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Commentary

Summer 2021



and
 about
 all that
 blessed
 substance
 and now, and
 he will "curse
 unto Satan, Behold,
 thy power; only upon
 with thine hand. So Satan
 the presence of the LORD.

ACTIONS

ere was a day ¹⁴when his sons
 daughters were eating and drink-
 ing in their eldest brother's house:
 and there came a messenger unto Job,
 saying, The oxen were plowing, and the
 asses feeding beside them:
¹⁵And the Sabeans fell upon them, and
 took them away; yea, they have slain the
 servants with the edge of the sword; and I
 only am escaped alone to tell thee.
¹⁶While he was yet speaking, there came
 also another, and said, The fire of God is
 fallen from heaven, and hath burned up
 the sheep, and the servants, and consumed
 them; and I only am escaped alone to tell
 thee.
¹⁷While he was yet speaking, there came
 also another, and said, The Chaldeans made
 out three bands, and fell upon the camels,
 and have carried them away, yea, and slain
 the servants with the edge of the sword;
 and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.
¹⁸While he was yet speaking, there came
 also another, and said, Thy sons and thy

Job's name
 (LXX), the
 The Hebrew
 common in the
 "east" could designate "virtually any place
 from Damascus to Arabia and as far east as
 Persia" (R. Alden, Job, 50).
 1:5 to ensure his family's spiritual purity.
 1:9-11 Satan challenges Job's motives
 for fearing God. 1:6 suggested that Job's
 devotion to God depended on his life cir-
 cumstances.

U N D E R S T A N D | E X P L O R E | A P P L Y

Job; Ecclesiastes



LifeWay | Adults

THE MEANING OF LIFE

Many people try to build their lives on success, wealth, power, or intellectual accomplishments. Such a way of life, however, is ultimately futile and meaningless. Everything in this life is fleeting and fading away; anything that does not have eternal value really has no value.

Jesus taught that a house built on the sand will collapse when the storms hit, but the one who builds his house on the rock—his house will stand (Matt. 7:24-27). This “rock” that provides a solid foundation for life is Jesus Himself. Jesus is the foundation for a life that is secure, satisfying, and meaningful.

The Old Testament character of Job learned that the answer to life’s mysteries and meaning lies in proper reverence for God. It’s been said that you don’t know God is all you need until God is all you have. In losing everything he had, Job discovered that God was all he really needed.

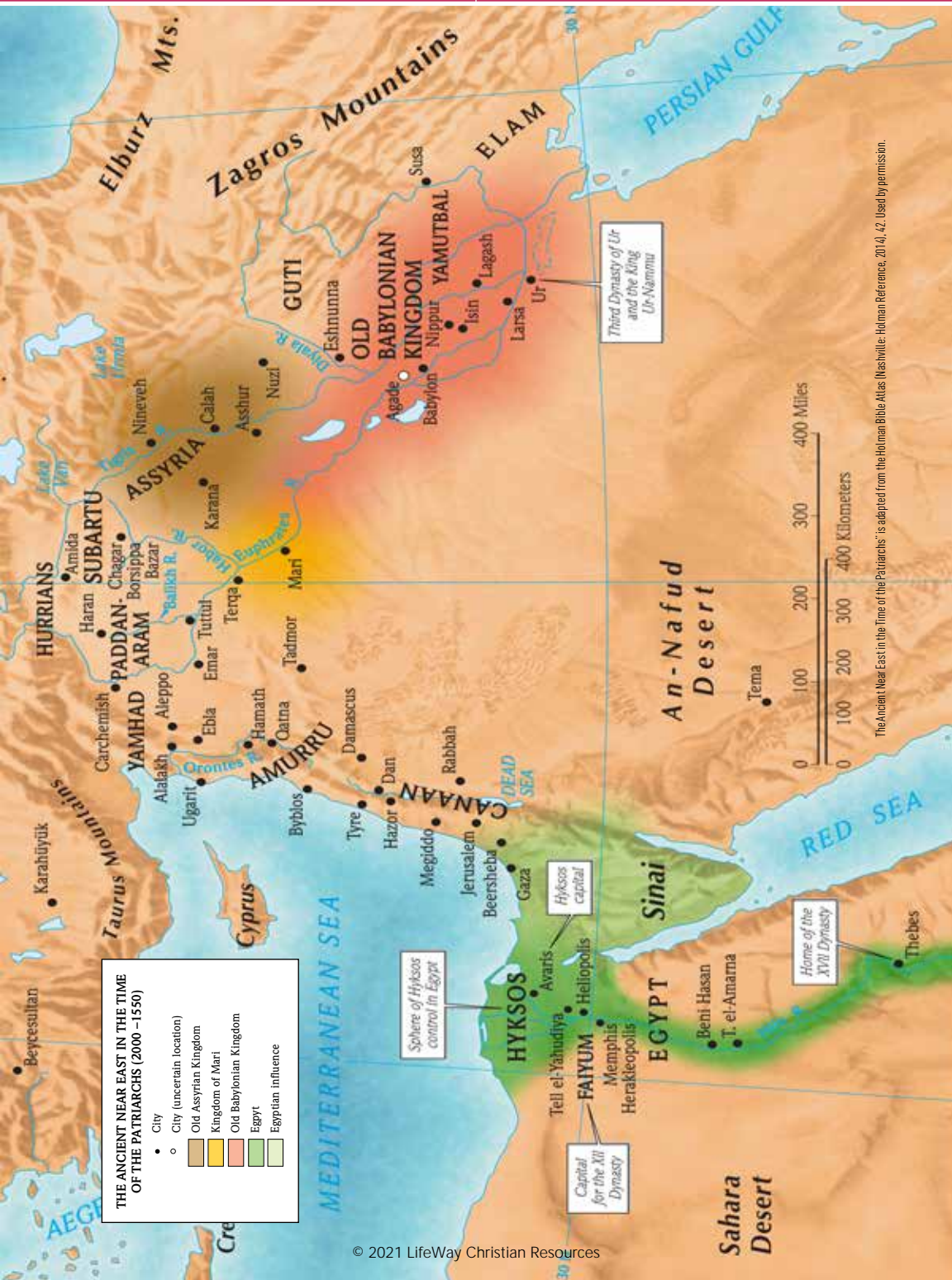
Solomon learned the meaning of life by gaining and acquiring everything life had to offer. Despite having everything, he found it was all futile and meaningless if God is not the central focus of life.

