

To fully understand the following Old Testament stories, one must keep in mind the spiritual darkness that was everywhere in creation before God revealed His Son, so far as truly knowing God is concerned. To read the following stories from the perspective of people living in those ancient days, we must lay aside the knowledge of God that the Son has brought to us. Otherwise, we may find ourselves imposing upon them motives and thoughts that were impossible for them, and more importantly, we may miss the greatest lesson these stories teach – the supreme value of God’s Son!

TARES IN HEAVEN: Satan and Job

The First Gathering of the Sons of God

Of the forty-two chapters in the book of Job, Satan figures in only the first two. In them, as throughout the Old Testament, Satan is depicted as an obedient servant of God. If we think of Satan as wicked when we read Job’s story, we are right; at the same time, if we think that Job or anyone else at that time saw Satan that way, we are mistaken. The Son was still hidden, and within him was hidden all wisdom and knowledge of God, which includes the knowledge of what was good and evil in God’s mind.

Nothing in Job’s story suggests that Satan was obsessed with Job, or even that Satan was particularly interested in him. God is the one who brought up the subject of Job and sent Satan to earth to afflict him, and Satan did exactly as God commanded, nothing more or less. That done, Satan is no more mentioned. The book of Job is a story about God and Job, not Satan and Job.

If we read the book of Job with this in mind, we will see that nothing in it would have revealed to anyone that Satan was evil. Here is the opening scene of Job:

Job 1

6. Now, it came to pass on the day when the sons of God came in to present themselves before the LORD that Satan also came in among them.
7. And the LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” And Satan answered the LORD, “From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.”
8. And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one who fears God and eschews evil?”
9. Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for nothing?”
10. Have you not made a hedge around him, and around his house, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.
11. But stretch out your hand now and strike all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.”
12. Then the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not put your hand on him.” So, Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

Allow me to emphasize again the universal ignorance of the time by revising verse 6 to read like this:

6. Now, it came to pass on the day when the sons of God came in to present themselves before the LORD that *Gabriel* also came in among them.

Nothing in that revised verse suggests that Gabriel is evil, does it? Just so, nothing in the original verse 6 suggested to ancient readers that Satan was evil. We have a sense of Satan's wickedness when we find him in the Old Testament only because the Son came and revealed that Satan was evil, but we should not impose that knowledge on those who lived before the Son came.

By all indications, this gathering of the sons of God was not a special or unusual event. When God asked Satan where he had been, Satan calmly replied that he had come "from going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." Such a conversation was probably routine. God was known to send heavenly beings to "travel about on the earth" (Zech. 1:10–11), and presumably, He would afterward ask them questions about their earthly visits, just as He asked Satan here. Moreover, Satan had responsibilities on earth that demanded his attention, for it was his duty as "god of this world" (2Cor. 4:4) to know what was going on among the nations. The sons of God in that heavenly meeting no doubt expected God to ask Satan about his visit to earth, and in essence, Satan's reply was, "I have been going to and fro in the earth, carrying out my regular duties."

Next, God brought up the subject of Job. He asked Satan if he had considered Job, describing him as "a perfect and upright man". Satan did not ask God who Job was. He knew who Job was, and he stated his opinion, without fear of being rebuked for it, that Job would not continue to be perfectly upright if God took Job's blessings away. Satan was not disagreeing with God's judgment of Job. Everyone in heaven knew that God's judgments are perfect, and Satan would not have been so foolish as to dispute anything God said. Satan's reply to God was only an opinion that Job would abandon his righteousness if God stopped blessing him.

Further, in their conversations, not only did Satan not disagree with God, but God did not disagree with Satan! There in that heavenly assembly, there was no quarrel or debate between God and Satan. Nothing said by either party revealed to the sons of God that Satan was evil, or even that his thoughts were different from God's. To at least some of God's sons, if not all of them, it must have appeared that God and Satan agreed that even the best of humans were contemptible and that God was handing Job over to Satan in order to watch him bring Job down.

We know that God cared deeply for Job and that He loved him, but we know that only because the Son has revealed to us that God is the embodiment of love (cf. 1Jn. 4:8, 16). Had any one of us been in God's place in Job's days, we would never have treated Job the way God treated him. No one in heaven or earth understands that kind of love. To God's heavenly sons, it would have seemed obvious that He had no concern at all for the horrific pain and suffering that He was about to pour out on helpless Job. Where was the love in that?

All God's sons knew that God knew the future, including whatever would happen in the end with Job. They, like Satan, likely thought they knew, too. But they had no idea what it really would be, and they still don't because they still do not have God's kind of life. God initiated this conversation with Satan because He had an incomprehensible blessing in mind for Job, and He had chosen Satan to be His agent in initiating the process. Then, He sat quietly on His throne, patiently allowing everyone to think whatever they wanted to think about what He was doing.

God's Plan, Not Satan's

Because we know Satan is evil, it is easy for us to overlook the reverential deference that Satan showed God. He was not hasty to talk in God's presence, but remained silent until he was spoken to, respectfully waiting for God to choose whether or not to speak, and if He spoke, to choose the subject of the conversation. We also tend to assume that Satan wanted to hurt Job, but nothing Satan said or did indicates that he even considered Job worth hurting. Besides, as the Reader has seen, Satan expected a

promotion from God, and he would not have put that promotion in jeopardy by hurting someone whom God did not want to be hurt.

