

The Character of Job



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 1:1, 8; Job 29:8–17; Job 31:1–23; Exod. 20:17; Matt. 7:22–27; Matt. 5:16; Eph. 3:10.*

Memory Text: “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” (*James 2:22, NKJV*).

In the midst of all the major issues touched on in the book of Job, we mustn't lose sight of another crucial theme: that of Job himself. Who was this man whom the Lord trusted so much that He challenged the devil over his faithfulness and integrity? Who was this man who did not understand why all this was happening to him, who knew that what was happening to him wasn't fair, who expressed anger and frustration over it all, and yet stayed faithful right through to the end?

While the essence of the book of Job dealt with Job after the calamities struck, from this story we can pick up information about Job's earlier life. And what we learn about Job's past and the kind of man he was gives us a greater understanding of why Job stayed faithful to the Lord, even amid all the terrible suffering, even amid everything Satan did to try to turn him away from God.

What was Job like, and what can we learn about how he lived that can help to make us be more faithful followers of the Lord as we live our own lives?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 24.

The Man From Uz

Read Job 1:1 and Job 1:8. What does this tell us about the character of Job?

Though Job had been told all through the dialogues that he must have done something wrong in order for all this evil to come upon him, the opposite appears to be the case. It was his goodness, his faithfulness, that made him the special target of Satan.

How good and how faithful was he? First, the text tells us that he was “perfect.” This word does not have to mean “sinless,” as was Jesus. It comes, instead, with the idea of completeness, integrity, sincerity, but in a relative sense. The person who is “perfect” in the sight of God is the person who has reached the degree of development that Heaven expects of him or her at any given time. The Hebrew word for “perfect,” *tam*, “is equivalent to the Greek word *teleios*, which is often translated ‘perfect’ in the [New Testament] but which is better translated ‘full grown’ or ‘mature.’ ”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 499. Job’s later experiences revealed that he had not reached the ultimate perfection of character. Though faithful and upright, he was still growing.

Second, the text says he was “upright.” The word means “straight,” “level,” “just,” “right.” Job lived in a way that he could be called “a good citizen.”

Third, the text says he “feared God.” Though the Old Testament portrays the idea of “fearing” God as part of what being a faithful Israelite was all about, the phrase also was used in the New Testament for Gentiles who faithfully served the God of Israel (*see Acts 10:2, 22*).

Finally, Job “eschewed,” or shunned, evil. This characterization of Job was affirmed by the Lord Himself, when He said to Satan, “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?” (*Job 1:8*).

In the end, Job was a man of God whose faith was revealed by the kind of life he lived; and thus, he truly bore witness “to angels, and to men” (*1 Cor. 4:9*) about what a person can be in Christ.

If the book of Job were about you, how would the opening line read?
 “There was a _____ in the land of _____ who was
 _____ and _____ and who _____
 God and _____ evil.”

Steps Bathed in Cream

As Job struggled to come to terms with the calamity that befell him, he did think about his past life and how good it had been for him and how he had lived. Talking about the earlier days, Job said that in this time “‘my steps were bathed with cream’ ” (*Job 29:6, NKJV*).

For instance, in *Job 29:2*, Job talked about the time that “‘God [has] watched over me’ ” (*NKJV*). The Hebrew word for “watched over” comes from a common word used all through the Old Testament to talk about God’s watchcare for His people (*see Ps. 91:11, Num. 6:24*). Beyond question, Job had the good life. The important thing, too, was that he knew that he had the good life.

Read *Job 29:8–17*. What do these verses tell us about how others had viewed Job and how he treated those who were struggling?

We can see here just how much Job was respected. The phrase about his taking his “‘seat in the open square’ ” (*Job 29:7, NKJV*) brings in the idea of some sort of local governance, of which Job was obviously a part. Such seats would usually be given to the senior and respected members of the society, and among them Job was highly esteemed.

But we can see that even the “lowest” members of the society loved and respected him. The poor, the perishing, the blind, the widow, the fatherless, and the lame—those who had not been blessed as Job had been blessed were the very ones to whom he gave aid and comfort.

“God has given in His word a picture of a prosperous man—one whose life was in the truest sense a success, a man whom both heaven and earth delighted to honor.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 142.

Verses like these and others (as we will see) show us why Job had been a very successful person in every way, both in the sight of men and of God.