All of this points to our need of Jesus and the life He offers. He came so that we can have life that is abundant and eternal (John 3:16; 10:10). Right now, He is waiting for you.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

Ancient Near East During the Patriarchs



The Ancient Near East in the Time of the Patriarchs is adapted from the Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2014), 42. Used by permission.

JOB; ECCLESIASTES

The Book of Job leads us to grapple with the question: Do we love God for who He is or for what we can get from Him? If we love Him only for what He gives us and not for who He is, then we're serving ourselves, not Him. It's been said we don't know that God is all we need until God is all we have. Job, who lost everything, reminds us that the Giver—not the gifts—is all we need. The Book of Ecclesiastes likewise grapples with a weighty question: What's the meaning of life? The writer of Ecclesiastes, who gained everything this life has to offer, shows us the futility and meaninglessness of life when it is lived apart from God as its central focus. Both Job and Ecclesiastes are complex books that ask deep questions and ultimately enable us to see afresh our need for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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SUMMER 2021



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*Evangelistic emphasis

MEET THE WRITER

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FROM THE TEAM LEADER

Job and Ecclesiastes? Really!

Most two-year blocks of time are filled with ups and downs. The past two years seem to have had more than their fair share. Members of the team that create these resources and our associates have seen deaths of loved ones and births, a retirement and an addition to our team, surgeries and recoveries, and sickness and health. We felt the economic impact of quarantines and learned new ways of relating, working, and teaching. Our experience was not unique, having heard from many of you as well.

The challenges of the last two years set the background for what you have in your hands. As we and our writers worked through Job and Ecclesiastes, we did so when facing many of the same questions addressed by Job and Solomon. We rediscovered the joy of trusting God for each day, the promise of a sunrise, and the satisfaction of a sunset. Job and Solomon came to the same conclusion as they looked at life: trust God in all things. They discovered a hope that was based on the One who does not change. That trust and hope brought balance and perspective to their lives.

Job and Solomon learned some important lessons that can help us today. As we study these two Bible books, we will focus on these timeless truths and the hope found through faith in God and in His redemptive work. May God help us remain faithful to Him in all things.

In His service,

G. Dwayne McCrary

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INTRODUCTION TO **JOB; ECCLESIASTES**

Preschoolers can be both inquisitive and irritating. One repeated expression that can quickly test a parent’s patience consists of a single word: “Why?” Still, by asking this one-word question again and again, young children are often giving evidence of their hunger for further learning.