There would have been no question in heaven that God was the One who wanted Job to suffer, that it was God's plan, not Satan's, that Job should suffer. Satan expressed an opinion about what Job would do if he suffered, but after expressing it, he respectfully waited for God's response, if any, to his opinion. Satan had no plans for Job and may even have been surprised that God's response was to send him to earth to ruin Job financially and kill his children. Here again is the opening scene, this time with some clarifying commentary:

Job 1

8. And the LORD said to Satan, “[*Since you have been on earth, fulfilling your obligations, tell us,*] have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one who fears God and eschews evil?”
9. Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “[*Yes, Master, I have, and he is indeed a perfect and upright man. But we all know how men are.*] Does Job fear God for nothing?”
10. Have you not made a hedge around him, and around his house, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.
11. But stretch out your hand now and strike all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.”
12. Then the LORD said to Satan [*God does not express any disagreement with Satan*], “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not put your hand on him.” So, Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD [*to do the harm to Job that God commanded him to do*].

Satan swiftly accomplished the cruel mission laid upon him by God. But what else would any of God's sons have done? If God had sent Gabriel to afflict Job, would Gabriel have refused to obey God's command? Of course not. Then, how could Satan's carrying out the mission God gave him have revealed to anyone that he was wicked? Indeed, it would have been wicked if he had *not* brought disaster upon Job. Even if someone on earth at that time somehow knew that Satan existed and that he brought those disasters upon Job, they would have seen him only as a fearsome and obedient instrument of God, not an evil one.

Neither Job nor his three friends who came to him during his suffering ever blamed Satan for Job's afflictions. Job and his friends did not agree on much, but they always agreed that it was God who was afflicting Job. It was clearly irrelevant to them which agent, if any, God used in the process; they blamed Satan no more than they blamed the storm that killed Job's children or the Sabeans and Chaldeans who killed Job's servants and stole his herds. We do not know whether Job and his friends even knew Satan existed, but if they did, they were still wise enough to know that God alone is responsible for what happens to His servants.¹

The Second Gathering of the Sons of God

At an unspecified time after Satan performed his gruesome duty, stripping Job of all that he possessed and killing his children, there was another gathering of the sons of God. Satan, as usual, was among them. By this time, Job's humble attitude through his suffering may have earned some respect in heaven; Satan himself must have been impressed, at least a little, that Job had not become bitter against God, as his wife had (Job 2:9); instead, he clung tenaciously to his righteousness. As in the first meeting

¹ For more on this issue, see my book, *Suffering and the Saints*, available for reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

of the sons of God, Satan respectfully waited for God to initiate any conversation, which God did again, asking Satan where he had been. And again, God, not Satan, brought up the subject of Job. With a few clarifying comments, here is the scene:

Job 2

2. The LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” And Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.”
3. And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one who fears God and eschews evil? And still, he holds fast his integrity, even though you moved me against him to destroy him without cause.”
4. And Satan answered the LORD and said, “[*Yes, Job is holding fast his integrity. Still, we all know how men are. They love themselves and will do anything to save their own necks.*] Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has, he will give for his life.
5. Stretch out your hand now and strike his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.”
6. And the LORD said to Satan [*as before, God neither rebukes nor expresses any disagreement with Satan*], “Behold, he is in your hand. But spare his life.”
7. So, Satan went out from the presence of the LORD [*to do as God commanded him*], and he struck Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the top of his head.²

It is instructive to note that in neither of the conversations between God and Satan recorded in the opening chapters of Job did Satan ask permission to afflict Job; he did not even speak as if he either wanted or expected God to use him to afflict Job. In both conversations (1:11 and 2:5), Satan said that if *God* afflicted Job, then Job would turn against God. It was altogether God’s decision to send Satan instead of someone else to do what He wanted done to Job. Paul said that whatever God does, He does according to His own will (Eph. 1:11), and that is as true of His choice to send Satan to afflict Job as it is about anything He has done.

Those two heavenly scenes are remarkable for their relaxed atmosphere. God was pleasant and courteous with Satan, as Satan also was with God, and God left the door open for Satan to express his thoughts. Again, God’s sons witnessed no conflict between God and Satan, no debate, no contradiction, and no difference in judgment concerning Job’s character. Instead of exposing Satan’s wickedness, Satan’s apparent respect for God and his unhesitating obedience to God’s commands would have commended him to the other sons of God as a dutiful agent of the Almighty. If you think something in those two opening scenes reveals that Satan was evil, then you should reread them again and this time, try not to carry back into Job’s time the knowledge that the Son brought to earth much later.

What Satan did to Job was undeniably cruel, but God had commanded it to be done in an open assembly of His sons. Who in heaven, then, would have seen Satan as evil for his cruelty to Job when he was only carrying out God’s command to be cruel? Had the sons of God judged Satan to be wicked for his cruel treatment of righteous Job, they would have had to judge God as the source of that wickedness, and that was unthinkable. God was trying all their hearts by hiding His thoughts.

“I Will Not Let It Go!”

² Job’s sufferings were many and extreme. Besides the boils that are often spoken of, Satan afflicted Job for months with horrific ailments, both physical and mental. The tormenting role that Job’s three friends played suggests that even they were inspired by Satan, not by compassion, to come to Job.

Job's horrific ordeal continued for months, and if there were any in heaven observing him, they must have been impressed with Job's determination to maintain his righteousness:

Job 23

11. My foot has held fast to His steps. I have kept His way and I have not turned aside.

12a. Nor have I departed from the commandment of His lips.

Job 27

5b. Until I die, I will not forsake my integrity!

6a. I will hold fast to my righteousness and I will not let it go!

So Job thought. God's secret purpose for Job's great suffering was to compel him to let go of his righteousness so that he might be honored with a taste of God's kind of righteousness – long before the hidden Son would come and reveal it! Because of Job's strong determination to stay right with God (as Job understood what "right with God" meant), that purpose was not easily accomplished. But Job cannot be blamed for resisting what God was trying to do for him. The thought of being without righteousness terrified him, and he clung to it as his most precious possession, more precious than life itself!