It’s easy to be kind and respectful to the rich and the powerful and the famous. How, though, do you treat those who have nothing to offer you at all?

Heart and Eyes

At first glance, it could sound as if Job were bragging, as if Job were parading his holiness and virtue and good conduct before others. This attitude, of course, is precisely the kind that the Bible condemns (*see Matthew 23*). But that's not what was happening here with Job. Again, it is crucial to remember the context: he's being told that his past life, a life assumed to have been pretty evil, is the cause of his suffering. Job, meanwhile, knows that this simply cannot be true and that nothing he had done made him deserve what had come upon him. So he spends this time recounting the kind of life he lived and the kind of person he was.

Read Job 31:1–23. What else does Job say about how he lived before the calamities?

Notice, too, that Job wasn't dealing only with his outward actions. The text “ ‘my heart followed my eyes’ ” (*Job 31:7, NASB*) shows that Job understood the deeper meaning of holiness, the deeper meaning of right and wrong and of God's law. Job apparently knew that God cares about the heart, about our thoughts, as well as our actions (*see 1 Sam. 16:7, Exod. 20:17, Matt. 5:28*). Job knew that it was wrong to lust after a woman and not just to commit adultery with her. (Again, what powerful evidence for the fact that knowledge of the true God had existed even before the Lord called the nation of Israel to be His covenant people and a witness of Him.)

Read what Job said in Job 31:13–15. Why is this message so crucial?

Here Job shows an amazing understanding, especially for his time (any time, really) about the basic equality of all human beings. The ancient world was not a place where concepts of universal rights and universal laws were understood or followed. People groups thought of themselves as greater than and superior to others, and at times thought nothing of denying basic dignity and rights to others. Here, though, Job shows just how much he understands about human rights and that these rights originate in the God who made us. In some ways, Job was ahead of not only his time but ours, as well.

A House on the Rock

Read Job 31:24–34. What else can we learn about Job?

No wonder the Lord said what He did about the life and character of Job. This is a man who clearly lived out his faith, a man whose works revealed the reality of his relationship with God. This, of course, made his complaint all the more bitter: *Why is this happening to me?* And, of course, it made the arguments of his friends as vain and hollow as they were.

But there's a deeper and more important message that we can take from the reality of Job's faithful and obedient life. Notice how closely the life he lived in the past was tied to how he responded to the tragedies that befell him later. It was not by chance or luck or sheer willpower that Job refused to "curse God, and die" (*Job 2:9*). No, it was because all those years of faithfulness and obedience to God gave him the faith and character that enabled him to trust in the Lord, regardless of what happened to him.

Read Matthew 7:22–27. What is found in these verses that reveals the reason Job stayed faithful?

The key to Job's major victory here was found in all the "smaller" victories he had before (*see also Luke 16:10*). It was his faithful adherence to right, without being willing to compromise, that made Job what he was. What we see in Job is an example of what the book of James says about the role of works in a life of faith: "Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" (*James 2:22, NKJV*). What an important principle of the Christian life is revealed in this text. In the story of Job we see this principle played out in a powerful way. Job was made of the same flesh and bone as all of us; yet, through the grace of God and his own diligent effort, he lived a life of faithful obedience to God.

What choices do you need to make in order to live as faithfully as did Job?

The Manifold Wisdom of God

Earlier in the book of Job, amid the back and forth between the characters, Eliphaz the Temanite said to Job: “ ‘Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous? Or is it gain to Him that you make your ways blameless?’ ” (*Job 22:3, NKJV*). That’s a very ironic question, given what we know about what was happening behind the scenes in heaven. Yes, it is a pleasure to God if Job was righteous, and it was gain to Him if Job made his way blameless. And this is true not just with Job—the same goes for all of those who claim to be followers of the Lord.

Read Matthew 5:16. How do those words help to answer the question that Eliphaz threw at Job?

The immediate issue in the book of Job was, would Job be faithful? Satan said he wouldn’t; God said he would. Job’s faithfulness then was definitely to God’s advantage, at least in this specific battle with Satan.

This story, though, is just a microcosm of bigger issues. The first angel’s message tells us, in part, to “give glory” to God (*Rev. 14:7*), and Jesus explained in Matthew 5:16 that by our good works we can bring glory to God. This is what Job did; this is what we can do too.