In most cases, human curiosity and learning continue throughout life. As adults, we never seem to quit asking *why*—nor should we. Asking *why* ultimately helps us turn to and listen for the eternal voice of God—our Creator and Redeemer. God alone knows the answer to our deepest questions. Indeed, God is the answer.

The biblical books of Job and Ecclesiastes both address the human search for meaning. The Book of Job focuses on one person’s response to a series of catastrophic events. The Book of Ecclesiastes centers on one individual’s journey to test all of the typically human ways of defining life’s meaning—great knowledge, continuous pleasure, vast wealth, and constant work. In both books, the main characters conclude that life’s ultimate meaning can be found only in a right relationship with God.

PURPOSE

Job—Bible scholars have long debated the purpose of the Book of Job, proposing a number of possible ideas that generally fall into four categories. First, some argue that Job was written to give an answer to the question of why good (or righteous) people suffer. A second proposal suggests the Book of Job was written to refute the belief that people who enjoy worldly blessings (prosperity, fame, posterity) are by definition righteous and thus worthy of such blessings.

Third, some scholars emphasize that the Book of Job was written to explore the question of whether human beings can (or will) worship God without consideration of what they receive in return. In 1:9-11, Satan said to the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Haven’t you placed a hedge around him, his household, and everything he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he owns, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

Fourth, some scholars propose that the Book of Job was written to show that God is present with and supportive of His people even when they cannot perceive His presence and activity. Hence, Job’s example is instructive for all of God’s people when any (or all) of them are dealing with disasters in their lives. God is always good, and He is ultimately in control!

Ecclesiastes—The Book of Ecclesiastes is an autobiographical report. Solomon, the king of Israel, sought to discover the ultimate meaning of human life. His experiences in life guided his investigation, therefore his arguments were experiential, not systematic. He investigated the human pursuits of pleasure, wisdom, wealth, and work; and he concluded that none of these pursuits provide ultimate meaning. Solomon’s conclusion to his search led him to acknowledge that human beings’ central purpose is to “fear God and keep his commands” (Eccl. 12:13).

WRITERS

Job—The writer of the Book of Job is not named. Nevertheless, the writer was a skillful poet and theologian, as judged by the book’s contents. While the description of the man Job and his surroundings fits well in the patriarchal period of Israelite history, the book itself may not have been written until much later—perhaps during King Solomon’s time (tenth century BC) or following the Babylonian exile (fifth century BC). These uncertainties make any suggestions about the writer’s identity at best speculation. On the other hand, the acceptance of the Book of Job into the canon of inspired Scripture by Israel as well as by the New Testament church (see Jas. 5:11) gives us confidence that God is the book’s ultimate Author.

Ecclesiastes—Ancient Jewish tradition attributed to King Solomon the writing of the Book of Ecclesiastes. While the name *Solomon* does not appear in the Hebrew text, nevertheless the writer identified himself in the first verse of the book as “the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.” This phrase plus the autobiographical descriptions of the Teacher’s great wealth and position point convincingly to the conclusion that Solomon wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes—probably late in his reign as king of Israel.

ORGANIZATION

Job—The Book of Job is named after its main character. It is part of Israel’s wisdom literature. Some wisdom literature taught skills for success in life. One example of this type of wisdom literature is the Book of Proverbs. Other wisdom writings considered profound problems of human existence. They sought to reveal the meaning of life and faith. The Books of Job and Ecclesiastes belong to this category of wisdom literature.

The Book of Job contains distinct divisions of material. The material is arranged so as to create a tempo in the overall story. The story begins with an introductory prologue (Job 1:1–2:13), written in prose. Then three cycles of dialogue (in poetic form) between Job and three friends follow the initial narrative section. The first cycle establishes a pattern followed in

the subsequent cycles, except that the third cycle does not include a speech by the third friend. In place of this missing speech, the text presents an extended speech by a young observer—heretofore unmentioned—named Elihu (32:1–37:24). The poetic sections reach a climax with a speech from God to Job (38:1–42:6). Finally, a brief epilogue in prose completes the literary work (42:7–17).

Ecclesiastes—The structure of the Book of Ecclesiastes consists of sections in which Solomon reports on his various quests to find life’s ultimate meaning (Eccl. 1:1–8:17). Therefore, the organization is necessarily repetitious at times in that Solomon concluded that each human effort in the end was futile. In a final section, he further concluded that truly wise people gratefully enjoy whatever time God allocates to them. The only lasting value in life is to fear and obey God (9:1–12:14).

