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The Message of Job

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a teaching for the Ten Days of Awe

The Book of Job, appearing in the Wisdom literature of the Tanach, is often a head scratching text for many people reading it. *It is not easy for many people to read*, but by no means should any of us avoid it. Job is unique among the books of our Holy Bible for many important reasons. And with many books of the Tanach, there are a few questions asked about its composition that we each must consider.

A challenge with understanding the message of Job is that much of it is made up of long discourse and dialogue between Job and his friends. Every person who reads Job will in all likelihood interpret and apply it differently, because of its genre and what it communicates. Job is a text that can be comforting to many people who have had to endure some kind of trial, or experience some kind of suffering. A subject matter dominating Job regards theodicy, asking us why God allows the unrighteous to prosper and the righteous to suffer. How does the Almighty work behind the scenes? Likewise, how is the figure of Satan used with God's direct knowledge? In the discussion and debate between Job and his friends, you see them trying to get at what the real cause of Job's suffering actually is.

Certainly also to be considered when reading through Job is the fact that while the protagonist knows the One True God, he is not an Israelite. For some, this adds to the difficulty of interpreting Job. Many conservatives consider Job to be a true historical figure, who lived in the Patriarchal era as a probable contemporary of Abraham. But at the same time, other conservatives consider the Book of Job to be parabolic—principally a moral story designed to teach Ancient Israel some critical lessons. These interpreters would accept that everything that the Book of Job says is valid and *could* have been possible in ancient history, and that God's interactions with Satan in Heaven do occur, but would consider Job to ultimately be a fictional character because of his not being an Israelite. Regardless of what position you lean toward, we still have to deal with the text as it exists in the Biblical canon, understanding that what it communicates did affect the worldview of Yeshua and

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His Apostles.¹ Job is a distinct character, sitting outside of the people of Israel, teaching one about a universal condition of humanity in relation to its Creator.

The story of Job opens as we see that he is a very well-to-do man, one who “was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil” (1:1). His children regularly held large banqueting feasts (1:4), and being quite concerned for them, “he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, ‘Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’ This was Job’s regular custom” (1:5). But while Job made it his pattern to intercede for his offspring before the Creator, his biggest test was ahead of him.

The Book of Job includes one of the few places in the Tanach where we are given a glimpse into the Heavenly dimension—a location of both good *and* evil. Satan has free access to the Lord, who asks him “Where have you come from?” (1:6), and so the Accuser responds, “From roaming the earth and going back and forth in it” (1:7). Depicted as already completing all the tasks he can perform, the Lord asks Satan a question, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (1:8). Satan asks the Lord in response, “Have you not put a hedge around him...? You have blessed the work of his hands...” (1:10), indicating how Job must be favored by the Lord and thus be impenetrable. But then comes the Accuser’s key statement: “But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face” (1:11). So God allows Satan to go and meddle with Job’s blessed life, but he is instructed by Him, “on the man himself to not lay a finger” (1:12). Satan could do as much as he wanted to Job’s family or property, but not to Job himself.

Immediately Satan’s actions against Job begin to manifest. Job’s oxen and donkeys are taken away by the Sabaeans, and only one servant escapes to tell him (1:15). Another servant comes and tells Job that fire from God has consumed his livestock and other servants, he being the only one to escape (1:16). Yet another servant comes and tells Job how the Chaldeans have stolen all of his camels, and he was the only servant to escape (1:17). Still not over, while his sons and daughters were feasting, a mighty wind came and collapsed the house where they were—killing them all—the servant reporting being the only one to escape (1:18). So what does Job do, hearing all of this bad news all at once? He tears his robe, shaves his head, and then falls down in worship to the Lord (1:19). He cries to God, “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised” (1:21). “In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing” (1:22).