The Struggle Not To Struggle

Years ago, I had a dream from the Lord related to this. In my dream, I was in a trench at night on the front lines of a fierce battle. Smoke thickened the darkness, and gunfire and bursting shells provided flashes that revealed a devastated landscape. Suddenly, I found myself engaged in bitter hand-to-hand combat with a strong enemy soldier. He got me on my back in the dusty trench and gripped my throat with his powerful hands. Desperately, I struggled to twist away from the death-grip, flailing with my fists, kicking, grabbing for his face or hair – anything that I could do to get him off me. In the midst of my struggle, I looked up into his face, and to my utter surprise, I saw that it was Jesus. His face showed no sign of the hatred that I expected to see. His look was solemn and determined but not angry. Then I understood. I was fighting against the blessing of dying to self and living to God, and, realizing that, my struggle then turned into an internal one. It became a struggle not to struggle against what the Lord was trying to do for me. Everything in my flesh wanted to fight against Jesus and stay alive, but everything in my spirit wanted Jesus to win. At the end of my dream, I was there in the trench, struggling to make my flesh cooperate with Jesus and let him kill me.

That was Job's struggle, but he did not have the knowledge of the Son of God to help him with it, the knowledge that we on this side of Pentecost possess. For me, it was a choice between my righteousness and the righteousness of God that Jesus wanted me to have. In Job's mind, it was a choice between righteousness and nothing, and Job trembled at the thought of standing before God with nothing.

Opinions

Satan would not have been the only one in heaven who expected Job to become bitter and turn from righteousness, for by Job's time, they had doubtless seen human integrity crumble many times under the weight of sufferings much lighter than Job's. Job's steadfast patience and faith may have caused some of the sons of God to wonder if they all had been wrong about him. Even at that, however, Job's patience would not have made Satan, or them, appear wicked. The holding of an opinion is not sin, even if the opinion is proved wrong.

If ignorance were sin, then every creature in heaven and earth would be sinning merely by not being God, for only God knows everything. Even when Satan and his angels were at last cast out of heaven, the faithful angels who were allowed to stay remained ignorant of many things, as Paul and Peter both plainly taught (Eph. 3:9–10; 1Pet. 1:12). Moreover, if ignorance were sin, then the Son himself would be a sinner because even he does not know all that the Father knows (Mk. 13:32). Satan’s opinion of Job, no doubt shared by many others in heaven, is completely understandable, and nobody was condemned by God for holding it. God knew from the beginning what Satan would think Job would do if He took away his blessings, and rather than become indignant at what Satan thought, He used it to accomplish His inscrutable purpose.

God has no opinions, only knowledge, and Satan understood that. If God had rebuked Satan and told him, “You are wrong, Satan. Job will stand firm, no matter what happens,” Satan would have believed God. That would have been the end of the matter, and the story of Job would not be in the Bible. But God did not tell what He knew. He had something wonderful in mind for Job, and God used His ignorant creatures, Satan in heaven and humans on earth, to accomplish His wonderful purpose. *That is how God always worked before the Son was revealed. Since the the day the Spirit was poured out on man, God has had children who know Him, but before the Son was revealed, ignorant creatures were the only kind of creatures available for God to use.* And throughout the process, God calmly sat on His throne, satisfied to let everyone assume whatever they wanted to assume about Him, what He thought and what He was doing.

God’s patience is terrifying.

Job’s Judgment Day

The most trying part of Job’s suffering was not the unparalleled afflictions of his body and mind that God sent upon him, but the refusal of God to communicate with him. The God whom Job had grown to love and trust ceased speaking to him, and Job did not know why. His tears and desperate cries for help from God were met with stone-cold silence for months on end. What could heaven have thought but that God was indifferent to human suffering? And what could men on earth have thought, even the best of men, but that Job had sinned in some way and provoked God’s wrath?

If anything could have pushed Job over the edge to follow his wife’s counsel to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9), his sense of being forsaken by God would have done it. But Job was determined to hold on to righteousness, even to the death, and even if it felt as if God was no longer holding on to him:

Job 23

8. Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him;
9. on the left hand where He is working, but I cannot behold Him; He is hiding Himself on the right hand so that I cannot see Him.
10. Still, He knows how it is with me, and when He has tried me, I will come forth like gold.

Throughout his terrible suffering, Job begged for God to come to him, and after Satan failed to break Job, God did. However, one of the mystifying elements of Job’s story, until we understand it, is that when God finally did come to Job, His tone was very harsh. Job had been a stellar example of steadfast righteousness in the midst of the greatest suffering, and so, we would have expected God to come to Job with words of comfort, even praise. Why, then, did God add to Job’s awful burden by attacking him with pitiless verbal abuse?

Even in the middle of God’s thunderous, final speech, when Job surrendered all claims of purity and cried out, “I am insignificant!” (Job 40:4), God mocked him for contradicting God’s judgment that Job was a “perfect and upright” man:

Job 40

7. Gird your loins now, like a man! I will ask you, and you teach me!
8. Would you really annul my judgment? Would you condemn me so that you may be justified?

Who was Job, to say that he was not what God said he was (even if he did not know that God had said it)? Satan never once argued against God’s judgment like that. How dare Job do such a thing? It was to Job, not Satan, that God was referring when He demanded, “Who is this who darkens counsel with words without knowledge?” (Job 38:1–2). And then, to further complicate the matter for the Reader of Job’s story, as well as for any heavenly observers, God threatened Job’s friends with this assessment of Job’s words: “My wrath is kindled against you, for you have not spoken what is right about me, as my servant Job has” (Job 42:7).³

Who in heaven or earth could have figured this out? How could God say that Job had “spoken of me what is right”, and at the same time say that he had spoken “words without knowledge”? And complicating the matter even further is the fact that while God seemed warm and courteous with Satan, He seemed cold and harsh toward Job! Judging by appearances, one would have thought that God and Satan were alike and that Job was evil. But judging by appearances is an error that Jesus warned us not to make (Jn. 7:24; cf. Mt. 7:1),

God’s stern response to Job’s humble confession sealed everyone in darkness as to His purpose, including poor Job. Job had just spent months defending himself as pure. Then God showed up and seemed to be very displeased with Job for doing that. So, Job humbly confessed what he thought God wanted to hear, namely, that he was vile. But God then rebuked Job for saying that, too! God intentionally made it impossible for Job to know what to do or say, or even what to think. If both “Yes, I am” and “No, I’m not” are wrong, what is left?

