

Dependence Declared

God honors those who humbly profess dependence on Him.

The believer's faith is tested most during times of great uncertainty. Do we profess our dependence on God during troubling times? Alternatively, does extreme anxiety divulge doubt about God's care? This session focuses on Job's profession of dependence on God. Job recognized that God was (and is) vastly superior to His creation, including human beings. People cannot comprehend the totality of God's activity. Therefore, they are wise to trust God at all times, especially when they do not understand all of what He is doing.

At the time I am writing this session, the nation is in the early months of a lockdown precipitated by a worldwide pandemic. Businesses are shuttered. Schools are shut down. Churches cannot gather in person for worship and Bible study. Hospitals are facing severe shortages of medical personnel, personal protective equipment, and even bed space and ventilators for critically ill people. Many people are dying. In short, we are facing a calamity of (as yet) unknown proportions. I am, like most other citizens, expected to stay at home except for emergency reasons.

It occurred to me that while I am writing this study in March of 2020, readers of this material will not see it until the summer of 2021. Certain questions arise in my mind as I ponder that reality. Will the pandemic still be raging out of control in a year's time, or will it be basically a thing of the past? Will safe and effective vaccines be discovered and utilized? Will businesses reopen and the national economy rebound? Will schools return? Will life get back to normal? I cannot answer these questions today as I write. All I can do as a believer is trust that God has not been taken by surprise regarding our world's situation and is vastly more powerful than a worldwide pandemic or any other threat to our future and well-being.

In a real sense, we are living today with similar uncertainties about the future that Job faced. Having experienced personal losses and suffering that staggered his faith, Job had to live with a host of unanswered questions. Insensitive and untruthful counsel from his friends only added to his pain. But through direct personal communication with God, Job finally realized that the greatest wisdom available to humanity is not what the future holds but rather who holds the future in His all-powerful hands.

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOB 42:1-17

When God was finished speaking (Job 38:1–41:34), Job acknowledged the Lord’s sovereign authority and unrivaled power. Then he meekly admitted that he had grumbled about matters that he did not fully understand (42:1-6).

In the presence of God’s revelation of His majesty, Job could not contend with God. Humble submission was the only appropriate response to God’s questions and declarations. More importantly, Job acknowledged that he had gained new insight into God’s nature. Job’s heartbreaking catastrophes had strengthened his relationship with God. He had acquired a new comprehension of God. Therefore, Job repudiated all the accusations he had made in his discourses, an implication of unqualified faith in God.

The Book of Job concludes as it began—with a narrative section written in prose rather than in poetry. The brief concluding narrative is organized in two distinct parts. In the first part (42:7-9), God spoke directly to Eliphaz as the leader of the coalition of Job’s friends. God charged the three friends with presenting false assertions about Him in their arguments. Further, the Lord indicated that Job’s allegations never misrepresented God.

In the second part of the concluding narrative (42:10-17), God replaced Job’s wealth and status. He restored Job’s health and doubled all of the possessions Job had before the disasters that Satan spawned. Job also fathered seven more sons and three more daughters. Job lived out the ideal life for people in Old Testament times—a long and prosperous one.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

ADMIT (Job 42:1-6)

In a brief reply to God, Job expressed dependence on Him for wisdom and understanding. He recognized that God alone is sovereign. Job confessed his inability to understand and committed to trust God for wisdom.

VERSES 1-2

Then Job replied to the LORD: I know that you can do anything and no plan of yours can be thwarted.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had vehemently attacked Job’s unwillingness to repent, yet they had failed to refute Job’s arguments despite presenting three

rounds of speeches (4:1–31:40). They did not even finish their third round of arguments—Zophar made no speech in the third round. Thereafter, a brash young man named Elihu had contended with Job in a lengthy series of uninterrupted speeches (32:1–37:24). All four men assumed Job’s plight was caused by some concealed wickedness in his life. Yet, Job never budged from his claim of innocence. Finally, God broke His silence, delivering an extended speech to Job about His sovereign majesty and wisdom (38:1–41:34). Now that God had concluded His message, it was incumbent on Job to respond to God’s revelation.