THEMES

Divine Sovereignty—Both Job and Ecclesiastes emphasize God’s sovereignty. Although Satan severely attacked Job and his family, he could not do so without God’s permission (Job 1:12). In Ecclesiastes 12:7, Solomon declared that “the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

Faith—Job made advances in faith as he endured the suffering that came upon him. First, he began to talk directly to God (7:7–21). Second, he longed for an arbitrator between God and humanity (9:33). Third, he appealed to God for some kind of distinction in death (14:13–14). Fourth, he appealed to his witness in heaven (16:18–17:9). Fifth, Job repented of his pride for passing judgment on things he did not understand. Thus, he found the solution to his dilemma was in trusting God (42:1–6).

Fear of God—In Ecclesiastes, Solomon emphasized the central importance of fearing God. The fear of God begins with a proper understanding of God’s presence and nature. This comprehension in turn shapes the believer’s behavior.

Satan—Job 1–2 contains one of the most extensive depictions of Satan in the Bible. Satan is a created being with limited authority and power when compared to God (see Job 1:6–7; 2:1). He is unable to attack God’s people without permission from God (1:9–12; 2:5–7).

Life—On the surface, Ecclesiastes appears to highlight the disillusioned pessimism of one whose life had been a total disappointment. On the other hand, Solomon came to understand the limitations of human effort alone. He acknowledged that God’s sovereignty is total. Therefore, God’s people can find ultimate meaning only in revering and obeying Him.

OUTLINE OF **JOB**

- I.** The Testing Begins (Job 1:1–2:10)
- II.** First Round of Discourse (Job 2:11–14:22)
- III.** Second Round of Discourse (Job 15:1–21:34)
- IV.** Third Round of Discourse (Job 22:1–31:40)
- V.** Elihu Speaks (Job 32:1–37:24)
- VI.** God Speaks (Job 38:1–42:6)
- VII.** Resolution (Job 42:7–17)

OUTLINE OF **ECCLESIASTES**

- I.** Introduction: The Search for Meaning (Eccl. 1:1–11)
- II.** The Search Described (Eccl. 1:12–6:12)
- III.** Wisdom Gained in the Search (Eccl. 7:1–10:20)
- IV.** Conclusion: Fear and Honor God (Eccl. 11:1–12:14)



ON THE COVER

Stone olive press found at Tel Aviv, the ancient port city of Joppa. The beam through the round upright stone was pushed by an animal or human. The rolling stone crushed the olives, and the oil was collected in a vat. Olive oil was used for cooking, lamp fuel, medicinal ointments, and the anointing of kings. Oil also was a symbol of blessing and joy. (See session 12.)

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRENT BRUCE/ ERETZ ISRAEL MUSEUM/ TEL AVIV, ISRAEL (60/9260)

Faith Tested

Believers show the depth of their faith in adversity.

James died in a tragic automobile accident. It happened just one month after he had made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Because the accident occurred in a neighboring state, Louise, James's grieving wife, had to complete numerous official procedures and paperwork to bring her husband's body home for the funeral and burial. The red tape delayed the funeral and thus added to her painful ordeal. Through it all, however, Louise remained the epitome of a faithful believer. Not once did she lash out at God or question His goodness. Neither did she withdraw from God's people. Instead she boasted that her husband's last month had been the most wonderful time of their life together as husband and wife. She praised the Lord for giving them those thirty days as a truly unified, loving, Christian family. Throughout the weeks and months that followed, Louise never wavered in her faith. She served as an inspiration to her other family members and to our church congregation.

A year or so later, I asked Louise if she would be willing to give a testimony of her faith during our church's revival services. She reluctantly agreed, cautioning that she was certain to break down and cry when speaking about her heartbreaking loss. Then she retrieved her Bible and showed me an old church bulletin that she kept inside it. Scribbled in the margin near the day's sermon title was a signed affirmation about trusting what God said in the Bible. Louise confessed to me that her husband's tragic, untimely death had severely tested her faith. She had recalled the words of Romans 8:28 that "all things work together for the good of those who love God," and she had to decide then and there if she really believed God's Word is true. Louise testified that she did believe it and her faith led to an assurance that God would ultimately bring something good out of James's death.