It was an utterly terrifying, Judgment Day kind of moment for Job, with his soul seemingly hanging in the balance. He had said that if God would come to him, he would fill his mouth with arguments (Job 23:4), but when he finally heard from the Almighty, Job was left speechless. Through long months of unrelenting agony, Job had begged for God to come to him because he expected God to affirm and comfort him when He came. Instead, God came fiercely, condemning whatever came out of Job’s mouth, demanding a multitude of impossible answers from Job, and saying nothing good about him. Job simply collapsed in utter confusion, not even sure of who he was anymore:

Job 42

1. Then Job answered the LORD and said,
2. “I know that you can do anything; not even an intent can be kept from you.
3. Who is this⁴ who obscures counsel without knowledge? That is why I went on, making declarations. But I have no understanding of things too wondrous for me. No, I did not know.
4. Hear, I beg you, and I will speak. I will ask you, and you will teach me.

³ God spoke these words to Job’s friends before Job’s sufferings were completely ended (Job 42:7–10), but after He had finished His lengthy address to Job. I use them here to help show how utterly hopeless and helpless God was making Job feel at this point.

⁴ Literally, “Who is this man?”

5. I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.
6. It makes me despise myself, and I repent in dirt and ashes.”

Forced into a Blessing

God had to crush Job to make him willing to receive the unheard-of blessing that God had for him. God pressed Job so far down that Job tasted the humility found only in God’s kind of righteousness, and in that humility, Job saw everything of earth, its yes and its no, its good and its evil, the best and the worst of it, as filth before God. Having touched upon God’s kind of life, Job now sensed that he knew nothing, indeed, that he *was* nothing, and he gave in to a new kind of surrender; *it was what amounted to repentance for being merely human.*⁵ He stopped struggling against the One trying to force him to give up on himself and all that he knew, and taste of eternal life. And when he surrendered, that single taste of God’s life created within Job the realization that nothing he could do or say would justify him before God, no matter how perfect he was in the righteousness he knew. That is the New Testament revelation given to Paul, not yet revealed because it was hidden in the Son, who was still unknown.

Job was blessed to feel, as no other human ever had felt, the absolute hopelessness of all mankind. His heart now knew, even if his mind could not fathom it, the sobering truth that Jesus would one day speak to his disciples: “With men, [escape from damnation] is impossible” (Mk. 10:27a). But to get Job to that place, God had to crush Job’s spirit under a double terror. First, God forced Job’s eyes open to the blinding brightness of knowledge that no degree of righteousness on earth would ever justify him before God. Second, God forced Job’s heart open to the terrifying truth that there was no earthly way of obtaining a righteousness that would save him. With man, Job saw, it was indeed impossible to *escape God’s displeasure*. Job felt hopeless. He stood naked before God, with no means of covering himself, and with only the lovingkindness of God in which to hope. Job suddenly knew, as no other man had ever known, *that God alone had to save, or no one could be saved*. God compelled Job to taste the sweet rest that comes with abandoning hope in anything but the grace of God.

Job’s forced awareness that his righteousness was nothing in God’s sight is the only thing that could have made him willing to let his righteousness go. After *all, he was force to conclude, if his righteousness was nothing to God, was the use of clinging to it?* In the end, no option remained for Job but to surrender all claims of righteousness and to put all his hope in the mercy of God. Then, and no doubt to his very great surprise, Job learned that God takes pleasure in those who hope in His mercy (cf. Ps. 147:11). And in knowing that, Job discovered an unknown peace.

With the Son still hidden, Job could not have understood all that he was feeling, but he did feel it. He still did not understand God’s ways or God’s thoughts. It is doubtful even that Job ever understood fully, as long as he lived on earth, what God had done to him, but Job had been fully rewarded for his great devotion to God with a taste of God’s kind of life before the Son paid the price for it to be given.

Forever Changed

Satan predicted that if Job was afflicted enough, Job would “curse God to His face”, and in that, Satan was proved wrong. At the same time, Job’s confession of self-abhorrence and repentance (Job 42:6) contradicted his previous confessions of purity. So, even though Job did not curse God as Satan said he would do, God forced him to abandon his righteousness and confess himself to be unclean — which was, essentially, what Satan had meant when he said that Job would “curse God to his face”.

⁵ This kind of surrender is what God demands in the New Testament, with the result of a repentant soul becoming a no longer merely human, but a new kind creature, one with a human body but God’s kind of life within it.

To God's heavenly sons as well as to men, righteousness was righteousness, no matter whose righteousness it was; nowhere in creation did there exist the concept of different kinds of righteousness. They would have seen Job's confession of a lack of righteousness as proof of no righteousness at all, rather than that he was overwhelmed by God's kind, and to them, that meant Satan's opinion had not been far off the mark. What they did not know, and what Job also did not know, was that in confessing his worthlessness, Job was confessing a lack of God's righteousness. Job really was "a perfect and upright man", but God had transported him beyond perfection, that is, beyond the uncleanness of perfection in earthly righteousness.