Satan returns to God’s throne in Heaven, only reporting to the Almighty that he has been “roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it” (2:2). The first thing out of the Accuser’s mouth has nothing to do with the pain he has inflicted upon Job, almost as though the bad things Job has just experienced Satan has inflicted on others as well. So the Lord asks Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason” (2:3). Satan has just taken away all of Job’s family and property, and desiring Job to curse God, says, “Skin for

¹ Job is mentioned by name in James 5:11, and a significant quote from the Septuagint translation of Job 13:16 (Heb. *hu li l'yeshuah* into Grk. *touto...sōtērian*) appears in Philippians 1:19 where Paul says, “what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.”

skin!...A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face” (2:4-5). The Lord allows Satan to go, but he is instructed by Him, “he is in your hands; but you must spare his life” (2:6) as Job is not allowed to die. Job is afflicted with “painful sores” or “incurable boils” (HCSB) all over his body (2:7) that he scrapes off himself (2:8).

Seeing the physical pain of her husband, Job’s wife scolds him, “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (2:9). Job silences the foolish woman, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” In all this, Job did not sin in what he said” (2:10). Following this, Job’s three friends—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite—go out to comfort him after hearing about the calamities that had befallen him (2:11). “When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him...No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was” (2:12, 13). This begins a series of interactions between Job and these three men, dominating well over half of the book (chs. 3-27). We see how Job and his friends all react to Job’s terrible circumstances, and they do not exactly tell him what he wants or perhaps even needs to hear.

Job is distraught over the visit from his friends, and he does something very perplexing and strange for someone who has just praised the Lord. “Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth” (3:1). He cries “May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born!’” (3:3), going into a long lament over how bad it is to be born into a world of pain and inevitable death (3:4-26). While Job does not curse the Lord because of his pain, he does actually say of his birth day, “That day—may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it” (3:4), wishing “Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?” (3:11). Job is clearly not at all happy about his life circumstances, and is exclaiming how he wishes he had never lived. Why he says these things is a matter for you to decide. While his first reaction to tragedy is to praise the Lord (1:21), now he lashes out in something quite negative. But does he curse himself by these words, a matter to be dealt with later? Or is he just frustrated by not knowing what to do next?

Hearing their dear friend in distress, they each feel compelled to counsel him as best they can. Eliphaz the Temanite speaks first (4:1), and reminds Job how much good he has done for God (4:3-6). He asks him, “Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope?” (4:6). Eliphaz asks Job about innocent persons who have never perished (4:7, 9), and then tells him how he received a Divine vision (4:12-21). He tells Job that “If God...charges his angels with error, how much more those who live in houses of clay...?” (4:18b-19a). Eliphaz goes on, in no few words, to tell Job that it must be clear that God is judging Job for some sin he has committed (5:2-27). He tries to encourage Job, “I would appeal to God; I would lay my cause before him. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted” (5:8-9). Eliphaz views Job’s suffering as some kind of Divine correction, for after all, “Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty” (5:17). Much of what Eliphaz says about God’s character is indeed correct, as He is merciful toward those who are repentant, and He does indeed do miraculous things. But has Eliphaz

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done the right thing in trying to help Job? Or are Eliphaz' words delivered in a spirit of self-righteousness?

Job does not act as though he has heard Eliphaz. He instead just bemoans his condition, "If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery placed on the scales! It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas—no wonder my words have been impetuous...Oh that I might have my request, that God would grant what I hope for, that God would be willing to crush me, to let loose his hand and cut me off!...What strength do I have, that I should still hope? What prospects, that I should be patient?" (6:2-3, 8-9, 11). As self-condemning as these words may appear to be, Job is right to say "I had not denied the words of the Holy One" (6:10) as he has not cursed God. All he wants, however, is "the devotion of his friends" (6:14), but he does not consider them to have helped him (6:24-30) and tells Eliphaz "you would even cast lots for the fatherless and barter away your friend" (6:30).

With his bad circumstances, Job has reached a dead end, and can only say that life on Earth is not a pleasant experience (7:1-7), resulting in only death (7:8-10). He cries out to God, "I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul...I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine. I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning" (7:11, 15-16). He asks God why he is the target for such pain (7:20) and why he will not be forgiven by Him (7:21). He is in a condition where he can see no hope for things to change for the better, and would prefer to be rid of it all.

