

The “WHYs?” of Suffering: Part 3 – The Book of Job

God’s Answer to Job’s “Why?” and Job’s Reaction to It

Job is a very extraordinary and utterly absorbing book. It is a part of God’s Old Testament “*Wisdom Literature*” and one of the earliest written books of the Bible. The book is exceedingly high drama and is beautifully and wonderfully written as only God the Holy Spirit can do.

Job is a very important book for us because it deals directly with the “*Whys?*” of human suffering and pain in the light of a good, all-powerful, caring, merciful, and sovereign God of love. It is all the more captivating as Job was, from a Biblical viewpoint, a very good man, a man of whom even God Himself had twice proclaimed ...

“... there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil.”

It is an extremely interesting book because we are privy to what is going on behind the scenes (while Job is not), as Job, by and with God’s express permission, came to suffer more than any other major personage in the Bible, save our Lord Jesus Christ

The book is also an extremely important book for us to consider in our course on pain and suffering as it shows us the thoughts, feelings, misapprehensions, and spiritual despair to which even a “*blameless and upright [man], and one who feared God and shunned evil*” can descend in a period of prolonged and intense suffering. This will be of great help to us individually should we ever be called to endure intense suffering ourselves or have occasion to give godly counsel to others going through a period of prolonged intense suffering.

Throughout his ordeal of grievous suffering, Job “*maintains his integrity*” (i.e., insists that he has done nothing to deserve such suffering) and repeatedly longs and pleads for an audience with God so as to show Him the mistake and the injustice of his being afflicted so grievously.

In Chapter 38, Job, at long last, finally gets the meeting with God that he has so intensely longed for – and God’s answer to Job’s “*Why?*” and Job’s response to it are magnificent.

God’s discourse with Job and Job’s consequent replies to God in Chapters 38-42 are truly fascinating and intriguing. What Job, and, thereby, we ourselves, can learn from Job’s audience with God, both about God and about ourselves, and about the proper perspectives and viewpoints to maintain during periods of suffering and pain, will be of incalculable value, help, and comfort to us as we go through our course on pain and suffering.

We will proceed as follows ...

1. Introduce “*The Principal Characters in the Book of Job*”,
2. Give “*An Overview of the Events of Job*”
3. Conclude with “*What we may Take-Away from Job*”.

So, let’s take up this most impressive and beautiful book.

The Principals in the Book of Job are ...

God – “*God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.*” (*Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 4*).

Job – “*There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.*” (*Job 1:1*)

By and with God’s permission, Job will be struck with many very severe afflictions.

Satan – The evil one, who, when God presented Job before him in a heavenly court, twice claimed that Job only loved God because of the abundant blessings God had given him and would ‘*curse Him to His face*’ if they were taken away (*Job 1:9-11; 2:1-6*)

Job’s Three Friends – “*Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite ...*

... [who, we are told] made an appointment together to come and mourn with him [i.e., Job], and to comfort him” (Job 2:11) – and who, when they saw him, were so incredibly devastated by his appearance that they “sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great.” (Job 2:13)

After mourning silently with Job for seven days, Job’s three friends will, through three cycles of discourses, repeatedly urge Job to repent of the great sin that they are sure that he must have committed to bring all of this upon himself, but Job will hold fast to his blamelessness and integrity, claiming that he has done nothing to deserve all that has come upon him

Elihu – a young man who bides his time and enters in at Chapter 32 with a series of monologues stretching to the end of Chapter 37. He does not make the same accusations as Job's three friends and God does not later find him in error as He did Job's three friends.

Let's make a Brief Overview of the Flow of Events in Job

Chapter 1 ...

of *Job* opens in a heavenly assembly in which God asks 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?'' (Job 1:8)

Satan replies ...

"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!" (Job 1:9-11)

God replies to Satan,

"Behold all that he has is in your power, only do not lay a hand on his person." (Job 1:12)

As a result, in one day, Job, "*the greatest of all the people of the East*" (Job 1:3), loses his seven sons and three daughters and also suffers the loss of all his livestock and property.

Yet, we read concerning Job ...

"Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said:

*"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked shall I return there.
The LORD gives and the LORD has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:20-21)*

... and are told, in the very next verse ...

“In all this, Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.” (Job 1:22)

In Chapter 2 ...

God again presents Job before Satan and talks of his steadfastness and again comments ...

“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?” (Job 2:3)

And adds in the second part of verse 3 ...

“And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause.” (Job 2:3)

Satan again challenges God ...

“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!” (Job 2:4-5)

And so, again with God’s permission ...

“Satan ... struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he set in the midst of the ashes.” (Job 2:7-8)

Again, the events of both of these heavenly scenes are totally unknown to Job, who, after showing such great steadfastness at the beginning of his afflictions, becomes totally bewildered at all that has befallen him and starts spiraling downward into a whirlpool of depression and despair, wondering why God has become his “*enemy*” and treated him so unjustly. He repeatedly pleads for an audience with God so that he might show Him the unjustness of His actions towards him.

It is important for us keep in mind that it was God Himself who twice brought Job to Satan’s attention (not the other way around). And, once more, it is important to remember that neither Job, nor any of his friends, nor his wife or anyone else around him knows anything of these background heavenly councils and challenges.