Until God showed up, Job stubbornly insisted that he was pure because it is as ungodly for the righteous to say they are sinful as it is for the sinful to say they are righteous (cf. Isa. 5:20). All along, Job felt compelled to confess his righteousness because he would not lie, and he knew that he had been perfectly righteous according to the standard of righteousness he knew. When his sufferings were past, Job still possessed that kind of righteousness, in that he still did not sin, but to Job, that righteousness was no longer worth much. God's love was his hope.

Beyond Perfection

God is so holy that it is beneath Him to behold what is in heaven, much less what is on earth:

Psalm 113

4. The LORD is high above all nations. His glory is above the heavens.
5. Who is like the LORD our God, who makes His home on high?
6. He abases Himself to look at what is in heaven as well as on earth!

God was right when He testified of Job that no one on earth was like him, but then, there was no one like Job in heaven, either. Who among the billions of heavenly creatures was so loved by God that God permitted him to feel the uselessness of his righteousness and be made more than perfect with God?

The only way a perfect man like Job could have gone beyond perfection was for God to interrupt the normal course of life and take him there, and that is what God did. He came to Job and to a very few others before the Son was revealed, and He carried each of them to the door of His most holy place, a place which no one in heaven or earth knew existed. None of them, of themselves, made the journey; God took them there simply because He chose to. *He knew, though they did not, that their hearts were yearning for His kind of life, and every person He took to the door of that hidden place was forever changed by the experience.* It was a place of such frightful holiness that they knew that no righteousness known to man could protect them, and after visiting that holy place, they became mystery figures, somewhat like the hidden Son, but in their cases, they became a mystery even to themselves.

When God unlawfully forgave David of adultery and murder (2Sam. 12:13), it was a taste of New Testament mercy, forbidden by the law (Lev. 20:10; Num. 35:31), and it made David an unwanted alien to this world, even to most of Israel (cf. 2Sam. 20:1–2). Moses glimpsed God in His glory on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:5–8), and no one ever could bear to look upon Moses' shining face again (Ex. 34:29–35). David and Moses survived their experiences, but they were transformed by them into something beyond the ordinary state of man. Just a touch of God's kind of life made them aliens in this world, like the Son of God when he came to earth (Ps. 119:19a).

Made Willing

Job cursed his own life (Job 3:1ff), but the principal reason Job did not curse God, too, once he relinquished faith in his righteousness, is that by that time, God had beaten Job so far down that he could

not even think to do it. A man must have a vestige of self-esteem left in him to be able to feel wronged and to complain about it; he must think enough of himself to think that his curse is worth uttering and his integrity is worth defending. Job did not; he had been driven too close to the abject humility of Christ than to think that he was worthy to judge anything, least of all the works of God. Through David, the hidden Son of God foretold how he would be made to feel as a human on earth:

Psalm 22

6. I am a worm, and not a man, a reproach to men, and despised by people.
7. Everyone who sees me ridicules me. They smirk; they shake the head

Job knew how that felt.

Job's sense of unworthiness before God, though being perfectly righteous, was an impossible conviction for his time. It was a New Testament kind of conviction for a righteousness that comes only by receiving the Spirit of God. It is the "godly sorrow that produces repentance" spoken of by Paul (2Cor. 7:10). That kind of conviction was withheld from men until the Son came and made the Spirit available; otherwise, men's souls would have been tormented, as Job's was, by perpetual hunger with no possibility of relief. Job's torment not only left him more confused than humanly possible, but it also left him more humble than humanly possible, and therefore, more like God than humanly possible – and more in love than humanly possible with the God he still did not know. Thousands of years after Job died, God was still praising him (Ezek. 14:14, 20), but even then, no one understood what God had really done to Job because no one yet had God's kind of life.

God Took Him There

When Jesus took on our sinful nature and became a curse for us (2Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13), he knew what he was doing, but Job was made willing to stand before God without righteousness and be cursed without knowing what was happening to him. Only God could have made Job confess to being wrong when everything Job had ever known told him that he was righteous and that he must under all conditions stay that way. Nevertheless, when God did so and Job surrendered his claim to righteousness, Job found to his astonishment that he was not cursed, but blessed with a closeness to God that surpassed all human understanding, even Job's.

So, in spite of how it appears, God *did* come to Job with comfort and peace, and even praise, but that kind of comfort and peace, and that kind of praise, is so foreign to this creation that creatures within it perceive it as a curse. Men likewise thought Jesus was cursed by God, even though he did nothing but good:

Isaiah 53

3. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He was like one hiding his face from us. He was despised, and we did not value him.
4. He took our sicknesses and bore our sufferings, yet we considered him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

How far from God's thoughts humans are! I mentioned earlier that when God said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways," He was speaking to man. That is true, but the truth is that humans are so far from His thoughts and ways that they don't even know what He was talking about. *The only way for human beings to know God's thoughts and ways is for God to reveal them. And even then, the revelation has to be believed, or His thoughts and ways will remain unknown.*

None of us, in ourselves, can desire God as He really is, for what He really is, is contrary to everything in our nature. God has to make us willing to come to the real Him, and sometimes, like Job, it takes quite a while for us to be willing. Yet, God is patient with us because He is so determined to bless us, just as He was determined to bless Job. His terrifying patience is, in fact, our hope (2Pet. 3:15).

It took months of horrific pain and sorrow for Job to become willing to let God take him beyond perfection. God patiently watched and waited as Satan and men did His bidding, and after He came and Job gave up and became willing, but could go no further by himself, when Job had to be picked up and carried to the threshold of the “secret place of the Most High”, God came and picked him up, and took him there. And in truth, to be carried by God is the only way anyone ever gets there. Jesus told his disciples, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him” (Jn. 6:44), and, “You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (Jn. 15:16).