Read Ephesians 3:10. How was the principle expressed here revealed in the book of Job, but on a smaller scale?

What we see in this text, and in the book of Job, are expressions of the fact that God is working in the lives of His followers to change them, for His glory, into His own image. “The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671. The life of Job was an example of how human beings may reveal this principle, even though Job lived many thousands of years ago. God’s people in every age have the privilege of living in the same way, as well.

What in your life brings glory to God? What does your answer tell you about yourself and how you live and what you might need to change?

Further Thought: The Protestant Reformation reclaimed the great truth of salvation by faith alone. This truth was first intimated in the Word back in Eden itself (see *Gen. 3:15*) and then given fuller expression in the life of Abraham (see *Gen. 15:6, Rom. 4:3*), before being successively revealed in Scripture up through Paul. Yet, the truth of salvation by faith alone always included the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, not as the means of salvation but as the expression of it. In the life and character of Job, we find a great example of what this work looks like. Theologians sometimes call this work “sanctification,” which means basically “holiness.” It is so significant in Scripture that we are told to strive “for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (*Heb. 12:14, ESV*). The basic meaning of *sanctification* is “set apart for holy use,” an idea seen, for example, when the Lord said to His covenant people, “ ‘ “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” ’ ” (*Lev. 19:2, NKJV*). Though the word and concept appear in various ways in both the Old and New Testament, they deal with what God does in us. It can be seen as a moral growth in goodness and toward goodness. It is “a progressive process of moral change by the power of the Holy Spirit in cooperation with the human will.”—*Handbook of SDA Theology*, p. 296. Though this work is something that only God can accomplish in us, we are not forced into sanctification any more than we are forced into justification. We give ourselves to the Lord, and the same Lord who justifies us by faith will sanctify us as well, molding us, as He did with Job, into the image of God, at least to whatever degree is possible this side of eternity. So, Paul writes, “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (*Gal. 4:19, NKJV*), and Ellen G. White writes: “Christ is our pattern, the perfect and holy example that has been given us to follow. We can never equal the Pattern, but we may imitate and resemble it according to our ability.”—*That I May Know Him*, p. 265.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What choices can we make that will influence the degree to which the Lord can work in us? We know that only God can change the heart, but we must cooperate. What does that cooperation look like? How is it manifested?
- 2 Colossians 2:6 reads: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (*NKJV*). How do these words help us to understand what it means to live in faith and obedience?
- 3 How can we as a church, not just as individuals, bring glory to the Lord before humans and before angels?

Waking Up My Heart: Part 2

About six months after my first visit to Kveto's home, he invited me to attend church with him. I'd been reading the Bible and was interested in what kind of church would teach these things, so I decided to go. I was interested but careful, for I didn't want to be seduced into something irrational.

The church building was unimpressive, but when we entered, everyone wanted to shake my hand. Kveto knew I was a reserved person, so he had warned me that the people were friendly. I felt a different atmosphere in this place, one filled with peace, order, and love.

I really enjoyed the church service and the warmth of the people and began going to church every Sabbath. Now I know that the Holy Spirit was awakening my heart and mind so I could understand the truth. I recognized my own spiritual poverty. God gave me faith and changed my heart.

My family noticed the changes in my life. They questioned me, fearing that I was being deceived by some sect. They saw that my religious conviction was strong and never forbade me to visit the church or read the Bible.

As Kveto and I studied together, we dealt with other aspects of faith in God and doctrines. I regularly attended public meetings on the topics found in the books of Daniel and Revelation. Repetition helped me to understand those things and answered questions that I wasn't sure how to ask.

One year after I first met Kveto on the street, I committed my life to God. On a Friday night, under the canopy of heaven, I was baptized. I felt as though heaven was near as I answered the pastor's questions and affirmed my faith. On Sabbath, I was officially received by the church. I was 20 years old.

How patient and caring is our mighty God! It amazes me to know that He who controls the whole universe would stoop down to free me from the errors of this world! He saved me, and He leads me daily toward a greater understanding of salvation! He caught me when I was trying to decide what I would do with my life. After my baptism, I studied at the Seventh-day Adventist theological seminary in Prague so that I could be an instrument in God's hand to lead other searching souls to Him.

I praise God and thank Him for Kveto, who never gave up on me when I did not believe.

