

The faithful of old— studied by the young

Job: you have heard of his patience

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THE BOOK OF JOB is the subject of much consideration and speculation. When did the events occur? Who was the Satan? Why did God allow Job to suffer?—these are all questions that are often asked when people discuss the book of Job. However, these things often cause us to lose sight of the character at the centre of the story—the man Job—who went through much trial but came through with a refined character that found favour in the eyes of God. He is counted among the righteous in Scripture, and therefore we will endeavour to discover the lessons that we can learn from the life of Job, and how these things can assist us in our lives.

Job's credentials

What do we know about the man Job? There is some uncertainty about the meaning of the name Job, in that it is unclear whether the origin of the name is Hebrew or Aramaic. However, the name Job in James 5:11 means 'harassed', 'afflicted' (Thayer); and how appropriate this seems to be! Here was a man who endured so much, and yet he endured with great patience and faith.

The first thing we are told about Job in the record, after his name and where he lived, is a summary of his character and his belief in God. Job 1:1 tells us the following things about this man:

- he was "perfect" (Heb. *tam*)—the word means 'to be complete' and is also used of Jacob in Genesis 25:27. We know that Job was not perfect, but this word indicates that he was of sound character and full of integrity
- he was "upright" (Heb. *yashar*)—the word means 'straight' or 'equitable'
- he "feared God"—he understood the greatness of God and was reverent
- he "eschewed evil"—the word "eschewed" literally means 'to turn off'; the same word is used in reference to 'putting away' idols.

We are given this description of Job three times in the first two chapters. This was something that we are being told to take note of: here was a man who had integrity and uprightness in the eyes of God, and therefore the things that happened to Job were not a punishment for what he had done.

So, looking at the character sketch of Job, a key point to note is that Job both feared God and turned away from evil. He had both a love for God and a hatred of evil; and it is important that we make this same commitment in our lives. We find it easy to love God for all the great things that He has done for us, but we also need to hate evil things. This is not as easy to do, as our human nature tries to draw us away. However, we know that we cannot love God and love the evil things of the world at the same time; Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:24 that "Ye cannot serve God and mammon".