Thus, **Job replied to** (“answered,” KJV; ESV) **the LORD**. The appearance of the name *the LORD* in this verse indicates that Job knew he was in conversation with the one true and living God—the God who entered into covenant with Abram (Abraham) and later with the people of Israel (see Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 19:3-6). In other words, Job enjoyed the intimacy of a covenant relationship.

Job began his response by acknowledging God’s sovereign power: **I know that you can do anything**. Job had previously asserted that he knew certain things to be true (see Job 9:2,28; 13:18; 19:25; 21:27; 30:23). Here, his assertion of knowledge was in response to God’s revelation out of the whirlwind.

Other people in Scripture learned firsthand of God’s capacity to do anything in advancing His purposes. Abraham and Sarah likely lived around the same time that Job lived. When Sarah laughed at the divine promise that she would give birth to a son in her old age, God asked Abraham a rhetorical question: “Is anything impossible for the LORD?” (Gen. 18:14). Less than a year later, Sarah gave birth to Isaac, demonstrating that indeed God could do whatever He promised to do.

About two thousand years after Abraham and Sarah’s miracle, the angel Gabriel promised Mary, a young virgin maiden in Nazareth, that the Lord had chosen her to give birth to the Messiah. When Mary inquired about how she, as a virgin, could possibly become pregnant and give birth, Gabriel declared, “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). What Abraham, Sarah, Mary, and many other biblical people learned through miraculous experiences, Job realized in the throes of bitter suffering and in the thundering, yet assuring voice of the Almighty: *God can do anything*.

Second, Job acknowledged that **no plan of the Lord’s could be thwarted** (“no thought can be withholden from thee,” KJV). God’s plan for His creation dominates every situation—indeed, all of human history. In the garden of Eden, God began unfolding His plan to overcome human sin (see Gen. 3:15). Salvation from sin would come through the unique and promised Deliverer who would be both fully God and fully human—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although Satan made numerous attempts throughout human history to thwart God’s redemptive plan, God sovereignly and powerfully brought it to pass (and will complete it) in Jesus Christ (see Rev. 12).

VERSE 3

You asked, “Who is this who conceals my counsel with ignorance?” Surely I spoke about things I did not understand, things too wondrous for me to know.

In this verse, Job recalled and then responded to God’s initial question. With a slight difference in wording (see Job 38:2), God had asked, **“Who is this who conceals my counsel with ignorance?”** In 38:2, God used a Hebrew verb that means “to obscure or darken.” Here, Job employed a different Hebrew verb that nonetheless had a similar meaning, “to conceal or hide.” The phrase rendered *with ignorance* literally reads “without knowledge” (see KJV; ESV; NIV). In essence, God had asked in 38:2 (and Job was recalling the question in 42:3), “What human being would dare to ignorantly distort the nature and plans of Almighty God?”

That question now echoed in Job’s mind as he thought about the many things he and the three friends had spouted to one another in their dialogue. Further, Job realized and admitted that he had spoken adamantly **about things he did not understand**. Indeed, they were **things too wondrous for him to know**.

Job’s analysis of his behavior was correct. Moreover, his behavior was typical of human beings. People can become so fixated on themselves and their personal situations that they neglect to realize they don’t have all the facts. Job never became fully knowledgeable of the reasons God allowed him to suffer so much. Readers of the Book of Job are made aware of Satan’s role in the suffering of God’s people, yet the text never fully explains the reason God acted as He did. What can be concluded, however, is that God’s ultimate purposes for His creation are right and good. We can trust Him. And we can live by faith that He is in control.

VERSE 4

You said, “Listen now, and I will speak. When I question you, you will inform me.”