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The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Job 1:1, 8*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Review the character of Job before he suffered, using what we can glean about him in various passages throughout the book.

Feel: Marvel at Job as a person who lived a life in consistent harmony with God, putting his faith into tangible action.

Do: Resolve to live a sanctified life of practical faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: A Blameless Life

A How blameless is blameless? When you look at Job's life, how would you answer this question?

B What are the traits in Job's character that are most appealing to you, and how are they relevant to your current situation?

II. Feel: A Consistent Life

A How do you feel about a person like Job who seems to be consistently good and righteous in all aspects of life?

B What are the elements in Job's character description that communicate this impression of consistency?

III. Do: A Sanctified Life

A What is the secret for success to living a spirit-filled and sanctified life?

B How does our sanctification impact our social interaction with a world around us that is full of physical and spiritual needs?

► **Summary:** A closer look at Job before his suffering, as pieced together from various passages in the book, reveals a personality that is consistently in harmony with God, which translates itself into a practical faith. High ethical values, personal integrity, and a heart for the socially vulnerable in society characterize this faith.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Job 29:12–16, 31:16–22*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Important aspects of Job’s righteousness are his high ethical and moral values that become visible in his dealings with the socially vulnerable. Righteousness needs to translate itself into tangible acts of goodness in our interactions with the people around us. God has placed us right into the midst of this world in order to lessen the suffering of the people around us. While we should not be of this world, we should be active Christians in this world.

Just for Teachers: As a church, we need to take our social engagement seriously. Sometimes we delegate social responsibility to the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), thinking that its workers are the professionals who should respond to the suffering in our world. While ADRA’s work is of utmost importance, it does not exempt us as individual church members from interacting with the socially vulnerable in our community. Look around the area where your church is located. In what ways is your church interacting with this community?

Opening Discussion: In 2008, an archaeology student who was participating in the excavation of the site of Khirbet Qeiyafa, in Israel—the biblical Shaaraim mentioned in 1 Samuel 17:52—came across a big shard of pottery that was inscribed with ink in ancient Hebrew letters. The exciting find turned out to be the oldest Hebrew inscription found up to that point and was dated into the 10th century B.C., the time when King David reigned over Israel.

Once the significance of the find was understood, the shard was sent to various labs for spectral imaging and further analysis, as some of the ink had faded, making it impossible to read the complete inscription. The result was that a number of scholars suggested different readings, trying to glean the meaning of this ancient inscription. Each of the different translations has a number of words in common, easily understood from the extant inscription, that give the general idea of the document: “protect the poor and the slave,” “plead for the widow,” “judge the orphan,” “rehabilitate the poor,” “plead for the infant,” and “support the stranger.” All these fragmentary sentences point to the fact that already during the 10th century B.C., Old Testament Israel had very high ethical values when it came to the protection of the socially vulnerable.

Job exemplified this lifestyle hundreds of years before the inscription was written onto a piece of pottery. Why is it significant that the oldest Hebrew inscription talks about caring for the poor, treating the widows and orphans with justice, and protecting the stranger who lives among us?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: It is interesting to create a character profile for Job, based on the passages selected for this week’s lesson. It is also a bit scary, because after continuously being exposed to the retribution theology speeches of Job’s friends for the last couple of weeks, some might have begun to wonder if there really weren’t some secret sin that Job harbored. That assumption is wrong, of course, as this lesson clearly shows. But this fact is the scary part. Job was consistently good, maybe to the extent that it scares us, because we could never dream of reaching this level of perfection. Or perhaps our idea of biblical perfection is a distorted one.

Bible Commentary

Job’s character, as discussed this week, raises a couple of important theological questions, one being the issue of biblical perfection that frequently causes animated discussion in our churches. Can we attain a perfect character here on earth? Is it possible, especially in the face of continual personal failure and falling into sin?

I. Biblical Perfection (*Review Job 1:1, 8 and Matthew 5:48 in the class.*)

Jesus’ admonition in Matthew 5:48 (“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect,” *NKJV*) often has caused consternation among believers. How could I ever attain this? What did Jesus mean by this statement? Is it an admonition or a promise?