People who, like Louise, have faced harsh adversity in their lives can connect on a visceral level with the biblical account of Job. In this opening session, we will have an opportunity to think through how we might respond to God if we suddenly lost everything that we hold dear or depend on for meaning and fulfillment.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOB 1:1–2:10

Some Bible scholars conclude that Job (the man) lived in a place called Uz around the time of the patriarchal era—that is, slightly before or at the time when Abraham and his family first settled in the land of Canaan. The exact location of the ancient “country of Uz” (Job 1:1) is uncertain. The fact that Noah’s son Shem had a grandson named Uz suggests that Job’s home lay east of the Jordan River, either in the region just south of Damascus or else between Edom and northern Arabia. (See Gen. 10:23. Uz’s father was Aram, whose name later became associated with the region of Syria.)

Like the patriarchal figures Abraham and Melchizedek (see Gen. 14:17-20), Job appears to have worshiped the one true God. In his attitudes and actions, Job tenaciously adhered to the Lord God’s revealed standards for righteousness. By all measures, Job was an extraordinarily blessed individual. He was wealthy and prosperous in life. In a culture that highly valued large families—especially sons—Job fathered seven sons and three daughters. The numbers seven, three, and ten even had the symbolic importance of representing God-given completeness. Job’s life truly appeared complete in every respect. Indeed, he was regarded as “the greatest man among all the people of the east” (1:3).

Further, Job’s behavior pleased God. Therefore, on one occasion God boasted about Job’s having “perfect integrity” (Job 1:8). Satan, however, was skeptical and challenged God’s claim about Job. Satan argued that God’s preferential treatment of Job accounted for the man’s exceptional conduct and devotion. Satan brashly predicted that Job quickly would abandon God if only harsh adversity struck him (1:11). Therefore, God allowed Satan to take away Job’s prosperity and blessings. Job’s physical well-being initially remained off limits to Satan’s malicious activity. In a single day, a series of catastrophic disasters ended Job’s idyllic existence. All ten of his children were killed by a powerful wind, and all of Job’s possessions were stolen by marauders. Job grieved his loss yet did not accuse God of being unjust (1:6-22).

Having been wrong in his initial prediction about Job, Satan tendered a second accusation. He contended before God that Job’s continued piety hinged on his being exempt from personal physical harm. God granted Satan permission to attack Job’s health with the caveat that the man’s life must be spared. Consequently, Job became infected with boils from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. The once prominent man was now reduced to sitting in an ash pile and scraping his sores with pieces of broken pottery.

Such items commonly were found at the local garbage dump. Still, God's boast about Job's "perfect integrity" proved to be accurate in every respect (2:1-8).

Even Job's wife implored her husband to curse God so that he would die and no longer have to endure such bitter suffering. But Job refused to budge from his staunch devotion to God. He did not sin as Satan had predicted he would (2:9-10).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PERMISSION GRANTED (Job 1:8-12)

VERSE 8

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? No one else on earth is like him, a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and turns away from evil."

One of the more mysterious theological aspects of the Book of Job is Satan's access to the heavenly council and, more significantly, to **the LORD** Himself. The name *the LORD* emphasizes God's identity as the almighty Creator and Redeemer. This is God's covenant name that He later revealed to Moses (and to Israel through Moses) at the burning bush (see Ex. 3:14-15). The writer of the Book of Job evidently assumed that his audience would not be sidetracked by a theological question but would simply recognize that Satan's unusual audience with the Lord happened because the sovereign God allowed it.

The English word **Satan** is a transliteration (letter-for-letter rendering) of the Hebrew term that means "adversary" or "accuser." In some Old Testament texts, the Hebrew word appears not as a name but as a description of opposition (see Num. 22:22; 1 Kings 5:4; Ps. 109:6). In time, however, the word came to be used as it is in Job 1:8—that is, as a name for the wicked adversary of God and His people, the devil (see 1 Chron. 21:1; Zech. 3:2; Mark 1:13; Acts 5:3; Rev. 12:9). The Book of Job's description of conversations between the Lord and Satan reveals among other things that Job was unaware of the heavenly dialogue even though the discussion was about him.

The heavenly conversation began with the Lord asking Satan where he had come from (see Job 1:7). When Satan replied that he had been roaming the earth (1:8), that prompted the Lord to ask if Satan had taken notice of His **servant Job**. The basic idea of servanthood is to be in submission to another. Thus, for the Lord to describe Job as His *servant* was to claim that Job's devotion and will were submitted to God. God was the Master of Job's

life in every respect, and Job worshiped no God except the Lord. Further, the Lord described Job as unique among His earthly servants.