And so, in response to Satan's challenge, God has allowed Satan to severely afflict Job over a prolonged period of time. Whether Job will remain faithful to God or "*curse Him to His face*" as Satan challenged would happen when everything is taken from him and his body grievously afflicted is the real-life drama that flows throughout this most incredible book.

And what of all those around Job? What was their response when all of this befell him? Did any try in a correct manner to help alleviate his sufferings? Well ...

His wife criticized him, "*Do you still hold fast to your integrity?*" and urged him to "*Curse God and die!*".

His three friends, as we mentioned above, in keeping with the general belief of his time, urged Job to repent of the great sin that he must have committed to bring such great suffering upon himself.

[Note: This thought was still held even by Jesus's disciples at their time –

"Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" (John 9:1-2) ...

... and is still widely held (if not taught) in many evangelical circles today.]

Even strangers and unworthy men, men who in the past would not have been allowed to keep Job's dogs (Job 30:1), shared in Job's ridicule and humiliation, some even spiting on him.

His enemies, of course, piled on relentlessly and mercilessly.

We need to pause at this point of our Overview of the Events of Job to point out that there are actually two different kinds of suffering

There is *physical suffering* and there is also *intellectual suffering*. Intellectual suffering is often referred to in the Bible as a "*broken spirit*"

We see in Proverbs

*"A merry heart does good, like medicine,
But a broken spirit dries the bones." (Proverbs 17:22)*

*“The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness,
But who can bear a broken spirit.” (Proverbs 18:14)*

We are told in Chapter 17 that Job cried out ...

“My spirit is broken” (Job, from Job 17:1)

And so, as a result of his great afflictions and the unknown nature of them, Job was “broken” both *physically* and *spiritually*. Indeed, Job probably suffered more intensely than any other child of God in Biblical history, save our Lord Jesus Christ (whose suffering included bearing the full wrath of God and an eternity of hell in our place).

In Chapters 3 – 31 ...

We see three cycles of discourses between Job and his three friends – discourses in which Job repeatedly describes the depths of his utter despair and his bewilderment that God has become his “*enemy*”. He continues to plead for an audience with God so that he might have an opportunity to vindicate himself and his innocence before Him and prove that he had done nothing to deserve the terrible sufferings and afflictions that God had, in his opinion, so unjustly heaped upon him.

In Chapters 32 through 37 ...

We have the monologues of Elihu who, as we said earlier, does not make the same mistake concerning Job’s integrity as did his three friends and who was not accused by God of wrongdoing as were Job’s three friends.

In our course on pain and suffering

... we want to very carefully observe and reflect upon the spiritual depths to which even a “*blameless and upright [man], and one who feared God and shunned evil*” can descend over a prolonged period of intense suffering – so that we might ourselves be forewarned and better prepared should God call us to endure long-term suffering and so that we might be better able to give good Biblical counsel to others going through a period of extended suffering.

Before starting, we would note again that Job did very well during the first part of his horrible ordeal of pain and suffering. But after being worn down over an extended period of time, Job eventually succumbs to despair and depression and falls victim to many

misapprehensions and errors in his thoughts concerning God. Still, through all of this, Job never loses his belief in his own personal “*integrity*” and, more importantly, he never loses his ultimate trust in God. He most certainly never “*curses God to His face*” – as Satan had twice claimed that he would.

Most interesting of all in our look at Job’s plight is his reaction upon finally getting the audience with God that he has been longing and pleading for all along and the conclusions that he comes to have as a result of it.

To help us better understand Job’s reactions ...

Let’s take a close and thorough look at Job’s thoughts and misapprehensions about God (in chronological order) to see the thoughts that can enter into the mind of even a very good and “*blameless*” man such as Job during a period of prolonged suffering and pain.

Be sure to note very closely the depth of Job’s utter anguish, distress, bitterness, misery, hopelessness and despair over his prolonged period of intense suffering:

Job longs for death

*“Why is light given to him who is in misery,
And life to the bitter of soul,
Who long for death, but it does not come.
And search for it more than hidden treasures;
Who rejoice exceedingly,
And are glad when they can find the grave?” (Job 3:20-22) (Confirm also 6:8-9)*

Job despairs at how God has stricken him and speaks of his terror of Him

*“For the arrows of the Almighty are within me;
My spirit drinks in their poison;
The terrors of God are arrayed against me.”* (Job 6:4)

Job has no reason for hope

“What strength do I have that I should hope?” (Job 6:11)

Job suffers from anguish of spirit and bitterness of soul

“Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;

*I will speak in anguish of my spirit;
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.” (Job 7:11)*

Job is terrified by God, loathes his life, and wishes God would just let him alone

*“Then You scare me with dreams
And terrify me with visions,
So that my soul chooses strangling
And death rather than my body.
I loathe my life;
I will not live forever.
Let me alone,
For my days are but a breath.” (Job 7:14-16)*

Job asks what he has done to God that He should set him “as Your target”

*“What have I done to You, O watcher of men?
Why have You set me as Your target?” (Job 7:20)*

Job says God afflicts him without cause and fills him with bitterness

*“For He crushes me with a tempest,
And multiplies my wounds without cause.
He will not allow me to catch my breath,
But fills me with bitterness.” (Job 9:17-18)*

Job comes to have very low thoughts of God, “who laughs at the plight of the innocent”

