

Introduction

It is important to avoid becoming obsessed with studying Job purely as literature, seeking to resolve each and every simile, illustration or Hebrew idiom at the expense of missing the greater spiritual message to which the Holy Spirit is pointing. This may be informative and even more revealing when conducting subsequent studies of the text, but especially when going through Job for the first time, it is more important to glean the obvious and more important teachings which are meant to be applied by us personally. This is why this lesson will not specifically resolve each and every such literary device present in the text, but concentrate on the greater message they are first and foremost intended to convey.

This is Job's second recorded response to the accusations and passionate observations which his "friends" cum accusers have assigned to Job's current state. This particular response captures the essence of all of Job's discourses which place the emphasis on God's sovereignty. In a sense, although Job unquestionably agrees with his antagonists that God is sovereign over all sinners regardless of their situation or actions, God is likewise supreme over the faithful regardless of their situation or actions as well. And even if one could obtain the ideal state of faithfulness to be found righteous and completely innocent of sin, it would still fall short in the presence of God; man's achievement of righteousness would still not afford him equal footing with God. In the final analysis, while Job shows that we may not always understand what is going on and why, it does not really matter since God is sovereign over everything anyway.

Read verses 1-12

Q: *What are the rhetorical questions posed by Job?*

1. (v.2) *"But how can a man be in the right before God?"*
2. (v.4) *"Who has defied Him without harm?"*
3. (v.12) *"Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him?"*
4. (v.12) *"Who could say to Him, 'What are You doing?'"*

Q: *What is the common issue which these rhetorical questions address?*

A: The sovereignty of God:

1. (v.2) No one, regardless of their spiritual condition, is justified before God.
2. (v.4) No one can rebel against God and not bear the consequences.
3. (v.12) No one can prevent God from working.
4. (v.12) No one can question His will.

¹Then Job answered,

²In truth I know that this is so;
But how can a man be in the
right before God?

³If one wished to dispute with
Him,
He could not answer Him once
in a thousand times.

⁴Wise in heart and mighty in
strength,
Who has defied Him without
harm?

⁵It is God who removes the
mountains, they know not
how,

When He overturns them in His anger;
6Who shakes the earth out of its place,
And its pillars tremble;
7Who commands the sun not to shine,
And sets a seal upon the stars;
8Who alone stretches out the heavens
And tramples down the waves of the sea;
9Who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades,
And the chambers of the south;
10Who does great things, unfathomable,
And wondrous works without number.
11Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him;
Were He to move past me, I would not perceive Him.
12Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him?
Who could say to Him, 'What are You doing?'

Application: *Even if someone were to be as righteous and spiritually sound as a human possibly could, they would **still** be subject to God's Word and ways; how much more so someone who falls far **short** of that standard!*

Q: What do the things Job assigns to God's power alone in v.5-6 have in common?

A: They are God's working in the earthly realm to exert His power in a manner indisputably impossible for man to influence, much less undertake himself.

Point: *Biblically speaking, it is only those belonging to the kingdom of God who cannot be shaken where it counts the most*

And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN." This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:26-29

Q: How does Job characterize this aspect of God's working in v.10?

A: "Who does great things, unfathomable..."

Q: What do the things Job assign to God's power alone in v.7-9 have in common?

A: They are God's working in the unfathomable expanse of the heavens and the sea. Man is completely incapable of influencing not just that which is below, but above as well. This combines to cover his entire environment on the land, sea or even in the air.

Q: Without dwelling on each one individually, what are these together speaking of?

A: The cosmological signs specified are "the Bear" which is used to mark the change of seasons, "Orion" which ancient cultures assigned to a former hero who rebelled against God, a key navigational aid in "Pleiades", and inclusion of such signs not visible from the view of the Middle East as embodied in "the chambers of the south". This is describing God's complete Creation and yet man's rebellion in it despite being provided God's signs and guides.

Q: How does Job characterize this aspect of God's working in v.10?

A: "And wonderful works without number".

Q: What may be particularly ironic about the statement Job makes in v.10?