The words **you said** indicate that Job was ready to respond to another statement from God’s speech. The statement **When I question you, you will inform me** appears twice in God’s speech to Job, in 38:3 and 40:7. In both of those instances, however, the statement was preceded by a divine injunction

for Job to “get ready to answer me like a man.” In Job’s recollection of God’s speech, he understood God to be saying, “**Listen now, and I will speak.**” That is, Job now realized he could not (and should not) attempt any longer to contend with God in a “man-to-man” fashion. The Lord is God; Job was not!

VERSE 5

I had heard reports about you, but now my eyes have seen you.

In his rebuttal of Bildad’s final speech, Job observed that God’s greatness is beyond people’s capacity to understand fully (see 26:14). In 42:5, Job admitted that his perception of God had been transformed through what he had endured and what God had spoken from the whirlwind. It represented the difference between merely hearing **reports about** God and having a personal encounter with Him.

The phrase rendered **now my eyes have seen you** is probably to be understood in a figurative sense. That is, Job had been given true spiritual insight about God through the personal experiences of pain and loss. God’s speech from the whirlwind had clarified Job’s new insight in an overwhelming way. Job now could trust God and submit to His wisdom with even greater devotion. God’s power, goodness, and justice do not change or falter even though our circumstances may turn from prosperity to poverty or from the best of health to the brink of physical death.

Job had experienced a fresh encounter with God. His statement parallels the prophet Jeremiah’s promise that people would come to know the Lord personally through His forgiveness of their sins (see Jer. 31:34). Jeremiah’s prophecy was ultimately fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Heb. 10:15-23).

VERSE 6

Therefore, I reject my words and am sorry for them; I am dust and ashes.

The word **therefore** connects Job’s personal experience of God’s presence and new spiritual insight in the previous verse with an expression of humble repentance. First, Job admitted the fact of his sins. His accusations against God had been baseless and wrong; thus, he confessed, “**I reject my words**” (“I abhor myself,” KJV; “I despise myself,” ESV; NIV). The root meaning of the Hebrew verb rendered *reject* is “to regard lightly.” Job no longer gave any credence to his former accusations.

Second, Job expressed sorrow over his sins. He was **sorry for them**. Job felt a deep emotional grief that he had questioned God’s justice and concern. He had unknowingly fallen prey to the schemes of Satan, who was determined

to show that Job's devotion to God was only skin-deep (see 1:9-11; 2:4-5). Third, Job acknowledged his utter helplessness by saying, **I am dust and ashes**. The terms *dust* and *ashes* signify the tiny, insignificant particles that remain after soil is sifted and wood is burned. The terms became graphic symbols of human grief. Job grieved because he had questioned God.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Memorize Job 42:5. What are some ways that your perception of God's activity in the world and in your life has matured in recent years?

REPENT (Job 42:7-9)

God addressed Job's friends, bringing charges against them. He directed them to offer a sacrifice and indicated that Job would pray on their behalf. God accepted Job's prayer and reconciled the men to Himself and to Job.

VERSE 7

After the LORD had finished speaking to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.

The phrase **after the LORD had finished speaking to Job** indicates that with Job's repentance in Job 42:6, God forgave Job and restored him to a right relationship. However, there remained the issue of Job's three friends who had not helped Job and in fact had become his heartless false accusers. Therefore, God now confronted the friends, not individually but through their first spokesman in each round, **Eliphaz the Temanite**. Perhaps Eliphaz was the oldest of the trio or the chief spokesman.

God immediately stated His displeasure with the men: **I am angry with you and your two friends** ("my wrath is kindled against thee," KJV). This must have been a chilling (and probably unexpected) message to hear. The writer of Hebrews later declared that "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). God declared that the three friends had **not spoken the truth about Him!** During their speeches, the three men dogmatically asserted they knew what God was like and what He expected of people. Their error, however, was in wrongly assuming that Job fell into the category of the wicked. That error led them to insist that Job's suffering was God's hand of punishment against a vile, unrepentant sinner. In doing so, they misrepresented both God and Job. They attributed to God an action

He did not take. In fact, they credited God with doing something that Satan actually did!