*“Therefore I say, ‘He destroys the blameless and the wicked.’
If the scourge slays suddenly,
He laughs at the plight of the innocent.
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.” (Job 9:21-24)*

Job thinks that God oppresses him and then smiles on the counsel of the wicked

*“Show me why You contend with me.
Does it seem good to You that You should oppress,
That You should despise the work of Your hands,
And smile on the counsel of the wicked?” (Job 10:2-3)*

Job is perplexed that all this has happened to him even though God “knows he is not wicked”

*“Although You know that I am not wicked,
And there is no one who can deliver from Your hand?” (Job 10:7)*

In his bitterness, Job again asks God to just leave him alone

*“Are not my days few?
Cease! Leave me alone, that I may take a little comfort.” (Job 10:20)*

**Job, Chapter 13, gives us a great deal of insight into the conflicting nature
of the thoughts that are running through Job’s mind ...**

Job greatly longs to speak with God and “reason” with Him about his mistreatment

*“But I would speak to the Almighty,
And I desire to reason with God.” (Job 13:3)*

Yet still expresses great faith and trust in Him ...

“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. (Job 13:15)

**... but in the same breath, wishes to defend himself before God and show Him His error
in treating him in such a manner without just cause ...**

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

Though he feels certain that he will be vindicated before God and his three friends ...

*“See now, I have prepared my case,
I know that I shall be vindicated.” (Job 13:18)*

He is still afraid of and dreads God ...

*“Withdraw Your hand far from me,
And let not the dread of You make me afraid.” (Job 13:21)*

... and continues to wonder why God has wronged him so and regards him as His “enemy”

*“Why do You hide Your face,
And regard me as Your enemy?” (Job 13:24)*

Continuing with Job’s errors and misapprehensions about God, in Chapter 14 Job says

God “destroys” man’s hope

*“But as a mountain falls and crumbles away,
And as a rock is moved from its place;
As water wears away stones,
And as torrents wash away the soil of the earth;
So You destroy the hope of man.” (Job 14:18-19)*

Job accuses God of being his adversary, of hating him

*“He tears me in His wrath, and hates me;
He gnashes at me with His teeth;
My adversary sharpens His gaze on me.” (Job 16:9)*

Job bitterly complains that God has “*delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over to the hands of the wicked*” and has “*taken me by the neck, and shaken me to pieces*”. Even worse, He “*pierces my heart and does not pity*”.

*“God has delivered me to the ungodly,
And turned me over to the hands of the wicked.
I was at ease, but He has shattered me;
He has also taken me by the neck, and shaken me to pieces;
He has set me up for His target,
His archers surround me.
He pierces my heart and does not pity;
He pours out my gall on the ground.
He breaks me with wound upon wound;
He runs at me like a warrior.” (Job 16:11-14)*

Job has a “broken spirit”

“My spirit is broken” (Job 17:1)

God has made Job into a “byword” of the people and “one in whose face men spit”

*“But He has made me a byword of the people,
And I have become one in whose face men spit.” (Job 17:6)*

Job says that God has “wronged me”

*“Know then that God has wronged me,
And surrounded me with His net.” (Job 19:6)*

Job says that God considers him as one of His enemies

*“He has also kindled His wrath against me,
And He counts me as one of His enemies.” (Job 19:11)*

Job says that God pitilessly “persecutes” him and is “not satisfied with my flesh”

*“Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends,
For the hand of God has struck me!
Why do you persecute me as God does,
And are not satisfied with my flesh?” (Job 19:21-22)*

Job again wants to “reason” with God and show Him how He has wronged him

*“Oh that I knew where I might find Him,
That I might come to His seat!
I would present my case before Him,
And fill my mouth with arguments.” (Job 23:3-4)*

*“There the upright could reason with Him,
And I would be delivered forever from my Judge.” (Job 23:7)*

Job again says that God “terrifies” him

*“Therefore I am terrified at His presence;
When I consider this, I am afraid of Him.
For God made my heart weak,
And the Almighty terrifies me.” (Job 23:15-16)*

Job says that God has taken away his justice and made his soul bitter

*“As God lives, who has taken away my justice,”
And the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter” (Job 27:2)*

Job says God is cruel to him

*“I cry out to You, but You do not answer me;
I stand up, and You regard me.
But You have become cruel to me;
With the strength of Your hand You oppose me.” (Job 30:20-21)*

Job complains that he has cared for the “troubled” and for the “poor”, but when he looked for “good” and “light” he got only “evil” and “darkness”

*“Have I not wept for him who was in trouble?
Has not my soul grieved for the poor?
But when I looked for good, evil came to me;
And when I waited for light, then came darkness.” (Job 30:26)*

Job feels that God is not aware of his goodness and good actions and longs for God to weigh him on an honest scales, that God may know his integrity

*“Let me be weighed on honest scales,
That God may know my integrity.” (Job 31:6)*

God has become a terror to him, a terror which he “cannot endure”

*“For destruction from God is a terror to me,
And because of His magnificence I cannot endure.” (Job 31:23)*

We are told at this point of the book that ...

“The words of Job are ended.” (Job 31:40)

Such are the thoughts that can come even to a man of whom God Himself has twice said

“... there is none like him on earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil.” Job 1:8, 2:3)

... during a prolonged period of pain and suffering.