None of us who now have God’s kind of life have it because we wanted it; we have it because God wanted us. We sought God only because He put it into our hearts to come to Him, often by sending affliction or trouble into our lives, waking us up to our need of Him. God has to create in us a hunger for His kind of life, and when He does that, we fall on our knees and seek Him for the relief from ourselves that His Spirit brings – the relief most people fear, or hate, preferring to cling to their own kind of life and righteousness instead, as Job did for so long.

Poor Job?

I have used the phrases, “poor Job” and “helpless Job”, but both are an assessment of Job from the standpoint of this world. From a human perspective, suffering Job was pathetic, and even the basest of men despised him:

Job 30

1. Those younger than I mock me, whose fathers I would have refused to put among the dogs of my flock.
- ...
8. Fools, worthless people, they are driven out of the land with whips.
9. But now, I have become their song. I am a byword to them.
10. They loathe me; they keep far from me and do not hesitate to spit in my face.

From Job’s wise friends to the basest of men in Job’s community, everyone was certain that Job had secretly sinned and was worthy of contempt. That is what all people of earth, even the best of them, have always thought of those whom God loves. From the beginning, God determined that the pathway into His kingdom would be fraught with suffering (Acts 14:22), and those whom God calls to walk that path are blessed, regardless of what it looks like to men. “We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good,” wrote Paul (Rom. 8:28). *And that was one truth that some men grasped, to an extent, before the Son was revealed. Joseph understood it, and it made him able to tell his brothers that God, not they, sold him into slavery in Egypt and that through that cruelty, God had positioned him to become ruler of Egypt next to Pharaoh so that he might save their lives (Gen. 45:7).* Paul knew perfectly well that God sent him to Rome in chains so that he could testify about Jesus to Caesar. If Paul had traveled to Rome on his own as a free man, Caesar would never have granted him a hearing. Even the most righteous souls on earth are blessed with chastening from God so that they might be made more like Him and bear more fruit, as Jesus told his disciples:

John 15

1. I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.
2. He takes away every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, and He prunes every branch that does bear fruit so that it might bear more fruit.

And the author of Hebrews gave this exhortation to suffering saints:

Hebrews 12

9. We certainly have had fathers of our flesh who chastened us and we revered them. Shall we not much rather submit ourselves to the Father of spirits, and live?
10. They, for just a short time, disciplined us as it pleased them; but He for our benefit, that we might partake of His holiness.

If those who are chastened are blessed, as David said (Ps. 94:12–13), then David was being blessed with chastisement when wicked Shimei stood on the hill cursing him and throwing dirt and stones down upon him and his men (2Sam. 16:5–8). David certainly saw it that way, and he told his angry companions to leave Shimei alone, that God had sent him to do those things to him (2Sam. 16:9–10). Because of Jesus, who suffered for us, we now know that only those who suffer will be saved (Rom. 8:17; 2Tim. 3:12). Sometimes they will suffer for righteousness, sometimes for the lack of it, and sometimes simply to increase in it, but the wise humbly submit to whatever suffering they must face, knowing that in Christ, it always has a good purpose. “If we persevere [with Christ],” wrote Paul, “we will also reign with him” (2Tim. 2:12), and we will persevere in righteousness if we, like Paul, consider our sufferings in this world to be “unworthy of comparison with the glory that shall be revealed” (Rom. 8:18).

Job, after his suffering, would certainly have agreed with Paul, that the glory into which God pressed him was worth all that he had suffered, and more. God loved Job as much as He could love him without revealing His Son. For the fullness of God's love, Job would have to wait until the Son's unveiling. Had the men who despised Job known God, they would have much preferred Job's lot to theirs, for with each new sorrow, Job was being forced closer to the greatest blessing possible before the day of Pentecost: a taste of God's kind of life.

Man in His Best State

Jesus equated the knowledge of God with eternal life (Jn. 17:3), and no price can be too high for us to pay to obtain it. God certainly thought that no price was too high for us to have it, for He purchased it with the life of His beloved Son. After Jesus brought the haughty young Paul down from his Pharisaic perch into his kind of humility, Paul valued more than his own life the knowledge of God which the Son had compelled him to find:

Philippians 3

8. I consider all things but loss for the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of everything. But I consider it all garbage, that I might gain Christ,
9. and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is by the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God, based on faith,
- 10a. that I might know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings,

People who feel that living and worshipping with their own kind of life is sufficient for salvation, as Job once did, often feel unjustly attacked, as Job also did, when they come face to face with God's kind of life. The wisdom in God's life exposes even the wisest of men to be foolish; His power exposes man's need; and His righteousness brings to light what Job's heart learned, which is that "every man in his best state is altogether vanity" (Ps. 39:5b). **Nothing but God's life reveals the worthlessness of man in his best state, that is, a man living in perfect human righteousness, like Job.**

Neither Job nor his three friends were fools. Job would not have had fools for friends. They were, much like Job, shining examples of man in his best state, and their unjust condemnation of Job was the best judgment that man in his best state had to offer. Job agreed with his friends that his suffering was the work of God; however, Job was the only one wise enough or humble enough to admit that he did not know why God was doing it. They assumed, based on their own knowledge and wisdom, that God was afflicting Job because Job had sinned, and they challenged Job to name one righteous person in all of history whom God had afflicted as He was afflicting him (Job 5:1, 27). But Job, with the same kind of knowledge and experience his three friends possessed, argued just as passionately that he was pure – until God appeared with His kind of righteousness, making Job's argument seem as foolish to Job as theirs had previously seemed to him.

Like a Slave

Man's view of God is in a direction different from the direction to which Jesus pointed them. That is why men always look the wrong way when they search for greatness. God had to beat righteous Job down in order to get him to look in the right direction. What God sees as up, men see as down, and they avoid it; and what God sees as down, men see as up, and they pursue it. My father said in a sermon many years ago, "The way up is down, and the way down is up." With that, he was echoing the hidden wisdom of the Son of God, who said, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk. 14:11).