Four times in Job 42:7-9, God referred to Job as His **servant**. In doing so, God established the basis for Job's role in the subsequent actions. Job would now become an intercessor for his three friends.

VERSE 8

Now take seven bulls and seven rams, go to my servant Job, and offer a burnt offering for yourselves. Then my servant Job will pray for you. I will surely accept his prayer and not deal with you as your folly deserves. For you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.”

In the Old Testament sacrificial system, a **burnt offering** represented giving one's best completely to God (see Lev. 1:10-13). As Job's friends and peers, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar likely enjoyed a comparable economic and social status as Job. God's instruction for the friends to offer **seven bulls and seven rams** called for a costly sacrifice on their behalf. The number seven symbolized completeness and perfection. Hence, the demand of seven of each animal for a burnt offering may point to God's mandate for total commitment to Him alone.

God then declared that His **servant Job** would **pray for** the three friends. Further, God promised that He would **surely accept** Job's intercessory prayer. He would **not deal with** the friends as their foolish actions deserved but would show them mercy. From this exchange, a wonderful portrait of God emerges, one that shows the Lord to be attentive and responsive to the intercessory prayers of His faithful people (see Jas. 5:16). It also shows the Lord to be truly patient with sinners, desiring them to repent, not perish (see 2 Pet. 3:9). God's message to the three friends concerning Job's prayer life should motivate believers today to increase and not forsake their prayerful intercession for unsaved friends and loved ones.

God repeated His charge that the three friends had **not spoken the truth about** the Lord, as Job had. The repetition serves to emphasize the severity of the charge. The three friends had not committed a minor infraction. They were guilty of blasphemy. God referred to their behavior as **folly**. The Hebrew term denotes the most serious form of foolishness. It refers to behavior that ignores moral and spiritual norms. Furthermore, those who commit such folly show that they have a closed mind when it comes to listening to God.

The friends had promised Job that God would forgive him if he confessed. Now, they needed to see themselves as the ones who needed to repent and receive God's forgiveness. On the other hand, herein was good news for

the three friends. Mercy was (and is) an attribute of God. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had foolishly peddled a false message about God, yet God was prepared to forgive them if they repented and offered the sacrifice of faith.

VERSE 9

Then Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

In some ways, Job's three friends were different from one another. **Eliphaz** was something of a mystic, claiming to receive special revelation in dreams and visions and initially showing some empathy for Job. **Bildad** was a traditionalist. He professed to have accumulated wisdom from the teachings of previous generations and concluded Job needed to reclaim the wisdom of the past. **Zophar** was a dogmatist, or legalist. He was adamant in his doctrine but deficient in empathy.

Yet, despite their different personalities and approaches, the three friends had reached the same conclusion: Job was guilty of some heinous sin (or sins) for which God was punishing him. Moreover, all three friends were followers of the one true God. Some of what they said about God was true. Their error came in misapplying God's truth to Job's situation. They were therefore guilty of conveying false teachings about God in regard to Job. Now, the friends had a direct invitation from God to repent and receive forgiveness. They complied! They **went and did as the LORD had told them**.

Job obviously was moved by the three friends' burnt offering of repentance. He prayed for them, **and the LORD accepted Job's prayer**. Literally, the final clause of Job 42:9 reads "the LORD lifted up the face of Job." The language describes what happened when a citizen entered the presence of a king with head bowed in humble reverence. If the king granted the citizen's presence and plea for royal help, he called for the supplicant to lift his or her face. The sovereign King, the Lord, had welcomed Job into heaven's throne room of prayer and had granted Job's petition of mercy for his three friends. What a powerful description of intercessory prayer!

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Intercession" on pages 810–811 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. In what ways can human beings intercede for one another? According to Romans 8:26–27, how does the Holy Spirit intercede for believers?