We note that even God Himself stated that Job has ... 'contended' with Him ... attempted to 'correct' Him ... and actually 'rebuked' Him

*“Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him?
He who rebukes God, let him answer it.” (Job 40:2)*

So ... What can we sum-up about Job in Chapters 1 – 31?

In looking at, but not excusing, Job's misapprehensions and erroneous thoughts about God, including, as God Himself stated ... Job's "*contending*" with Him ... Job's "*correcting*" Him ... and Job's "*rebuking*" Him ... We must remember that Job had gone through an extended period of intense physical and intellectual pain and was "*broken*" in both body and spirit. He was in a state of deep depression, despair, and perplexity and confusion as to why God had become his "*enemy*" and why God had singled him out for such great afflictions.

But, much to Job's credit, and to God's honor before the heavenly assembly, even though Job descended into having numerous erroneous thoughts and misapprehensions about God and made multiple rash statements about Him, Job never "*cursed God to His face*" as Satan challenged that he would if only God would allow him to afflict him. No, Job maintained his own integrity and ultimate trust in God throughout his whole terrible ordeal, as epitomized in Job's comment ...

“Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” (Job 13:15)

Job likewise never lost his assurance of his ultimate salvation and that he was still God's child ...

*“For I know that my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last upon 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.” (Job 19:25-27)*

Chapters 32-37

... contain the monologues of Elihu, which open with ...

“So these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then the wrath of Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, was aroused against Job; his wrath was aroused because he justified himself rather than God. Also against his three friends his wrath was aroused, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job” (Job 32:2-4)

We note again that Elihu did not make the same mistakes as Job’s three friends and was not rebuked or corrected by God for what he said.

As we turn to the final chapters of Job, Chapters 38-42, two things that we want to keep in mind are ...

First, that many scholars consider the book of Job to be one of the earliest written books of the Bible, which means that Job very likely had no body of written theology (not even the Pentateuch) to fall back on, only imparted wisdom from the Holy Spirit ...

Second, that one of the great errors of Job’s time was the idea that there is a direct link between the degree of one’s suffering and the degree of their own personal sin – an error that persists to this very day, and an error which is very hard to dislodge.

OK – We have seen that throughout his ordeal, Job has longed for an audience with God ...

He wanted to know why God has afflicted him so terribly when he has done nothing to deserve such treatment from Him. Job does maintain a trust that God is good, but has nonetheless made many rash, erroneous, and totally wrong statements about Him. He thinks and believes that if only he could gain an audience with God and present his case to Him, that God will come to see His error and injustice and lift His heavy hand from him.

And so – at the Beginning of Chapter 38 ...

Job, at long last, finally gets his requested audience with God.

It is an intensely fascinating and remarkable meeting. It has a very dramatic setting. Do not miss the weightiness and magnificence of it ...

On the one hand, we have Job – a man of whom God Himself has twice said “... *there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil*” – a man who is totally wrecked and broken in both body and spirit, deeply depressed, despairing, and in utter perplexity and confusion as to why God has become His “enemy”

On the other hand, we have our sovereign, all-powerful Creator and God, the supreme ruler of the universe, who has permitted Job to be so severely afflicted by Satan, and whom Job has accused of injustice, wrongdoing, and error, while contending with, correcting and rebuking Him.

And now this poor wretched shell of a man stands before the God who has allowed all this to happen to him.

Job’s three friends observe from the background.

It is a truly astounding setting.

As we go through Chapters 38-42, the Chapters covering God’s meeting with Job, we especially want to note two things ...

First, God’s answer to Job and Job’s reaction to it.

Second, what we can “take away” from Job’s audience with God to help us if we should ever be called upon to go through long-term intense suffering ourselves or to give counsel to others going through it.

So ...

What was “God’s answer to Job and Job’s reaction to it”?

At the very beginning of Job’s meeting with God, we see that instead of Job questioning God, as he had for so long desired to do, God immediately begins questioning him, opening their discourse with a profound and deeply penetrating question that clearly showed Job his foolishness and rashness in questioning God and charging Him with injustice and error and being an “enemy” to him.

God’s first words to Job were ...

“Who is this that darkens counsel

By words without knowledge?” (Job 38:2)

Listen to Matthew Henry’s *Commentary* on this ...

“The preface is very searching ... God charges him with ignorance and presumption in what he has said ... ‘Who is this that talks at this rate? ... Is it Job? ... shall he pretend to prescribe to Me what I must do or to quarrel with Me for what I have done. Is it Job? What! My servant Job, a perfect and upright man? Can he so far forget himself, and act unlike himself. Who, where, is he that darkens counsel thus by words without knowledge? Let him show his face if he dare, and stand to what he has said.’”

Matthew Henry further notes ...

“Darkening the counsel of God’s wisdom with our folly is a great affront and provocation to God ... God’s counsels ... are a deep which we cannot fathom ... We do but darken them, instead of explaining them.”

Very importantly, according to Henry ...

“This first word which God spoke is the more observable because Job in his repentance, fastens upon it as that which silenced and humbled him (40:3).

Also listen very carefully to R. C. Sproul’s comments on this verse ...