The words in the Old and New Testaments that are translated as “perfect” in our modern Bibles have in their original languages slightly different meanings. The Hebrew *tamim* means “complete, right, peaceful, sound, wholesome, or blameless,” whereas the Greek *teleios* means “complete, perfect, full-grown, mature, fully developed, and having attained its purpose.” These connotations already evoke different ideas of a sinless state as the expression of biblical perfection. If one takes further into consideration that biblical characters such as Noah and Abraham clearly showed some imperfections (*Gen. 9:21, 20:2*), one realizes that ideas of biblical perfection as a sinless state and the eradication of our sinful nature might not be that biblical after all.

As a matter of fact, our ideas of biblical perfection are deeply connected to how we see Christ's role in the work of salvation. If Christ's role as our model is overemphasized, then our task must be to assimilate this pattern to the utmost and try to achieve a sinless state, as Christ did, which makes us vulnerable to a work-oriented form of Christianity.

If, on the other hand, we accept Christ's substitutionary death on the cross as impacting on both our redemption and sanctification, we can accept His perfection as our perfection. Though we must always be careful not to fall into the idea of "cheap grace," a person who has fully committed his or her life to Christ is perfect in Him. This union is salvation by grace alone, and through our daily union with Christ we participate in His holy life. We have reached our perfection, our goal and objective, as the Greek word *teleios* expresses (*compare with John 15:5; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 3:19; 4:13; Phil. 2:12, 13*).

II. Christianity in the Public Sphere (*Review Job 29:8–17, 31:1–24, Isaiah 1:17, Psalm 72:4, and Exodus 23:3 with the class.*)

Much has been written and said about the role of Christians in the public sphere, referring to the place where Christians and non-Christians meet. The concept of the public sphere, or square, is an old one. Most ancient cultures boasted a public place where the citizens (and others) of the community interacted. In Spanish-speaking countries, each town had, and still has, a *plaza*. In ancient Israel, the gate area was the public place where business, law cases, and other important public issues were handled (*compare Ruth 4:1, 2*).

Some forms of Christianity, however, have chosen to follow a fortress mentality. This mind-set is centered on the belief that their church needs to be defended against any intruders from the world, leading to a very exclusivist idea of church with minimum social interaction. They have very little, if any, connection with the communities in which they are located.

However, the Bible strongly and consistently suggests that followers of God need to be socially sensitive, especially with regard to the vulnerable groups of society. These groups are repeatedly mentioned in Job, demonstrating that Job had strongly engaged with his environment. He "delivered the poor" and "fatherless" (*Job 29:12*) or provided for them (*Job 31:16*); he supported the "widow" (*Job 29:13, 31:16*) and upheld the rights of his male or female servants (*Job 31:13*). Righteousness is measured in the Old Testament by such acts. In contrast, when things go wrong, the prophets consistently denounce sin (for example, the book of Amos, which denounces Samaria's social wrongdoings). Christianity needs to be tangible. Our impact on these traditional groups (poor, widows, orphans, strangers) or modern additions to them (migrant workers, asylum seekers, HIV/AIDS sufferers, drug abusers, the racially oppressed, and so on) is a good measure for our practical Christianity.

Consider This: What does our interaction with the above-mentioned socially vulnerable groups have to do with our righteousness?

III. Intercessory Prayer (*Review Job 1:5, Hebrews 4:14–16, John 17, and Ephesians 6:18 with the class.*)

One of Job’s less mentioned pre-suffering characteristics was his intercessory prayer on behalf of his children. His prayers and sacrifices opened the door for the Holy Spirit to work more powerfully in the lives of his children, stemming back the powers of evil. This is how intercessory prayer always works, and our intercessory prayers are modeled on Christ’s.

Consider This: What are some of your experiences in intercessory prayer?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Job made a covenant with his eyes (*Job 31:1*). The amount of visual data that enters our minds through the eyes every day is almost incomprehensible and certainly almost impossible to process. We need some filters. We need a covenant.

Thought/Application Questions:

❶ How would a modern “covenant with [one’s] eyes” look practically?

❷ What are some ways you could reach out as a class to the socially vulnerable in your community?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Social ethics are the livelihood of the Old Testament prophets. They preached about it again and again. Likewise, our Christianity needs to become tangible in deeds of kindness and generosity.

Class/Individual Activity:

Plan a social outreach event with your class. Consider participating in a soup kitchen, volunteering at an orphanage, helping in a disaster situation, collecting essential items for the economically challenged, or visiting a shelter for homeless people. Make sure that this effort is not going to be a one-time event!