First, Job was **a man of perfect integrity**. The root idea of the Hebrew word rendered *perfect* is completeness. When linked to the Hebrew word for *integrity*, the terms convey the singular idea of remaining steadfastly loyal to a covenant relationship. Second, Job is described as a man **who fears God**. To fear God certainly includes having an appropriate emotional response that realizes God’s consuming holiness and power as the sovereign Creator. In a covenant relationship, however, the phrase “fear of God” takes on the additional sense of awe and humble submission to His loving presence. That sense of awe leads the faithful worshiper to seek to please God in every way. Therefore, the Lord thirdly described His servant Job as one who consistently **turns away from evil**. In essence, the Lord was telling Satan, “Have you noticed Job? He is like Me in character; he is not at all like you!”

VERSE 9

Satan answered the LORD, “Does Job fear God for nothing?”

Satan, true to his adversarial character, responded to God with a rhetorical question that implied Job was not as godly as the Lord thought. The question “**Does Job fear God for nothing?**” (“for nought,” KJV; “for no reason,” ESV) implied that Job’s devotion to the Lord and righteous actions were purely selfish, not special. Satan claimed that Job served God for the potential material benefits he might receive from doing so.

Some Bible scholars point to this verse as reflecting the overarching purpose behind the Book of Job. That is, the question poses a soul-searching dilemma: Will believers continue to devote themselves to and worship a God purely for who He is rather than for what He does for them? Is the believer’s worship little more than a quid pro quo? That is, God receives the believer’s devotion only to the measure that the believer receives God’s material blessings. Whether or not the issue reflects the book’s central purpose, it provided Satan with an opportunity to question God’s confidence in His servant Job.

VERSE 10

Haven’t you placed a hedge around him, his household, and everything he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

This verse continues Satan’s accusation against Job’s motivation. Satan accused the Lord of putting **a hedge around** Job. The idea of *a hedge* arises from the language of agriculture, specifically, the care of vineyards. To protect a vineyard from destructive intruders—both human and animal—

the owner would plant a hedgerow of tall, dense, thorny plants around the vines. In Satan's accusation, therefore, the *hedge* represented God's impenetrable protection around Job, his **household**, and all of his property.

Moreover, the success of God's *hedge* around Job and his family extended beyond protection from enemies. God also **blessed the work of Job's hands**. The Hebrew verb rendered *blessed* connotes something God does independent of human activity. It primarily means to imbue with power for success. Hence, Satan charged that whatever activity Job undertook, God ensured that it prospered and was protected. Satan supported his accusation by pointing out that Job's **possessions had increased in the land**. Satan's implied accusation was this: What human wouldn't remain devoted—in name, at least—to a God who continually tipped the scales of health, wealth, and success in that person's favor?

VERSE 11

But stretch out your hand and strike everything he owns, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

Satan argued that Job's devotion to God had never been tested for genuineness. Satan therefore challenged the Lord to **stretch out His hand and strike everything** that belonged to Job. The Hebrew verb rendered *strike* literally means “to touch” (see KJV; ESV). In this context, however, the implication of the verb was that God's intervening *hand* would change Job's situation for the worse. Blessings that had been as reliable as the morning sun would cease, be stolen away, or in some cases be turned into sickening burdens.

Satan was counting on the probability that Job would conclude his sudden misfortune came directly from the same source as his former blessings—that is, from the Lord. Satan thus fully expected Job to react with selfish anger and rejection of the Lord. Instead of worshiping the Lord, Job would **surely curse** God. The phrase **to your face** emphasizes that Satan expected Job to blame (and reject) God directly and openly. Further, such a reaction by Job would reveal—in Satan's thinking, at least—that the man's devotion to God had been shallow all along.

VERSE 12

“Very well,” the LORD told Satan, “everything he owns is in your power. However, do not lay a hand on Job himself.” So Satan left the LORD's presence.

The Lord's response to Satan emphasizes two realities. First, God's permission for Satan to test Job's faith revealed God's confidence in Job. The Lord had

confidence that Job’s devotion rested on his trust in God, not on a continuous guarantee of worldly success. Thus, God allowed Satan to exercise **power** (literally, “in your hand”; see ESV) over **everything** Job possessed. This included Job’s crops, herds, and, most significantly, Job’s children.

Second, the Lord’s response to Satan revealed His sovereignty and Satan’s limitations. Satan could exercise power over Job only by the Lord’s permission and only to the extent that God allowed. In fact, at this point Satan was forbidden from laying **a hand on Job himself**. He could only strike Job’s possessions.