“Do you hear the force of that rebuke? God says to him: ‘Who is this who darkens counsel with words without knowledge? Watch it, Job! You’re casting a shadow over the perfect counsel of My wisdom. You are speaking not from the perspective of omniscience but from the perspective of consummate ignorance. You don’t know what you’re talking about. And now you’ve put Me on trial? You want Me to give an answer to your theological questions? You want to interrogate Me? I will answer your questions but before I answer them, I want you to answer some for Me. Prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Here’s question number one, Job: Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?’”

Very importantly, Sproul later comments ...

“This is not an exercise in divine bullying over Job, but a crash course on the nature and character of God. ‘Job, look at who I am. Job, you can trust Me.’”

We ourselves should pay close attention to God’s first question to Job ...

*“Who is this that darkens counsel
By words without knowledge?” (Job 38:2)*

... for any of us, myself included, who has ever questioned God’s wisdom, justice, and love and put Him on trial for something He has done, should feel the full force of this rebuke – for it is directed to us as well as to Job.

God continues ...

*“Now prepare yourself like a man,
I will question you, and you will answer Me.” (Job 38:3)*

Matthew Henry comments ...

“He challenges him to give such proofs of his knowledge as would serve to justify his inquiries into the divine counsel ...

[It was] as if He had said ‘Gird up now thy loins like a stout man, prepare thyself for the encounter; I will demand of thee, will put some questions to thee, and answer Me if thou canst, before I answer thine.’

Interestingly, this was exactly what Job himself had asked for back in Chapter 13, Verse 22

“Then call, and I will answer ... ”

God continues with a lengthy round of questions in which He displays His sovereignty, wisdom, omnipotence, goodness, and greatness before Job and then asks him (and you and me as well) another deeply penetrating question ...

*‘Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him?
He who rebukes God, let Him answer it.’” (Job 40:2)*

And so, in the beginning of our look at ...

“God’s answer to Job and Job’s reaction to it”

... we have two very remarkable and intriguing aspects of Job’s audience with God that we want to very carefully note ...

First, God never gives Job an explanation for his great ordeal of suffering

Second, equally remarkable, Job no longer wants to ask Him for one.

What an incredible change this represents in Job's attitude towards his suffering!

In the very presence of God, Job immediately forgets all his complaints, questions and charges. The farthest thing from his mind just then would be any contention with, or correction or rebuking of God.

Rather, Job was so totally overwhelmed by the transcendent majesty and presence of God that even though he was probably the godliest man of his time from a Biblical point of view, he came to view, and say of himself and his situation ...

*"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." (Job 40:3-5)*

... and, again, two chapters later ...

*"I know You can do everything,
And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.
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 42:1-6)*

And so, Job has learned first-hand of God's greatness and experienced a first-hand view of His transcendent majesty. He has been struck speechless by God's questioning of him, and has, as a result, admitted that he has *"uttered that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me"*. He has also, consequently, *"repented in dust and ashes."*

In the face of all his suffering, when in God's presence, Job could only consider himself *"vile"* and *"abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."* No more questions. No more

demands to know “*Why?*” Only humility and repentance for the harsh words that he had uttered earlier about God.

[Note: Job’s encounter with God as well as Isaiah’s similar encounter with God in Isaiah 6:1-6 both show us that our view of our God is much, much less that it deserves to or should be.]

We can also learn a lot about God from His stern rebuke of Job’s three friends for speaking wrong of Him and misrepresenting Him ...

“And so it was, after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD then said 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, 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)

First, it is incredible that in His rebuke of the three friends, God, in His graciousness, called Job “*My servant*” four times in two verses and then says two times, in the same two verses, to Job’s friends, “*you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.*” God does not blast Job or chasten him for the many rash statements that he had made. No. Quite the opposite!

Indeed, we might rather be inclined to ask,

“After reading six full pages of Job’s rash thoughts and statements to and about God during his afflictions, how is it that God can say Job has spoken ‘what is right’ of Him?”

The answer is that all too often we are too quick to overlook the total and abundant forgiveness, graciousness, mercy, and full acceptance back that God shows to a repentant sinner.

After Job’s questioning and rebuking by God, Job humbled himself, acknowledged that what he had said was wrong, and sincerely repented. At this point God had compassion on him, forgave him, and accepted and honored him with the accolades that He did – even to the point of appointing “*My servant Job*” as the intermediary through which forgiveness can be obtained for his three friends ...

“... and My servant Job shall pray for you. For I will accept him, lest I deal with you according to your folly” (Job 42.8)

God no longer held up before Job the former things that Job had said against Him, but forgave them and remembered them no more. He instead commended Job for what he had said that was right about Him over against what his three friends had said.

Matthew Henry says it is as if God had said ...

“Though he is poor and despised, he is my servant notwithstanding, and as dear to me as he was in prosperity. Though he has his faults, and has appeared to be a man subject to like passions as others, though he has contended with me, has gone about to disannul My judgment, and has darkened counsel by words without knowledge, yet he sees his error and retracts it, and therefore he is my servant Job still.”
(Matthew Henry’s Commentary, Job 42:7-8)

What astonishing grace, love, and mercy on God’s part!

We see this same graciousness displayed by God in Hebrews 11, often called *God’s Honor Roll of the Heroes of the Faith* where He lists men like Samson and Jephthah among the ‘*heroes of the faith*’, without the slightest mention of any of their failings.

God’s forgiveness and graciousness are truly astounding in their scope and fullness.