RESTORED (Job 42:10-11)

God restored Job's possessions, giving him twice as much as he had before the ordeal. Job once again hosted his extended family and friends who encouraged Job and presented him with money and golden rings.

VERSE 10

After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and doubled his previous possessions.

Job's willingness to pray for those who vehemently accused him of being sinful provides additional evidence that God's assessment of Job was accurate. In fact, Job's intercession **for his friends** foreshadowed the teachings of Jesus to pray even for one's persecutors (see Matt. 5:44). Sinful human nature would rather see one's enemies suffer. But Jesus commanded His followers to act differently.

Job definitely had perceived that his three counselors chose to act toward him as enemies rather than true friends (see Job 6:14-15; 16:1-5; 19:1-3). Nevertheless, Job still thought of them as *his friends*. Some Bible interpreters have suggested the label was a literary device for incorporating the three men into a single identity. The Hebrew word rendered *friends* can indeed have a range of meanings from an occasional associate to a close friend. However, Job's willingness to pray that God would forgive the trio suggests he still considered them to be his close friends.

Next, God **restored** Job's **fortunes** ("turned the captivity of Job," KJV). This Hebrew phrase was often used to describe the setting free of a captive. In Job's case, he had been imprisoned by devastation and losses that were as restrictive as iron shackles. Job could do nothing to free himself from his bondage; but God could. And God did! The name **the LORD** in Job 42:10 is in an emphatic position, underscoring that the one true God—who is both Creator and Redeemer—took the initiative to rescue and restore Job.

This change in Job's fortunes was an act of God. It was an expression of divine grace. Repentance leads to spiritual restoration but does not necessarily guarantee material prosperity. God does not promise to always restore all material losses. In Job's case, however, God not only restored but also **doubled** Job's **previous possessions**. The precise numbers of animals Job acquired are listed in Job 42:12.

VERSE 11

All his brothers, sisters, and former acquaintances came to him and dined with him in his house. They sympathized with him and

comforted him concerning all the adversity the LORD had brought on him. Each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold earring.

During the second cycle of dialogue with the friends, Job complained that his **brothers, sisters, and former acquaintances** had abandoned him (see 19:13-15). Now they eagerly **came to him and dined with him in his house**. Their visits fulfilled an important function. Job still grieved over his losses. Restoration of his fortunes did not nullify the pain caused by the death of ten children. Thus, his visitors **sympathized with him and comforted him concerning all the adversity** (“evil,” KJV; ESV; “trouble,” NIV) **the LORD had brought on Job**.

The Hebrew term rendered *adversity* denotes the opposite of prosperity or well-being. Hence, here the term refers to the complete sequence of events that occurred in the first two chapters of the Book of Job. Satan’s role in Job’s troubles is not mentioned in the concluding narrative. The Lord allowed Job’s life to be turned upside down, and He would be the One to return Job’s life to blessedness.

Theologically, attributing life’s adverse events to God is significant. It reminds believers of God’s sovereignty over all things. Moreover, it should comfort believers to know that even in the worst circumstances, God has everything under control and the outcome is in His hands. Believers can be assured that what God has in store for His redeemed people will far outweigh any losses experienced in this life.

Job’s visitors each **gave him a piece of silver** (“money,” KJV; ESV) **and a gold earring**. Coins did not exist in Job’s time. Nonetheless, *silver* was an important medium for trade in the Old Testament era. In the ancient Near East, silver was sometimes considered more valuable than gold. The Hebrew word used here is one of the oldest units for measuring silver’s value. *Gold* was relatively abundant in Job’s time. When smelted, the metal was very malleable and thus easily cast into various shapes. Therefore, gold was an ideal metal for making jewelry. By giving Job these two expensive gifts, his visitors expressed their honor and love for Job.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Number Systems and Number Symbolism” on pages 1168–1169 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some symbolic meanings for multiples of seven? What is your response to the fact that the Lord doubled Job’s possessions from what they were before his troubles?