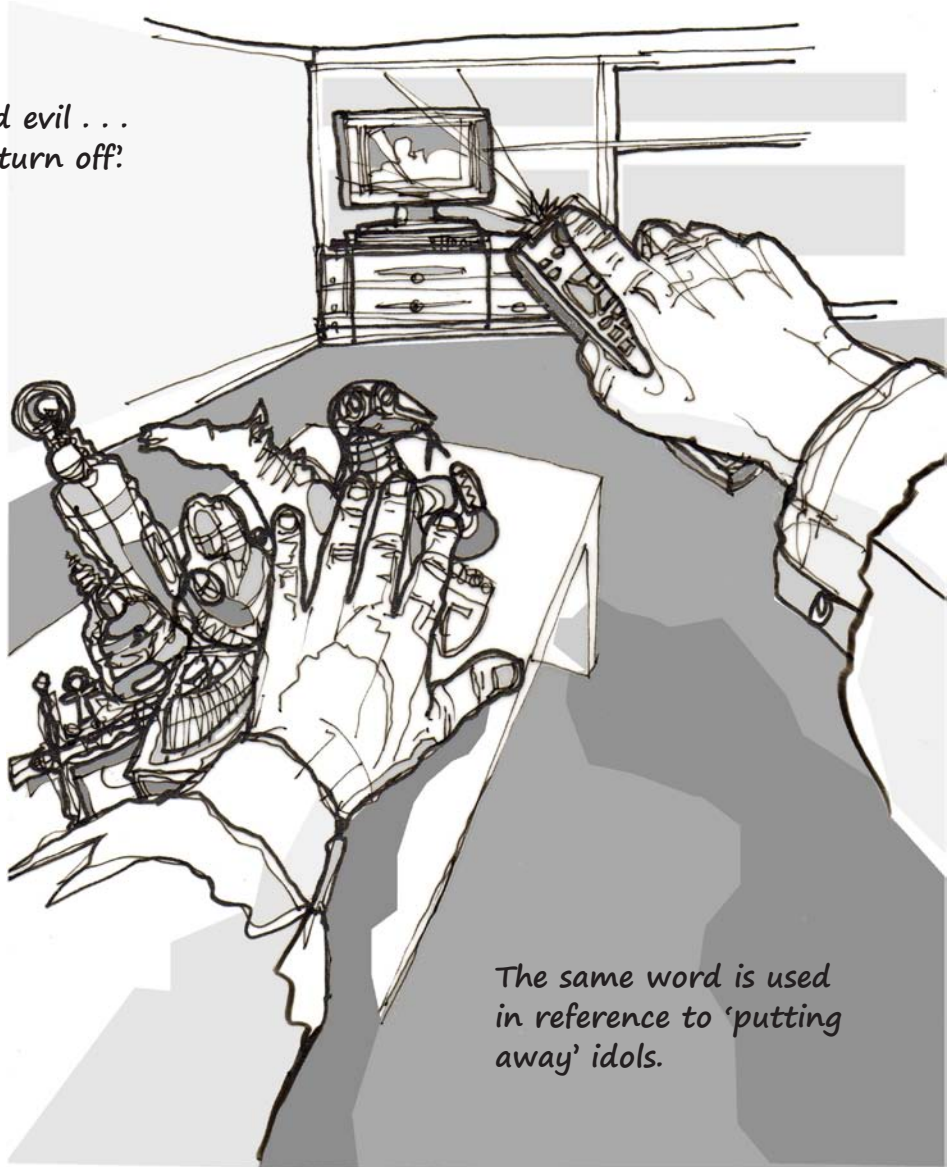
Catastrophe strikes

The record then continues to give an account of Job from a human point of view: he is described as being one of the greatest men of the east; he had a large family and great possessions. However, these things did not distract Job and his family from remembering God every day of their lives in the offering of sacrifice and spending time together as a family. It is always easy to remember to worship God in times of adversity and trial, but the example of Job yet again shines, in that God remained at the forefront of his mind despite it appearing that he wanted for nothing.

The record goes on to recount the terrible things that Job suffered at the hands of the Satan, including:

- the loss of all of his farming animals—which would have impacted his livelihood
- the loss of many of his servants
- the death of all his sons and daughters
- his body covered in sores.

*Job eschewed evil . . .
literally, to 'turn off'!*



*The same word is used
in reference to 'putting
away' idols.*

Pictures: Mark Pennington

If we were burdened with any of these trials we might struggle, but Job endured all of these. Job went through a period of mourning and of meditating and musing on what had happened to him, and these are the thoughts and words that make up the majority of the book. However, he came through his trials and was commended by God for his attitude (42:7), being blessed accordingly (v. 10).

Reaction to trouble

We all suffer trials of some form, and they are often very difficult to endure, but looking at the

faithful example of people like Job can give us encouragement. Paul tells us in Romans 15:4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope". The story of Job should not just be something that we know and can recite the details about, it needs to impact on the way that we live. Job suffered greatly, but if those who read of his patience and faithfulness can take encouragement and strength from his actions then it has not been in vain. Despite facing trials in our lives, and often finding them difficult to bear, we are exhorted by Paul to

be patient and take comfort from the Scriptures. It is in the darkest hour that we come to realise our weakness and need for God, and this in turn increases our hope and desire for the return of the Lord Jesus and the setting up of God's Kingdom.

During these times of trial we should also take comfort from the words of Paul to the ecclesia at Corinth, when he says, "God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). In the midst of a trial it is often hard to see the way out, but we can take comfort from the words of Paul. We can only begin to imagine the grief and torment that Job went through, but the Lord God allowed it to happen, and it was part of His plan to develop the character of Job. This speaks highly of Job: that God knew that he would be able to withstand these trials and that he would emerge through them refined, as a vessel meet for the Master's use.

Developing endurance

James picks up the example of Job later in his letter as an example of patience. James 5:11 says, "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy".

The example of Job shines out when it comes to the patience shown by Scriptural characters; his example was an encouragement to the scattered believers in the first century to whom James was writing, and it should be to us as well. We are blessed in that, unlike Job, we are able to know what the outcome of his situation was, and that he emerged from his trial with greater blessings than he had before. We have "seen the purpose of the Lord" (ESV) and can understand that Job's trials were for a reason; from this we come to understand that God will not push us beyond our limits. The ESV translates the final phrase of this verse as, "how the Lord is compassionate and

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. . . but "the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy".

merciful". This emphasises to us the love of the Lord God, and that He will help us in the hour of our greatest need.

James tells us earlier in his letter that we should "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (1:2-4).

Patience is not an attribute we can gain instantly, it is something that develops with time and experience. The trying of our faith works, or produces, patience. It is in the continuous tense, for it is a process that is ongoing. We will never reach a point in our mortal existence where we have developed perfection or completeness, but we must strive to do our best to develop patience in our lives. If we are patient, and continue to live our lives in the service of God, we have been promised great blessings: "to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" (Rom. 2:7).

Job's patience in his time of great trial was helped by the fact that he was able to see beyond what was immediately in front of him. He was able to see far greater things afar off. He stated in Job 19:25,26, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God". Job was able to see that, despite the sorrows and trials that he faced in his life, there was hope beyond, and this gave him the strength and encouragement to endure. He took the same attitude that Paul expands on: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"

(Rom. 8:18). Paul gives us further encouragement from his writings to the ecclesia at Corinth, when he says, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed . . . For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:8,9,17).

Written to instruct

The challenge for us is to be able to have the same vision as Job. Are we able to see with the eye of faith beyond our current cares and worries to the great hope that is to come? Are we able to recognise that all of the things that happen to us in this life are preparing us for greater things to come? We have been given great insight into what God has promised for those who remain faithful to Him, and we need to develop this as our hope. We can then use this as a motivation to get us through the challenges and trials that we face in our daily lives.

Possibly the psalmist was drawing on the life of Job when he said in Psalm 37:37, "Mark the perfect [Heb. *tam*] man, and behold the upright [Heb. *yashar*]: for the end of that man is peace". We know that God accepted Job's repentance and he offered a sacrifice on behalf of his three friends. Then "the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:12). We have been blessed by God now, but have been promised greater blessings to come, and we look forward to a time to come when the God of all grace will accept our repentance and will give us an answer of peace. Then we, like Job, will be truly blessed at our latter end more than our beginning.