But, let’s get back to Job’s three friends ...

“And so it was, after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD then said 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, 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)

Matthew Henry comments that ...

“Job’s friends were greatly mortified, and come off with disgrace. They were good men and belonged to God, and therefore He would not let them lie still in their mistake any more than Job, but, having humbled him [Job] by a discourse out of the whirlwind, he takes another course to humble them [Job’s three friends].”

The point to note here is that in spite of the three friends' great misrepresentations of both Job and God Himself, God graciously and mercifully rebuked them, corrected them, and forgave them, just as He will do with all of His children.

This said, let's now turn our attention to Question # 2, which is ...

What we can "take away" from Job's audience with God to help us if we should ever be called upon to go through long-term intense suffering ourselves or to give counsel to others going through it.

We have twelve "take-aways" for you:

1. **Maintain your trust and faith in God:** The first and foremost thing you need to do in a period of prolonged intense suffering is to, in spite of any and all circumstances to the contrary, strive to maintain your trust and faith in God – a simple faith and trust that He loves you, cares about you, and will do only what is good and right for you.

This faith and trust is not mere wishful thinking or fallible hope. No! The sure foundation of your faith and trust stands upon a firm Biblical knowledge of God's inner goodness, His vastly superior wisdom, sovereignty, and judgment, and on His promises to you that He loves you dearly, cares very much for you, is not unaware of what is happening to you, and would never do anything that is not for your ultimate good. With such a foundation as this, we can have and maintain a sure faith and trust in Him and more easily strive to rest content in His love no matter what our circumstances.

So, when beset by troubles and suffering, especially those that are long-term, our guiding thoughts and principles should always be ...

"I will trust God. He knows exactly what is going on and what He is doing. I will trust Him no matter what. I will believe His promises. I will believe in His goodness. I will believe in His love for me. If I should ever doubt His love for me, I will look to the cross of Calvary. I will very simply, when all is said and done, trust Him, for He is worthy of it."

2. **Do not succumb to rash and erroneous thoughts about God:** A second "take-away" learned from Job is that you should be forewarned by Job's case not to succumb to rash and erroneous thoughts about God – thoughts that your three great enemies, "*the world*," "*the flesh*," and "*the devil*", will constantly bring to your

mind. You should reject such thoughts outright, repeat memorized Scripture to yourself in their place, and review our list of “take-aways.”

We need to resist our natural tendency to drag God before our own personal bar of justice and demand that He give an account for whatever has happened to us. No! Like Job, we need to come to remember just who He is and just who we are. Our God is a consuming fire of holiness and transcendent majesty. He is omniscient and omnipotent. He is our Creator and, in reality, He does not in any way owe us an explanation for anything He does. We, on the other hand, owe Him our faith and trust.

Rather than ever judging God, we, as His redeemed children bought by the blood of His own dear Son, should be content to know that God is good, that He loves us, that He has His own good and perfect reasons for whatever has happened to us, reasons far beyond our feeble comprehension.

And so, when we go through extended periods of pain and suffering, periods that may lead us to doubt God’s love for us, we need to remember that when our life is over and we stand in the presence of God and see the wonderful tapestry of our life that He has woven, including our pain and suffering, and how He has used it to help and instruct us, help others, and glorify Himself, we will, like Job, stand in awed wonder and silence before Him and will not want to go back and change one minute of it. We will only rejoice that we were considered worthy to suffer for Him and His glory.

3. **God is infinitely wiser than we are and knows exactly what He is doing:** A third “take-away” to help us through a period of prolonged and intense suffering is to always remember, like Job came to know, that God is infinitely wiser than we can ever even begin to know, comprehend, or imagine. He Himself has told us that His ways are vastly higher than our ways and His thoughts vastly higher than our thoughts

*“‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD.
‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.’” (Isaiah 55:8-9)*

We need to, like Job, come to realize and understand that there may well be much going on that we simply cannot know or understand here and now. So let us rest in God’s superior wisdom and be careful lest we ourselves have to repent and say with Job ...

*“Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”*

Before going to Take-Away Point # 4, we wish to note again that the term “means of grace” describes the “means” by which God’s grace flows to us. They include ... worship (individual, family, and corporate) ... reading, hearing and meditating on God’s word ... partaking of the Sacraments ... and so on. They are also our main means of communication with God, as we communicate with Him through prayer and He communicates back with us through His word.

4. **You cannot fight this fight alone:** A fourth lesson that we can learn from Job is to realize that you cannot fight this fight alone. Job had no written body of theology to fall back on and his only “comforters” were his three well-intentioned, but very theologically misguided, friends. As a result, Job was overwhelmed by his terrible ordeal and sank further and further into a whirlpool of depression and despair.

If you wish to avoid the *intellectual* aspects of Job’s suffering, you must daily immerse yourself in the *means of grace*.

Always remember the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ ...

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

Read that last sentence again and note very carefully your Lord Jesus Christ telling you that “*you can do nothing*” spiritually worthwhile or meaningful on your own.

On the other hand, our Lord also tells you that by diligently abiding in the *means of grace*, we can “*bear much fruit*.” The “*fruit*” of which He speaks is the “*fruit of the Holy Spirit*” which is ... “*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

So, if you would like to have “*love, joy, peace, longsuffering [and] self-control*” during your time of intense suffering, you must seriously appropriate and daily use the means of grace. There simply is no other way. You have great advantages that Job never had during his prolonged period of intense suffering. So, do not waste them.