When Jesus said, "I am meek and lowly" (Mt. 11:29), no one understood his kind of meekness. How could a meek and lowly man overturn the money-changers' tables in the temple, dump their money out onto the floor, drive out the animals with a whip, and their owners, too, and angrily command them, "Get these things out of here! Don't you make my Father's house a marketplace!" (Jn. 2:14–16; cf. Mt. 21:12–13). Jesus was continually demonstrating God's kind of meekness (e.g., Lk. 14:7–10), and men were continually confused by it. Once, when his disciples were quarreling over which of them would be the greatest, Jesus took a little child, stood him before them, and warned them that if they did not become like that child, they would never enter his Father's kingdom, much less be the greatest in it (Mt. 18:1–3). They did not understand that admonition; man's spirit cannot take it in. Even at the Last Supper, they fell into a quarrel over who would be greatest (Lk. 22:24). Then, Jesus again explained to them that God's kind of greatness is different from man's, saying, "He who is greatest among you must be as the youngest, and he who rules, like one who serves. . . . I am in your midst as one who serves" (Lk. 22:26–27). Then Jesus wrapped a towel about him, bowed down as a lowly slave would do, and washed the disciples' feet (Jn. 13:2–5). None of them believed, however, or could have believed at that time, that in doing this, Jesus was showing them the heart of God.

After Job's suffering ended, he was once again blessed in ways that men could see and understand, but until the end of his earthly life, Job could never again be impressed with human righteousness, nor could he have understood altogether what had happened to him. As much as God loved Job, He was determined that His Son would have the honor of revealing His kind of love and righteousness. Until then, God did not allow that knowledge into any man's heart:

1 Corinthians 2

9. As it is written, “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered the heart of man the things God has prepared for those who love Him.”
10. But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

Satan Was Pleased

God knew Job’s confession of vileness might lead some in heaven, especially Satan, to believe they had been right to think Job would forsake righteousness if enough pressure was applied to him. Job did stop trusting in his righteousness; indeed, he came to despise it. Seeing that, many in heaven must have thought Job was despising righteousness altogether, for they did not know that another kind of righteousness existed. They did not know that God’s thunderous condemnation of Job came from a righteousness that was beyond the perfection they knew about, a righteousness known only to God and His Son. They had no way of knowing that the “condemnation” was actually an invitation to Job to come visit “the secret place of the Most High”, where the Son was hidden, to breathe in its sweet aroma and to feel its power and glory.

We are not told what took place at the next gathering of the sons of God, but Satan must have walked into the meeting with satisfaction. In his view, God’s rebuke of Job, together with Job’s confession of wretchedness, had proved him substantially right. Though he himself had not been unable to compel Job to surrender his tight grip on righteousness and curse God, he now thought he perceived what God’s point had been all along, that Job was so strong-willed that only God could make him turn from his righteousness — *what Satan had said Job would do if enough pressure was applied. Satan’s opinion that Job would “curse God to His face” was figurative speech, meaning that Job would despise righteousness as worthless, which Job did (knowing nothing of the righteousness of God). That only God could bring Job to do it would not have embarrassed Satan in the least;* everyone in heaven knew that God was greater than all, and if God had wanted to use a strong-willed man on earth to show again that only He had enough power to expose Job as weak and contemptible, then so be it. Instead of hanging his head in shame, Satan would have basked in the glory of having been right about Job, even though it took God’s personal intervention to prove it.

Satan, gratified, no doubt praised God more than ever in the heavenly Assembly. When all was said and done, the only conclusion Satan could have reached was that God had known from the beginning that nothing Satan did would make Job turn him away from righteousness and that from the beginning, God planned to do it Himself, thus to demonstrate once more to all of heaven that He was the greatest. Satan was sure that God was just like him, proud of His glory and power, and willing to destroy the lives of innocent souls like Job in order to demonstrate His superiority. Didn’t God sometimes speak contemptuously of humans through the prophets?

Isaiah 2

22. Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils! For wherein is he to be accounted of?

Isaiah 40

5. Behold! The nations are as a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as fine dust on a balance. Behold! Islands are as fine dust floating in air.

.....

17. All the nations are as nothing before Him – less than nothing! They are considered nothingness before Him.

Satan was pleased. God was patient.

Leviathan

In the last part of God’s fierce address to Job, He spoke of a creature He called “Leviathan”. No one knew that God was referring to Satan. Not even Satan would have guessed it as he smugly watched God pummel Job with unanswerable questions about this mysterious creature. He knew what God was saying, but did not know what God was thinking:

Job 41

1. Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook, or his tongue with a cord which you let down [*as I drew Satan into a conversation about you, Job*]?
2. Can you put a hook into his nose, or bore his jaw through with a thorn? [*as I hooked Satan and manipulated him to accomplish my will for you*]?
3. Will he make many supplications to you [*as Satan makes requests to me*⁶]? Will he speak soft words to you [*as Satan speaks to me*]?
4. Will he make a covenant with you, [*as Satan does with me*⁷]? Will you take him for a servant forever, [*as Satan serves me*]?
5. Will you play with him as with a bird, [*as I am toying with Satan this very moment*⁸]?

It is easy to imagine Satan listening in the background, pleased to see God beating Job down with impossible questions, totally blind to the meaning of God’s words. But then, no one in heaven or earth understood God’s words because what God was doing for Job was entirely a matter of the heart, and God alone knows the heart (Acts 15:8).