Job's second friend, Bildad the Shuhite, steps in with some stern words. He asks Job, "How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind. Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin" (8:2-5). He simply instructs Job to "plead with the Almighty" (8:6), as God will surely "not reject a blameless man" (8:20). Job responds to Bildad, chiding him with "how can a mortal be righteous before God?" (9:2), asking him that in spite of His infinite powers (9:4-10), why would he try to dispute his circumstances with Him (9:14-20)? Job is consumed by his circumstances, being content to die no matter what happens (9:21-10:17). He repeats his crying out why he had ever been born, asking the Lord "Why then did you bring me out of the womb?...If only I had been carried straight from the womb to the grave!" (10:18a, 19).

His third friend, Zophar the Naamathite, proceeds to counsel him in lieu of this despair. He asks Job, "Are all these words to go unanswered? Is this talker to be vindicated?" (11:2). He repeats Job's claims to him that he is blameless (11:4), then telling his friend, "Oh, how I wish that God would speak, that he would open his lips against you and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom, for true wisdom has two sides. Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin" (11:5-6). Zophar implores Job to remember, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave²—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea" (11:7-9). Among his friends, Zophar is trying to get Job to see beyond his mere circumstances, and get him to consider God's position on the matter. He encourages Job to turn to Him,

² Heb. *Sheol*.

and remove any sin or evil that might be imperiling him (11:13-17), telling him that not all hope is lost (11:18-20).

Regardless of what his friends tell him, as they are at least trying to help poor Job, Job is not impressed by their counsel. He says, "Doubtless you are the people, and wisdom will die with you! But I have a mind as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know all these things?" (12:2-3). Job thinks himself to "have become a laughingstock to my friends" (12:4), believing "Men at ease have contempt for misfortune" (12:5) and saying that he knows something about how God works (12:7-25). He has seen how God acts in His Creation (13:1-2), exclaiming, "I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God" (13:3). But it is Job's friends who "smear [him] with lies; you are worthless physicians, all of you!" (13:4) He tells them, "Hear now my argument; listen to the plea of my lips. Will you speak wickedly on God's behalf? Will you speak deceitfully for him? Will you show him partiality? Will you argue the case for God?" (13:6-8). Even if Job's friends may have said some truthful things about the Lord, they are still not Him and cannot judge Job as the Eternal.

As Job believes his friends to have condemned him, he asks them, "Would it turn out well if he examined you? Could you deceive him as you might deceive men? He would surely rebuke you if you secretly showed partiality" (13:9-10). Job believes that his friends cannot properly represent the Almighty God, as they are flawed human beings (13:12). While Job himself may not be the happiest person, there is some glimmer of restoration in his words "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face. Indeed this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless man would dare come before him!" (13:15-16). Job might have not reacted appropriately, but he has still been a good man who is confident that he has been faithful to God (13:18-19). He implores his Creator, "summon me and I will answer, or let me speak, and you reply" (13:22). He asks God to show him whatever sins he has committed (13:23), wondering why He hides himself (13:24). He now begins to honestly wonder why great calamity has befallen him (13:25-28). He recognizes the temporal nature of man, and how his Creator controls his destiny (14:1-22).

Eliphaz probably thinks that Job just does not get it. He again repeats his words that God will judge human beings just as He will judge the angelic host, with retribution surely coming to the unrighteous (15:1-35). Job considers Eliphaz' accusation to again be meaningless, asking him "Will your long-winded speeches never end? What ails you that you keep on arguing?" (16:3). To Job, he has exhausted the possibility that there is extreme sin in his life that would warrant God's punishment (16:4-17:9), wishing nothing more than death to end his suffering (17:10-16).

Bildad tries to reason with Job, "When will you end these speeches? Be sensible, and then we can talk" (18:2), wondering why Job considers his friends "stupid" (18:3). Bildad considers Job to be acting in anger against his friends, a definite sign that Job is being consumed by sin (18:4-21). Job does not take kindly to Bildad's accusations, considering them to be unwarranted as he has made his pleas made known to a God who does not answer (19:1-22). Job asks why his friends will not just have pity on him as God has struck him, as it is He alone who can judge (19:21-22).

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Perhaps this interchange between Job and his friends has helped Job realize that he really does stand innocent before the Lord, in spite of some of his negativity about life on Earth and what has recently transpired. Job expresses a unique and powerful hope: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (19:25-26). Many view this statement as Job's realization that he had a *Messianic Advocate* standing for him in Heaven, and that even though he would die (whether at that immediate time or later), he would in fact be resurrected one day to see God in the very flesh that was giving him such grief. Job might not be happy at present, but there is the possibility here that he thought things would be better.