A: It is what Eliphaz stated in 5:9 to Job, "Who does great and unsearchable things, wonders without number". But whereas Eliphaz provides the working of God in the context of the unaddressed sin

presupposed in Job's life, Job escalates it to include God's sovereignty even over the righteous as well.

Q: But how does v.11 express the ultimate conundrum when it comes to the will and working of God?

A: Man cannot recognize God in the first place, and therefore has no idea what He is doing or that He is even working.

Point: This is an important observation on Job's part since one of the most crucial issues the book of Job wrestles with is the lack of understanding by everyone involved of what God is really doing in Job's life. His friends neither "see" nor "perceive" God working in any way other than discipline or punishment.

Application: God is all-**powerful**; there is no **power** man can apply toward God. Man's **environment** is completely subject to God's will and working alone.

Read verses 13-24

¹³“God will not turn back His anger;
Beneath Him crouch the helpers of Rahab.
¹⁴How then can I answer Him,
And choose my words before Him?
¹⁵For though I were right, I could not answer;
I would have to implore the mercy of my judge.
¹⁶If I called and He answered me,
I could not believe that He was listening to my voice.
¹⁷For He bruises me with a tempest
And multiplies my wounds without cause.
¹⁸He will not allow me to get my breath,
But saturates me with bitterness.
¹⁹If it is a matter of power,
behold, He is the strong one!
And if it is a matter of justice,
who can summon Him?
²⁰Though I am righteous, my mouth will condemn me;

Q: Comparing the object of the focus in the previous section to this, to what has Job shifted the emphasis?

A: In the previous section Job addressed God's working in what we might label as "the laws of nature", or the physical universe; here it changes to what we might call "the rule of law", or the rules and laws governing mankind's spiritual and moral behavior in this world.

Point: Having established God's sovereignty over the physical, Job now affirms His sovereignty over the spiritual.

Q: How is this expressed in Job's provided rhetorical question?

A: "How then can I answer Him, and choose my words before Him?" (v.14)

Application: Just as the laws of the physical universe are beyond mankind's control and subject to God's Word and ways alone, so are the laws concerning mankind's spiritual and moral behavior. Just as we cannot escape, much less influence, the laws of the physical universe, neither can we affect those corresponding to our spiritual nature.

Q: What does Job indicate can be at work against mankind in addition to, and because of, God's anger in v.13?

A: "...the helpers of Rahab".

Q: Who or what, exactly, is Rahab?

A: Bearing in mind that Job is actually the earliest book of the Bible, predating even the writing of the Pentateuch, this is the earliest reference to the agents of Satan on earth, and although it will take form through various earthly kingdoms, at this time it is Egypt:

Even Egypt, whose help is vain and empty. Therefore, I have called her "Rahab who has been exterminated."

Isaiah 30:7

Though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty.

²¹I am guiltless;

I do not take notice of myself;
I despise my life.

²²It is all one; therefore I say,
'He destroys the guiltless and the wicked.'

²³If the scourge kills suddenly,
He mocks the despair of the innocent.

²⁴The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
He covers the faces of its judges.
If it is not He, then who is it?

But notice how Egypt is not only associated with Babylon, Philistia and Tyre— all scriptural representations of Satan, but also directly with Satan as the dragon:

"I shall mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me;

Behold, Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia:

"This one was born there.'

Psalm 87:4

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD;
Awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago.

Was it not You who cut Rahab in pieces,
Who pierced the dragon?

Isaiah 51:9

Ultimately the overcoming of Egypt as an historical event will represent the ultimate victory over Satan:

"He quieted the sea with His power,
And by His understanding He shattered Rahab.

Job 26:12

You Yourself crushed Rahab like one who is slain;
You scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm.

Psalm 89:10

Point: At various points in history, what began under Nimrod with Babylon is replayed in Egypt, Assyria, literal Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, the Roman Empire, and ultimately fulfilled in the final kingdom of the Antichrist called "Babylon the Great". At this particular time, however, it is Egypt who is the chief earthly agency of Satan. However, Job raises the possibility which we know to be true which neither he nor his comrades understand at this point, that Satan's influence can be responsible.