Many readers of the Book of Job have questioned why God would allow Satan to wield destructive power against such a devoted and righteous person. God allowed the testing of Job for His own wise reasons, which are not completely spelled out in the Book of Job. It is sufficient, however, to affirm the known character of God. He is good, loving, just, and wise. Therefore, we can trust His decisions, even when we cannot understand them completely. God will always do what is right.

Having received permission to attack Job in a limited way, Satan departed to vent his fury against God’s faithful servant. Today, we as believers can be sure that Satan still seeks opportunities to attack God’s faithful followers. Although he is in rebellion against God, Satan remains subject to divine authority. He cannot act beyond God’s permissive will.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Devil, Satan, Evil, Demonic” on page 419 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How does the description of Satan in the Book of Job enlighten our understanding of the New Testament teaching that Satan has power over the present world (see John 14:30; Eph. 6:11-12; 1 Pet. 5:8-9; 1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:12)? Conversely, how does the New Testament information on Satan help us better understand Job 1:6-12?

ATTACK EXECUTED (Job 1:13-19)

VERSES 13-15

One day when Job’s sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, a messenger came to Job and reported, “While the oxen were plowing and the donkeys grazing nearby, the Sabeans swooped down and took them away.

They struck down the servants with the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you!”

Job 1:4 states that Job’s ten children (perhaps with their spouses) routinely gathered in one of the sons’ homes for festive banquets. Job and his wife evidently did not attend these family get-togethers. Thus, they were not present on this occasion when the siblings gathered **in their oldest brother’s house**. Being a righteous and attentive father, however, Job realized that such occasions marked by **eating and drinking wine** could present certain dangers. In particular, Job was concerned that in their festiveness his children might be tempted to sin by cursing God (see 1:5-6). It seems clear, however, that on this occasion neither Job nor his children anticipated the overwhelming dangers that were about to rain down upon his family.

A series of four disasters suddenly began to unfold. First, **a messenger came ... and reported** to Job that a band of marauders had **swooped down** (“fell upon,” KJV; ESV; “attacked,” NIV) and stolen the family’s **oxen and donkeys** from the fields. If the thieves made off with all of Job’s oxen and donkeys, the loss amounted to at least fifteen hundred valuable work animals (see 1:3)! Such a loss would have severely crippled Job’s farming operation and thus his capacity to provide for his family and workers.

Who were **the Sabean**s? In this context, the name likely refers to a band of nomadic merchants who traversed the desert regions of Arabia. They may have conducted legitimate trade when it was possible and was to their benefit. However, in desperate times these nomads did not hesitate to attack unsuspecting farms and estates to take what they wanted. Here, *the Sabean*s not only stole Job’s livestock but also **struck down his servants with the sword**, compounding the disaster. The phrase rendered *struck down ... with the sword* indicates that the Sabean

s massacred Job’s workers. The fact that only one servant **escaped** the carnage **to tell** Job what happened could have been either a providential rescue or an intentional act by the marauders to send Job a terrifying message.

VERSE 16

He was still speaking when another messenger came and reported, “God’s fire fell from heaven. It burned the sheep and the servants and devoured them, and I alone have escaped to tell you!”

With the words **he was still speaking when another messenger came**, the biblical writer emphasized the speed with which Job’s blessed and successful life came crashing down. The second messenger **reported** the loss of all Job’s **sheep** along with all **the servants** tending the sheep. The cause of this disaster was not attributed to wicked men, however. Instead, the messenger

reported that **God's fire fell from heaven** and killed the sheep and the shepherds. While this description probably refers to a devastating lightning strike, the words *God's fire* would have meant much more to Job.

We as readers of the Book of Job know that Satan had been given permission to attack Job's possessions (1:12). Job, on the other hand, was not aware of the previous dialogue between the Lord and Satan. By slaughtering Job's sheep and shepherds with a lightning strike, Satan sent a chilling message to Job: "Hey, Job! The God to whom you are so devoted directly caused your bitter and unexpected losses. What do you think of Him now?"

VERSE 17

That messenger was still speaking when yet another came and reported, "The Chaldeans formed three bands, made a raid on the camels, and took them away. They struck down the servants with the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

A third messenger arrived while the second **was still speaking**. Similar to the first disaster, this one was perpetrated by a marauding tribe. **The Chaldeans** later became associated with the area around Babylon in southern Mesopotamia (see Isa. 23:13; Dan. 9:1). In Job's day, however, the name probably described certain nomadic groups that migrated back and forth across northern Arabia. Like the Sabeans, *the Chaldeans* in desperate times resorted to marauding and stealing. **Three bands** of these marauders targeted Job's herd of three thousand **camels** (see 1:3). They strategically organized their fighting men into a three-pronged attack force and **made a raid** on Job's camels. Job's workers were no match for the attackers. The Chaldeans **struck down** all but one of Job's **servants with the sword**.

