹⁹The small and the great are there,
And the slave is free from his master.

[Read v.11-19]

Q: Although this section connects with the last one by opening with a reference to his birth, how is the tone or underlying meaning actually different?

A: Whereas Job previously cursed the day of his birth, he is now speaking of his suffering in the form of a lament. This is expressed in the opening rhetorical questions, “Why?”

Q: What is Job speaking of in v.13-19 in contrast to the opening section?

A: Whereas he previously focused on the troubles in this life, here he contrasts it to the peace of the grave, a place not consumed with the activities of earthly life.

Q: Who are the various personalities referenced by Job?

A: Kings, counselors, princes, infants, prisoners, taskmasters, the small, the great, the free, the master.

Q: What do these all have in common?

A: Regardless of their position in life, they all come to the same end, what is expressed in v.13 by the list of complimentary terms, “*lain down and been quiet*”, “*slept*” and “*at rest*”. This reinforced in v.17 by the comparison of “*cease from raging*” and “*at rest*”.

Point: Job expresses in a dramatic fashion his wish for an end to his suffering.

Q: What is the meaning in v.14 when it mentions that kings and counselors “rebuilt ruins for themselves”?

A: It refers to a cycle by which one ruler after another does not learn from past examples and repeats the same mistakes and come to the same end. Historically, each empire in history incorporates the skeletal structure of the previous one, only to come to the same end themselves.

Point: Job recognizes the futility of every person, regardless of their station or relative position, whose personal efforts in this life comes to the same end, generation after generation.

Q: What is the futility associated with princes in v.15?

A: Their accrual of gold and silver is a nod to the old adage, “You can’t take it with you”. Just as kings and counselors cannot take their power and authority with them into the grave, neither can the acquisition of wealth be transferred.

Q: What might be an interesting revelation in v.16 concerning miscarriages and perhaps even abortions?

A: They are counted among the dead. In other words, just because they were not born does not mean they never lived, merely that as living souls they went directly to the afterlife.

Q: What is shared in common by the parallelism of v.17-19?

1. (v.17) The “*wicked cease from raging*” and the “*weary are at rest*”.
2. (v.18) The “*prisoners are at ease*” and “*do not hear the voice of the taskmaster*”.
3. (v.19) The “*slave is free from his master*”.

All are at peace and rest.

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Q: With whom is Job identifying himself?

A: The weary, prisoner and slave, but he notes, “The small and the great are there”. (v.19)

*²It is better to go to a house of mourning
Than to go to a house of feasting,
Because that is the end of every man,
And the living takes it to heart. — Ecclesiastes 7:2*

²It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear. — Ecclesiastes 9:2

Application: Death is the great equalizer for everyone regardless of their station in this life.

²⁰“Why is light given to him who suffers,
And life to the bitter of soul,
²¹Who long for death, but there is none,
And dig for it more than for hidden treasures,
²²Who rejoice greatly,
And exult when they find the grave?
²³Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,
And whom God has hedged in?
²⁴For my groaning comes at the sight of my food,
And my cries pour out like water.
²⁵For what I fear comes upon me,
And what I dread befalls me.
²⁶I am not at ease, nor am I quiet,
And I am not at rest, but turmoil comes.”

[Read v.20-26]

Q: How does this opening question indicate a change in emphasis from the previous sections?

A: The keywords are “light” (v.20.23) and “life” (v.20). He acknowledges that in contrast to his call in the opening section for darkness to cover things up followed by a wish to have never been born, Job’s suffering is compounded by the actual knowledge and revelation of God’s working which has been imparted to him.

Point: Job’s focus has changed to directly contemplating the life of one who has to experience this kind of suffering. It is a variation of the oft-asked question, “Why does a loving God allow bad things to happen to good people?”

Q: How do v.21-22 reveal something about the intensity of what Job is experiencing?

A: Not just the picture that one in his situation will “dig for it more than for hidden treasures”, but upon finding the grave will “rejoice greatly, and exult”.

Q: How does Job’s additional question in v.23 harken back to how this all came about?

A: In Job 1:10, Satan’s original challenge to God was to take away the hedge of protection around all of Job’s earthly possessions; here Job sees God as the source of a hedge which prevents Job from understanding why this is taking place.

Application: Job is more concerned about understanding what is taking place spiritually than the consequences of what has transpire physically.

Q: How do v.24-26 summarize Job’s assessment of what he is feeling? How he expressing the opposite situation from those previously cited as finding peace in the grave?

A: In life, Job is experiencing the opposite of those in the grave: “not at ease”, “nor...quiet”, “not at rest, but turmoil comes”. (v.25-26)

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Q: Is the “dread” and “fear” expressed in v.24 speaking about his physical hardships?

A: It is actually addressing his greater spiritual angst about being in the dark as to what God is doing, and whether or not something might be wrong in his spiritual relationship with God.

Application: For believers, the most difficult thing to overcome when experiencing suffering is reconciling it with what we personally know about God, His Word, and His ways.

Overall Application

From the outset, Job’s question is about God’s will, not about relief from sin. How might we relate this to ourselves?