Job's friend Zophar, perhaps the most reasonable to him among the three, feels personally offended by Job's self-defense (20:1-2). He considers Job to be hiding sins of prideful evil (20:4-26) and that "The heavens will expose his guilt; the earth will rise up against him. A flood will carry off his house, rushing waters on the day of God's wrath. Such is the fate God allots the wicked, the heritage appointed to them by God" (20:27-29). Replying to Zophar, Job tells him that it is not his place to interfere in a situation that is by its definition between him and the Lord: "Is my complaint directed to man?" (21:4). He considers Zophar to be mocking him (21:3). He repeats his knowing something about the ways of God in judging the wicked (21:5-33), asking "how can you console me with your nonsense? Nothing is left of your answers but falsehood!" (21:34).

Eliphaz then steps into the conversation, insisting again that if Job were righteous God would not be judging him, and that he must turn to God in submission (22:1-30). As Job has been insisting, "If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what he would say" (22:3-5). Job says that God would not find him guilty of the sins which his friends suggest he has committed (23:6-7). The challenge is that Job does not know where he can find God to plead his case (23:8-17), demonstrating how he knows that God lets bad things happen for no good reason (24:2-12). Job knows that there will be those who are judged by God in the end, thinking that they have gotten away with their sin (24:13-24). He asks, "If this is not so, who can prove me false and reduce my words to nothing?" (24:25).

Bildad simply emphasizes the might of God again, and how puny and unrighteous a human being is compared to Him (25:1-6). Job goes on the offensive, asking him what kinds of good deeds he has done (26:1-4), as he already knows the might of God (26:5-14).

From this point, we see that "Job continued his discourse" (27:1), which in our Bibles appears in chs. 27-31 of the text. Primarily, this section of significant speech makes up a self-defense of Job, as he states that he has committed no serious errors against the Lord. We also learn some important things about who God is—a likely reflection on who He was to the Ancient Israelites who were instructed by the Book of Job. Many godly men and women throughout history, believing themselves to have suffered unjustly, would offer a similar defense as Job does.

Job begins his apologetic speech by exclaiming, "As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty who has made me taste bitterness of soul...my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit...I will maintain

my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live" (27:2, 4, 6). In spite of the accusations made by his friends, Job insists that he stands innocent. Job says that his enemies will be cut off (27:7-10) and tells his friends what he knows about the retribution of God against the wicked (27:11-23). Job explains to his friends how precious the value of God's wisdom is, comparing it to the Earth and treasures such as gold and silver (28:1-28). Job then expresses how much he would like to return to the old times of plenty, when God prospered him and his life was going well:

"How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone upon my head and by his light I walked through darkness! Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house, when the Almighty was still with me and my children were around me, when my path was drenched with cream and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil" (29:2-6).

Job mentions how he was valued in his local community (29:7-10), and how people spoke well of him (29:11-14). Job was someone who helped people in distress (29:12-17), believing that he would live to a long age because of his good deeds (29:18-20). Those who once took Job's words seriously (29:21-25) now mock him (30:1-15), and he can see nothing more than suffering (30:16-17). While recognizing "In his great power, God becomes like clothing to me; he binds me like the neck of my garment" (30:18), Job also says "He throws me into the mud, and I am reduced to dust and ashes" (30:19). Job does not curse the Lord, but he certainly does question Him: "I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me. You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me. You snatch me up and drive me before the wind; you toss me about in the storm" (30:21-22). Job is distraught over why God has let terrible things happen to him, as he was certainly one in the past who "wept for those in trouble" (30:25), asking the Lord, "Has not my soul grieved for the poor?" (30:26). All he can think about now is how "The churning inside me never stops; days of suffering confront me...My skin grows black and peels; my body burns with fever. My harp is turned to mourning, and my flute to the sound of wailing" (30:27, 30-21).