The Third Option

God’s eventual restoration of Job’s health and possessions would have been seen by Satan as no more than a meaningless consolation prize for the loser, given to Job only after he broke down and forsook his righteousness. And if the Son had not come and given us an understanding, Job’s repentance and restoration would have appeared the same way to us. Without the Son, we might also have thought that God sent Satan to afflict Job because He agreed with Satan about him. We might have concluded, like Satan, that God’s plan all along had been to glorify Himself by making the best man on earth confess his worthlessness after even the wise and powerful Satan had tried and failed. And we might also have thought, as many still think, that God sent Satan to test Job. Even Job thought he was being tested (Job 23:10), as did the wise young man Elihu (Job 34:36). But Job’s ordeal was not a test. It was a reward.

Job was driven by God to repent, in a sense, for being human, even though before the Son came, there was no cure for that disease. God’s powerful presence made Job feel deeply the vanity of his kind of life, the only life he knew, but mankind would have to wait until the coming of the Spirit, purchased

⁶ See Luke 22:31, where Satan had asked God for permission to sift Jesus’ disciples.

⁷ As is shown in Isaiah 43:3–4.

⁸ Cf. Ps. 104:26.

by the sacrifice of the Son, to be delivered from the bondage of their kind of life — delivered from both its sinfulness *and* its righteousness!

A dear brother in Christ, Gary Savelli, once remarked that one of the beautiful things about the truth is that it liberates us from taking either side in the controversies of this world. The truth provides a heavenly third option, for it is neither the way good people of the world see life nor the way evil people see it. The truth is “a new and living way” which no one can see. We all know that God is neither male nor female, neither young nor old, and so forth. But God is also neither wise nor foolish — the way the world knows wisdom and foolishness. Nor is He right or wrong, or good or evil — the way the world thinks of right and wrong, and good and evil. God is completely other than everything we know with our own kind of life! When God said, “Your ways are not my ways” (Isa. 55:8), He meant *all* of our ways, whether they be what we think is good or what we think is evil.

Thoughtless

The glory of the place to which God took Job left Job more than speechless; it left him thoughtless. What can one think when confronted with a completely unknown kind of life? In the presence of that life, Job was forced to be still and to experience spiritual rest, that is, the absence of all human ways and thoughts. *In the blinding beauty of God’s kind of life, Job might not have been able to see it clearly, but he could sense the vanity of human life, and Job felt an abhorrence of himself because he, like Solomon, felt it so strongly.* Job and Solomon’s shared hatred of earthly life (cf. Eccl. 2:17) was exactly what Jesus later would say that every person must feel before they can become his disciple: “If any man comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and his wife and children, and his brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk. 14:26). That healing kind of hatred is possible only in hearts in which God creates a desire for His kind of life. This is why Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him.” No one can even *want* to come to Jesus until God creates that desire within him.

Satan may have rejoiced that God brought Job down to the dust where Satan thought he belonged, but in bringing Job down to the dust, God had actually raised Job up so high that Satan couldn’t see him. Job had repented for things beyond his power to change, such as for not having the true knowledge of God, for being merely “perfect and upright”, and for not seeing beyond his perfect righteousness. Job’s mind was useless to help him understand what he was repenting for, but his broken heart knew that he must, and so, he humbled himself in the sight of God, and God – not any of the many works of righteousness that Job had done – lifted Job up. That is the common experience of New Testament believers (Tit. 3:4–6; Jas. 4:10), but in Job’s time, it was unheard-of. Job never confessed to any specific sins because he had not committed any. He repented and abhorred himself only because he had been ushered into a place of such holiness that it made the righteousness he knew feel unclean.

“Wash Me, Not the Animals!”

Long after Job’s ordeal, King David, also broken in spirit, pleaded for the same relief from human nature which Job wanted:

Psalm 51

2. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin,
3. for I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is continually before me!
- ...
7. Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

...

10. Create a clean heart for me, O God, and make within me a new, steadfast spirit!

David's cry for God to wash *him* was not a cry for another ceremony but for a washing of his soul, which was not available in his time. Under the law, priests could wash themselves (Ex. 30:18–21) and wash the sacrificial meat (Lev. 1:9, 13, etc.), but the law did not provide for anyone to wash another *person*. God never ordained anyone but Moses to wash another person, and Moses did that only once, when he consecrated Aaron and his sons to begin their Levitical priesthood (Lev. 8:1–6). Later, when Moses prophesied of the coming Messiah, he told Israel to look for a prophet like him (Dt. 18:15), that is, someone who would wash people, not things.

That washing of others – the washing of their souls – was what David and Job were crying out for and what John the Baptizer declared that the Messiah would do (Mt. 3:11). The washing of the spirits of men, the answer to the prayers of Job and David, would be the Messiah's credentials, the proof that he was the One. On the day of Pentecost, when the resurrected Jesus began washing souls from sin (Tit. 3:5–6; Rev. 1:5b–6a), God was giving proof, His personal testimony, that Jesus was the Messiah, and John said that to refuse that holy testimony, the baptism of the Spirit, is to call God a liar:

1John 5

10. He who does not believe God has made Him *out to be* a liar because he has not believed in the witness that God has given concerning His Son.

Others besides Job and David longed for the grace that God would one day give. Nevertheless, “these all died in faith, not having received the promises; however, they saw them far away, and welcomed them, and confessed that they were foreigners and pilgrims on the earth. . . . And these all, given a good testimony because of their faith, did not receive the Promise” (Heb. 11:13, 39). That Promise was the relief that Job and David prayed for, the relief brought to man by the Spirit from his own kind of life. Just days before that relief was first given, Jesus commanded his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for it:

Acts 1

4. Being assembled together with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem but to await the Promise of the Father, “which”, he said, “you have heard about from me.
- 5.. John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized with holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Until the Son came, those who were touched by God's life to feel a longing for the Promise neither understood their longing nor knew that such a relief could ever be given. However, just to feel it made them blessed above all others.