Q: What is the main rhetorical question Job asks in this particular case?

A: "How then can I answer Him, and choose my words before Him?"
(v.14)

Q: How do we know that Job's meaning is that under no circumstances can man ever justify himself before God?

1. (v.15) "For though I were right, I could not answer; I would have to implore the mercy of my judge".
2. (v.20) "Though I am righteous, my mouth will condemn me; though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty".

Q: What is the point Scripture is making by using this dramatic distinction?

A: When it comes to God's sovereignty, His qualities and station are so far above man, that by comparison, even someone who is "right", "righteous" and even "guiltless" fall short in the perfect presence and glory of the Lord. Even if a person were able to attain these conditions, it would not place them on equal footing with God.

25“Now my days are swifter than
a runner;
They flee away, they see no
good.
26They slip by like reed boats,
Like an eagle that swoops on its
prey.
27Though I say, ‘I will forget my
complaint,
I will leave off my sad
countenance and be
cheerful,’
28I am afraid of all my pains,
I know that You will not acquit
me.
29I am accounted wicked,
Why then should I toil in vain?
30If I should wash myself with
snow
And cleanse my hands with lye,
31Yet You would plunge me into
the pit,
And my own clothes would
abhor me.
32For He is not a man as I am
that I may answer Him,
That we may go to court
together.
33There is no umpire between
us,
Who may lay his hand upon us
both.
34Let Him remove His rod from
me,
And let not dread of Him terrify
me.
35Then I would speak and not
fear Him;
But I am not like that in myself.

Application: God is the final **Judge**— there is no **rule of Law** man can apply toward God.

Read verses 25-35

Q: How are v.25-26 a poetic description of man’s primary limitation?

A: This life is temporary. This is seen when we pare the text down to its basic meaning, “...my days...flee away...they slip by...” Time will run out.

Q: How do v.27-29 explain that merely changing one’s attitude or emotions fall short of the right remedy?

A: It cannot achieve an acquittal for sin.

Q: But even if we recognize sin, how do v.29-31 address man’s inherent disadvantage in attempting to address it?

A: The references to washing with snow (v.20), cleansing with lye (v.20) and the state of one’s clothes (v.31) are scriptural images of our own working to address sin by our own strength and power. Without God’s grace and working, these efforts always fall short, no matter how well-intentioned, or even if temporarily successful in man’s view.

Q: How do v.32-33 aid in explaining this disparity between man and God not just when it comes to sin, but even to righteousness?

A: He is always in the position of Judge, and we are always the judged. We will never find ourselves on equal footing with Him

Q: How is this expressed in the New Testament? Is there ever a condition where man can achieve his own righteousness?

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus**; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. **This was to demonstrate His righteousness**, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, **so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**.

Romans 3:21-26

Application: Man is completely **subject** to God— there is nothing he can achieve on his own to place him on an **equal footing** with God.

Overall Application

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:11-13

In a fully submitted life to Christ, one of the main reasons the qualities of humbleness and humility are present is because there is a recognition that God is sovereign not just in the presence of sin, but equally in that of righteousness; He is in control in times of scarcity and hardship as well as prosperity and blessing. While we can certainly attain the qualities and character of Christ, we can never achieve some sort of place where we are equal to or on the same level with Him. Even when achieving the best spiritual state possible, we must always maintain, “He is God; I am not”.

- Can you see that there is no power which we can apply toward God? Do you see how this is often displayed in false Word-Faith teachings where they say if you “claim this” or “pray this way” that God “must” answer you?
- How well do you recognize that God has no obligation to you, even when you are absolutely right? Is there ever a scenario where your will overrides or takes precedence over His?
- Do you sometimes think you can use God’s rules against Him in order to cause things to go your way? How well do you understand He is your Judge not just for all issues of sin, but all conditions of righteousness as well?
- What should you personally change in order to be completely subject to God? Are you just as equally submissive to Christ in the course of being faithful as when seeking remedy from issues of sin?