The fact that Job was blameless in his behavior cannot be denied. Job was not someone unfaithful to his wife: "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl" (31:1). He is a man who rightfully recognizes, "For what is man's love from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong?" (31:2-3). He questions God, "Does he not see my ways and count my every step?" (31:4). He asks the Lord to show him what he has done wrong, going through a litany of possible sins such as infidelity (31:9-12), being unfair to his servants (31:13-15), not helping the destitute (31:16-23), placing his confidence in riches (31:24-28), or rejoicing in the misfortunes of others (31:29-34). In his pleas before Almighty God, Job seems to be beside himself, not knowing what to do.

At this point in the story, after Job and his three friends have wrestled it out, another person enters the scene. We are told "these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes" (32:1), and so in comes Elihu son of Barakel, a younger man who "became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God" (32:2). "[W]hen he saw that the three men had nothing more to

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say, his anger was aroused" (32:3), and so Elihu steps in wanting to give Job another perspective on what has befallen him.

Elihu states that he knows that those who have talked before him are older (32:6-8), but is also clear to tell Job "It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right" (32:9), as young people too might have a perspective Job can benefit from. Elihu has kept his mouth shut in deference to the older men, but has something to say that he can no longer keep his mouth quiet about (32:11-22). Elihu urges Job to consider what he has to tell him (33:1-5), and is sure to say "I am just like you before God; I too have been taken from clay. No fear of me should alarm you, nor should my hand be heavy upon you" (33:6-7).

Elihu's first words concern how Job thinks himself to stand innocent before God (33:8-12), but that this cannot possibly be right because God is eternal and he sees things that human men cannot see (33:13-33)—as there might be something that Job has missed in his self-defense. He has listened to Job's cry of him not doing anything wrong (34:1-9), but repeats that "Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong. He repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves" (34:10-11), saying that God is just because He is supreme over the Earth (34:12-37). Any defense one offers before such an Eternal Being as God is meaningless (35:1-15), as Elihu asserts "Job opens his mouth with empty talk; without knowledge he multiplies words" (35:16). And he then urges those gathered to "Bear with me a little longer" (36:2), again repeating the everlasting mightiness of God (36:3-37:13). Elihu asks Job to "stop and consider God's wonders" (37:14), and how He "controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash" (37:15). He is quite keen to say "The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress" (37:23).

Job is not given the chance to respond to anything Elihu says to him, as the next thing that happens is that "the LORD answered Job out of the storm" (38:1). **God Himself steps onto the stage as Job has certainly been wanting to press his case before Him.** *A significant theophany ensues where Job gets the answers he has been desiring.* The Lord responds to Job, "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me" (38:2-3). Job is going to be shown how insignificant he is as a mortal before the Supreme One.

The Lord asks Job a pertinent first question: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" (38:4), then proceeding to describe some of the distinct features of how He created the universe (38:5-38). The Lord then tells Job how He knows the unique behaviors of the members of the animal kingdom (38:39-30). Neither one of these things has Job expressed knowledge about, and so God asks him, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" (40:1). And what can Job say? "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more" (40:4-5).

Continuing to speak to him from the storm, the Lord asks Job more questions. He asks Job, "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (40:8), asking him whether or not he is able to judge humans like him, humbling the proud (40:9-14). He asks him to consider the behemoth (40:15-24), a great creature that is concealed by the lotuses and the stream. He also asks him to

consider the leviathan, another great creature that is almost impossible to be captured (41:1-34).³

So what can Job do in light of the magnificence of God, and the creative ability that only He possesses? He can only tell Him, “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted...Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know...My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (42:2, 3, 5-6). While Job did try to defend himself as not doing anything wrong before the Lord, Job absolutely failed to consider God’s eternity and magnificence, only being concerned about himself. While he did not curse God, he certainly did question God and he did not try to consider God’s role in his suffering. In this regard, the young Elihu’s evaluation of Job was correct.

The Lord rebukes Job’s three friends, because as they have heard His voice from the storm, “you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (42:7). Job was humbled before the Lord’s eternity, while his three friends just sat there and did nothing. The Lord asks the three men to present burnt offerings before Him, as Job prayed for them (42:7-9).