5. **God is not punishing you:** A fifth lesson Job learned that can help you through a prolonged period of intense suffering is to always keep in mind that God is not punishing you in any way, shape or form for any sin you have committed before or since your conversion. No! God is a just God and would never punish you for any sin that has already been fully paid for by Christ on the cross. There may, of course, be times when God lovingly exercises Fatherly discipline in your life, but there will never be a time of punishment for any child of God. All of God's thoughts and actions toward His children are always gracious and for their betterment and good. Confirm ...

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

So, know for sure that in any afflictive providence God sends, He is not punishing you, but teaching and instructing you for your own good.

6. **Ask God for wisdom to see and understand any lessons that He might be teaching you:** Flowing logically from Number Five directly above, one very important thing you can do is to ask God for wisdom in understanding and learning any lessons that He might be trying to teach you during your period of suffering. Go to Him and ask His help in understanding and He will give it to you. Confirm ...

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5)

7. **Witnessing opportunities:** A seventh lesson is to always consider that your situation might just be a God-sent opportunity for you to witness to your many friends, relatives, neighbors, and co-workers who come to see you (some of whom you have longed for an opportunity to talk with about the gospel, but never have). Your testimony to them of God's love and grace in your life during such a period of suffering will be very meaningful to them as they will know that it is real and not scripted or canned. Know for sure that if it is known that you are a Christian, all who come to see you, especially any non-Christians, will be watching you and your reactions very closely.

Be willing to forgive well-intentioned but misguided comments by those who visit you. Job did not turn his back on his three friends who so grossly misunderstood his circumstances and dismiss them. No, he bore with them, truthfully and forcefully answered their points, showed them where they were wrong, and taught and instructed them in the truth. God later had Job to pray for their forgiveness, and, because of Job's intervention for them, God subsequently forgave them.

8. **There are great rewards for patient endurance and trust:** You should also bear in mind that that God has promised you great rewards for submitting to and patiently enduring such suffering – both now and later. Confirm ...

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18)

“... our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen. (2 Corinthians 4:18)

Job was greatly rewarded on earth after his ordeal was over. We are told ...

“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. He also had seven sons and three daughters ... In all the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job ...

After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days.” (Job 42:12-17).

Perhaps most incredible of all his rewards, God gave Job a unique and direct fulfillment of one of his pleas ...

*“Oh, that My words were written!
Oh, that they were inscribed in a book!
That they were engraved on a rock
With an iron pen and lead, forever!” (Job 19:23-24)*

And so we have the eternally existing book of Job, a part of the Holy Scripture, where his words are written and inscribed forever – a book of the Bible named after him, a book that chronicles his ordeal and the lessons he learned, a book that has been of great help to millions in time of suffering.

Job was also significantly rewarded by being one of the few men ever to have stood in God’s presence and converse with Him as God (the people of Jesus’s time did not recognize or in any way treat Him as God).

I'm sure his rewards in heaven are even greater than we could possibly imagine.

Certainly, one of the greatest rewards for you on earth would be an increase in and deepening of your faith and trust in God. For example, it is of great benefit to know that your faith has been tried in the furnace of affliction and survived. You can truly know that your faith is real, which should give you a much greater and fuller assurance of your own salvation.

As with Job, this does not mean that your faith has never wavered or that you have never had periods of depression or despair – Job certainly did. No, having periods of doubt about God's love does not mean that you don't have true saving faith, but a faith that needs to be strengthened by Biblical truth. We saw that Job had a extended period of rash thoughts and misapprehensions about God, but kept his faith in Him, nonetheless. [And even if your courage and testimony should fail, you can, like Peter, repent of it and still be used by our Lord for great service to His church.]

9. **Deeper prayer life:** One of the primary benefits that usually comes with intense suffering is a much greater and deeper prayer life. In truth, this could, in fact, be one of the reasons that you are in such a condition. So, work to develop it.

We can, of course, continue to pray to have God's afflictive providences removed from us, but we must always pray in the manner of our Lord, who said ...

"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." (Luke 22:42)

And, likewise, whenever we begin to falter, we should pray ...

"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

Being willing to humbly accept and submit to God's answer in the matter proves and exhibits true faith and real trust.

And, should God's answer to your prayers for relief be *"No"* or *"Not just yet"* – then humbly accept it in the light of the knowledge of God's inner goodness, His vastly superior wisdom, sovereignty, judgment, and knowledge, and His promises to you that He loves you dearly, cares very much for you, and is not unaware of what is happening to you.

[Note: A “deeper prayer life” is just one of the many Spiritual Benefits to be gained through the “afflictive providences” of pain and suffering. Please see Appendix I for a list of the others.]

10. Glorifying God by humble submission and trust: A tenth “take-away” – in addition to the strengthening your faith as mentioned above – is to always keep before you, that whether your suffering is of a long or short duration, that you are glorifying God by humbly and patiently submitting to his providences and that your glorifying Him also results in your own highest personal good.