VERSES 18-19

He was still speaking when another messenger came and reported, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house. Suddenly a powerful wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on the young people so that they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

Then came the most devastating report of the day. A fourth **messenger** arrived to inform Job that all of his children had been killed as they were feasting in the **oldest brother's house**. As with the second disaster, the cause of the catastrophe was a phenomenon of nature: **suddenly a powerful wind** ("great wind," KJV; ESV; "mighty wind," NIV) **swept in from the**

desert and struck the four corners of the house. That the storm *struck the four corners of the house* may indicate that it was a rotating wind—that is, a tornado. Tornadoes can reach incredible wind speeds which, as many people to this day can attest, can rip apart even brick and stone structures.

We do not know the type of materials the oldest brother used to construct his house. We do know, however, that whatever materials were used, the house was no match for the wind. The house **collapsed on the young people so that they died.** The fact that one messenger **alone ... escaped to tell** the tragic story suggests that house workers and others also were killed along with Job's ten children. Job's whole world suddenly collapsed in the dust! Stunned, he probably wondered, "Why, Lord? Why is this happening to me?"

EXPLORE FURTHER

What are one or two of the most difficult situations you have faced in your life? How did your relationship with God impact your responses to these situations? How have you grown spiritually through these experiences?

TRUST MAINTAINED (Job 1:20-22)

VERSE 20a

Then Job stood up, tore his robe, and shaved his head.

Certainly Job later pressed God with many questions (see Job 3:11-26). At this point, though, Job's faith held strong. To be sure, he grieved deeply about the bitter tragedies that had overwhelmed him. He **stood up, tore his robe, and shaved his head.** Tearing one's garment was a sign of great sorrow. The Hebrew term rendered *robe* referred to a man's outer garment; it often reflected the wearer's prosperity and status of importance in the community. Similarly, shaving one's head signified abject humility in the face of bitter loss. Thick, flowing, gray hair was a sign of wisdom and success (see Prov. 16:31). To shave one's head signified deep despair and a feeling of emptiness.

VERSES 20b-21

He fell to the ground and worshiped, saying: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will leave this life. The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.

Although Job was filled with grief and despair, he knew where to turn and what to do. He **fell to the ground and worshiped** the Lord. In a short,

poetic prayer, Job expressed three amazing affirmations. These affirmations were life principles by which Job had lived his life thus far and that gave him a calming sense of purpose even in the face of devastating calamities.

First, Job affirmed that human life and all of its material blessings are gifts from God to be managed, not owned. Job had arrived in the world **naked**. This is, of course, a literal description of childbirth. A child comes from his or her **mother's womb** unclothed. But the term *naked* can also have the figurative sense of having no position, power, or possessions. And in that sense, every person will also **leave this life** naked. Whatever we amass in wealth; however many offspring we produce; whatever fame we enjoy; these all get left behind at physical death. We go into the afterlife **naked**.

Second, Job affirmed God's sovereign rule over human life, as expressed in the statement **the LORD gives, and the LORD takes away**. Job later reminded his wife of this truth by asking, "Should we accept only good from God and not adversity?" (2:10). All that we are and have are gifts from God. The Lord in His wisdom knows what we need. He also knows when the removal of blessings is required to help us love and trust Him even more.

Third, Job affirmed that in either prosperity or adversity, the Lord was worthy of his trust and worship. Job declared that in the throes of devastating calamities, **the name of the LORD** was still to be **blessed** ("praised," NIV). What an amazing expression of faith and devotion!

VERSE 22

Throughout all this Job did not sin or blame God for anything.

The biblical writer closed this episode by emphasizing that **Job did not sin or blame God for anything**. The Hebrew word translated *sin* basically means "to miss the mark." Job maintained the high standard of faithfulness. He trusted God in the good times, and he also trusted God when life fell apart. This is significant in that Job believed firmly in God's sovereign rule over human life. Moreover, he was unaware of the temporary permission and power that Satan had been given to test Job's faith. This is the kind of faith Job later expressed in this way: "Even if he [God] kills me, I will hope in him" (13:15). Today, we who are followers of Jesus Christ are challenged also to live by such faith in our Savior and Lord.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Memorize Job 1:20-21. What do these two verses teach you about yourself? About the Lord? About trusting in the Lord?