And what of Job after this ordeal? We see that “the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came” (42:10-11a). His surviving loved ones “comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him” (42:11c). After passing through a time of intense trial “The LORD blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first” (42:12), being restored his livestock and the sons and daughters he lost (42:13-15). Job lives a long and full life, dying at the age of 140 (42:16-17).

When we see the climax of the Book of Job, some of us can honestly be perplexed at what happens. Job is not given the opportunity to defend himself before God, but is instead told by God how awesome and eternal He is—as the Creator of the universe. God possesses power and strength that Job cannot even think to possess as a limited mortal.

The protagonist Job was obviously a human being, who when hit with disaster, shows that he had some major issues. *He is distraught when everything is taken from him.* Reading this story, it is not unnatural for us to ask why Job, a relatively righteous and godly man, got hit with intense pain when other, more sinful men did not. Were either pride or misplaced self-confidence problems for Job? Job’s lengthy diatribes in self-defense, as he tries to determine what he has possibly done to offend God, ask each of us questions—leading to manifold interpretations as to what was really happening. Why does Job act as though human life leads to nothing more than death? Why is he so fatalistic? While Creation may only be “very good” (Genesis 1:31) and not “perfect,” it is still good enough to possess value for people.

Job and his friends who counsel him try to investigate a number of causes as to why he might be suffering, but it is not until Elihu asks Job to really consider the eternity of God in Heaven that things happen. *Neither Job nor his friends*

³ There is debate over what the *behemot* and the *liv'yatan* were in ancient times, but in all probability these are poetic references to the hippopotamus and the crocodile.

For a further discussion, consult Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 48.

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considered Satan's role, who was the one who originally told God that if you take away a man's property, and later his health, that he will curse Him. And right when Job is asked to consider God's eternity by Elihu—He then reveals himself and Job is humbled before Him.

The Book of Job is traditionally read during the Ten Days of Awe between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, as we are to reflect on who we are before God, hopefully as people seeking after His righteousness. It teaches me that we are to first stand and gasp before who He is as an Eternal Creator, who would *even be concerned* with us as small creatures! Far be it for this being a lesson to learn *last*—as Job did—we **must learn this lesson first**. Then, if we have committed any sins, we must plead before the Lord that He might reveal them before us so we can repent accordingly! And unlike Job, we have the advantage of actually knowing we have that Redeemer, Yeshua the Messiah, interceding for us before the Father (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Whenever we face bad times, we have a Biblical responsibility to consider God's place in the matter. Have you ever had things as bad as Job experienced happen to you personally? Some of you probably have lost your property, come upon desperate financial times, lost your health, had a loved one die, or any combination of terrible things. When such things came, did you ever curse God? As much as Job complained and bemoaned his life, **he never did curse God**. He may have questioned God, but he never damned God or blasphemed Him.

Perhaps a question we do not ask ourselves enough is, when we do encounter bad times, are we able to recognize that there is still good in the fallen world in which we live? God as Creator found it important enough to speak to Job—and his three friends stood there watching. When bad things happen, should we not heed some of the warnings seen in Job, and guard ourselves against fatalism? Is life really so bad that any of us would wish that we were never born? Is God's Creation and the life we live here really not "very good"?

Job made it through the tests that were levied against him—albeit not easily. What does Job teach us about how *not to react* when bad things happen? Job himself did say, "This will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him" (13:16, ESV). He praised the Lord after the bad things occurred—but then his praise to Him led to self-despair. Why did he not just continue in his praise to God, recognizing that whatever happened to him God would use it for His purposes? Thankfully, others who have examined Job **have seen this!** The Apostle Paul said, "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

When considering all of this, what might the Book of Job teach you? Does it teach you something about how bad things have befallen your life in the past, or even in the present? What does it tell you about the future, and how God is in control? Do you ever consider the forces of evil behind the scenes, and how God might actually let them test you, to see if you are loyal to Him? And regarding one of the biggest debates of all—which we may never solve—how does God's predetermined plan affect your free will choices? Did God actually foreknow that Job would not curse him, as bad as Job's attitude would get? **What critical life**

lesson(s) will you learn from the Book of Job, O small mortal? What do you need to take before Him in prayer?⁴

⁴ Consult the entry for the Book of Job in *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic* for a summary of its date, composition, etc.