11. Drawing you nearer to Himself might be one God’s reasons for your situation: Never be tempted to think that your wanting to draw near to God will be less meaningful to Him because you are only doing it after undergoing prolonged suffering and/or facing approaching death. No, your drawing nearer to Him might actually be the reason that He is putting you through your ordeal, *precisely because* He loves you *and wants* a closer relationship with you.

Use your time of suffering as a time of meditation on God’s word and drawing nearer to Him. Begin with meditating on the Scripture verses on suffering and on such passages as ...

“Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

Always remember during your time of suffering that one of God’s greatest promises to you, especially in times of suffering, is ...

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” (James 4:8)

So, seize the opportunity you have and use it wisely to grow in prayer and Bible meditation – and “Draw near to God” by a diligent and daily use of the means of grace.

12. The importance of having a Full Assurance of your Salvation: Our twelfth and final “take-away” from Job is the importance of having a full assurance of your salvation. Job, in spite of all His rash and erroneous thoughts and statements made in times of depression and despair maintained and was much comforted by a full assurance of his salvation ...

*“For I know that my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last upon 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.” (Job 19:25-27)*

The greatest comfort a believer can possibly have while going through a prolonged period of suffering and pain is a full assurance of their salvation, an assurance which both the Apostles Peter and Paul *command you to “diligently”* inquire into ...

“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure.” (2 Peter 1:10)

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Many only “hope” that they are saved or “feel” that they are saved, which feelings can change on a dime at any moment. But hope and feelings are not enough to sustain and comfort you through a period of intense suffering in the way that a full assurance of your salvation based on Biblical truth can – which is why our next two Papers are ...

Paper 7: “Having a Full Assurance of Your Salvation” ... and ...

Paper 8: “How Can I know For Sure that I am a Christian?”

A Summary of our 12 “Take-away” Points

1. Maintain your faith and trust in God – He is worthy of it.
2. Do not succumb to rash and erroneous thoughts about God. Be guided instead by Biblical truth.
3. God is infinitely wiser than we are, so rest assured in His superior wisdom.
4. You cannot fight this fight alone and should immerse yourself in the means of grace.
5. Remember that God is never punishing you. All His actions toward you always are and always will be loving, beneficial, protective, and instructive or corrective.
6. Ask God for wisdom in understanding and learning any lessons that He might be trying to teach you during your period of suffering.

7. Always consider that your situation might just be a God-sent opportunity for you to witness to your many friends, relatives, neighbors, and co-workers who come to see you (especially the ones that you have longed to share the gospel with, but have not).
8. Bear in mind that that God has promised you great rewards, both now and later, for trusting Him and patiently submitting to and enduring such suffering.
9. Use this time to develop a much greater and deeper prayer life – and the other Spiritual Benefits to be gained through suffering (See *Appendix I*).
10. Always remember that you are glorifying God by humbly and patiently submitting to his providences, which also results in your own highest personal good.
11. Drawing you nearer to Himself might very well be one of God’s reasons for your present affliction. So never think or feel that God will think less of your drawing near to Him as it came *only after* the onset of intense suffering or approaching death. No, whatever the reason, God greatly delights in your drawing nearer to Him. So, run to Him and embrace Him, for, as His child, He longs to lovingly embrace you.
12. Having a full assurance of your salvation, as Job did, is your best comfort and help in a prolonged period of suffering. (See our next *Paper* on “*Having s Full Assurance of Your Salvation*”.)

We would note in closing our look at Job ...

... that one of the great ironies of the book is very beautifully summed up as follows ...

“When his eyes have seen the Lord and he has repented in dust and ashes, Job has come to understand that God on his throne is sovereign, and rewards those who belong to him despite times of pressure and pain. The reader learns that Job suffered, not because he was one of the worst of men, but because he was one of the best, and that his ordeal glorified his God.”

(Taken from the New Geneva Study Bible, Book of Job, notes on Characteristics and Themes, page 699.)

Soli Deo Gloria

“To God Alone be All the Glory”

Appendix I: The Spiritual Benefits of Suffering

John Flavel, a great English Puritan, gave us eight sets of reasons as to why God ordains suffering for His children and the spiritual benefits to be derived therefrom.

Reason 1: To Reveal, Deter, and Mortify Sin

Reason 2: To Produce Godliness and Spiritual Fruit

Reason 3: To Reveal the Character of God

Reason 4: To Relinquish the Temporal for the Eternal

(1) By loosening the believer's grip on temporal and earthly things

(2) By showing the believer the vanity of this world

(3) By revealing the true nature of comfort

(4) By making the believer long for heaven

Reason 5: To Produce a Sincere Faith, Devoid of Hypocrisy

Reason 6: To Encourage Fellowship with God through Word, Prayer, and the Sacrament of the Lord's supper

Reason 7: To Bear Witness to the World

Reason 8: To Cultivate Communion with Christ, the Greatest Sufferer

These Reasons are taken from a book, *Suffering & Sovereignty – John Flavel and the Puritans on Afflictive Providence*, Reformed Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, MI

Cosby comments ...

"Flavel sees the affliction of the saints as 'sanctified afflictions.' These are sufferings brought about by the sovereign will and design of God in accordance with one of His many purposes for the saints – all of them, to be sure, for their ultimate good ... From the standpoint of the elect, these afflictions are 'sanctified, sweetened, and turned into blessings.' Afflictive providences, then, are blessings to [believers], and come from the love of God."