

Job 42: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Job chapter 42. Then Job answered the Lord and said, I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Hear, and I will speak, I will question you, and you make it known to me. I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you. Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes. After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. So Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them, and the Lord accepted Job's prayer. And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.

Then came to him all his brothers and sisters, and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first daughter Jemima, and the name of the second Chazir, and the name of the third Kerenhapuk. And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers.

And after this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his sons and his sons' sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

[2 : 1 6] Job chapter 42 is the final chapter of the book, and the conclusion and resolution of the entire drama. The Lord had challenged Job in chapters 38 to 41, declaring his insufficiency for the task of just government and control of the creation that he had presumed to judge the Lord concerning.

Job, although he had rightly maintained his own integrity against the friend's accusations, had wrongly charged the Lord with fault in the handling of his case. And now, after the Lord confronts him, he finally repents. He confesses the Lord's unrivaled sovereignty. In verse 3, he quotes a version of the Lord's opening charge to him at the beginning of the first speech, in chapter 38, verse 2. Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

Job responds to the quoted charge by a confession of his guilt in the matter. He had spoken presumptuously of matters beyond his understanding, competence, or station. As a result, he had obscured rather than illuminating the truth of God by his statements. In verse 4, Job quotes the second half of the Lord's introductory statement with which he opened his initial speech, from chapter 38, verse 3.

Dressed for action like a man, I will question you, and you make it known to me. Job confesses that until this point, he had been working chiefly with others teaching about God. Now, however, the Lord has spoken directly to him and into his situation. His old theology, which was another species of retribution theology, not that far removed from that of the friends, lies in tatters, and he sees something of his former ignorance. His response is to repent in dust and ashes, an expression of humbled mortality, which he employed earlier in chapter 30, verse 19. God has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. Of what exactly is Job repenting? Job is soon going to be vindicated of the charges made against him by the friends. Job's sufferings did not come upon him on account of any sin on his part. However, Job had been in the wrong, in his bitterness towards the Lord, and in the charges that he had made against the Lord for injustice. Job had not, contrary to Satan's insistence that he would, curse God to his face, but he had impugned the Lord's justice. He had failed to recognize that it was possible to insist on his own innocence, while also insisting upon the

Lord's justice. Faced with the Lord himself, he dropped his defiant claims, and confessed the justice and goodness of the Lord, and the illegitimacy of his earlier charges. In confessing himself to be dust and ashes, Job resumes an appropriate creaturely position before the Lord, expressing his creatureliness in an arresting way that anticipates his future mortal dissolution to the elements of his composition. He recognizes that the Lord alone is the ruler of all. This need not entail a shrinking back from appeal to the Lord for justice. The only occasion outside of the book of Job where we encounter the expression dust and ashes is Genesis chapter 18 verse 27. In that chapter, Abraham is in the presence of the Lord interceding for Sodom. Abraham answered and said, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. In this interaction, Abraham is both recognizing his creaturely limitation and speaking from that consciously acknowledged position to the judge of all of the earth, appealing to him as the free and sovereign God to manifest his justice in the handling of Sodom.

[5 : 38] The discourses that represent the main body of the text of Job have now come to an end, and we return to the prose form of the prologue in the epilogue that corresponds to it. From addressing Job in his speech, the Lord turns to speak to the three friends, speaking to Eliphaz the Temanite as their representative. Eliphaz was probably the oldest of the three friends, and was also the one who led them as he had spoken first, and at greatest length of the friends in each of the three cycles of speeches. No mention is made of Elihu. Lest we forget, Job's crisis was never merely one of private and personal suffering. Job was a public figure. Indeed, he was a prominent leader or even king of his people, and his sufferings concerned not merely the loss of his possessions and members of his household, but also social opprobrium and scapegoating.

He had desired more than relief of his suffering and restoration of his personal relationship with the Lord. He longed for public vindication, sufficient to counteract the supposed condemnation that he had earlier suffered by means of the Lord's signal actions against him. He had seemingly been marked out by the Lord's judgment as a wicked man. That sentence needs to be publicly reversed.

The confrontation of the friends and the declaration that Job is in the right with the Lord to them is necessary to the resolution of the conflict. Satan, the adversary and accuser, had wrongly charged Job in the heavenly court, but his unwitting servants, the three friends, had served as the accusers of Job in the court of Job's own society on earth. They also had to be silenced for the Lord's victory over the false charges of the adversary to be accomplished. The friends are blamed for their failure to speak truthfully concerning the Lord. Their dogmatic yet narrow retribution theology and their insistent yet unjust and often cruel accusations of Job mark them out as badly in the wrong. However, the Lord surprisingly contrasts them with Job himself, who is said to have spoken of the Lord what is right. Considering the fact that the Lord has just rebuked Job for his claims during the discourses, this might not be what we would expect. In what way has Job spoken truthfully about the Lord?

Despite his insinuations of divine injustice, Job had addressed himself to the Lord. He had expressed elements of hope, looking to the Lord to act into his situation and vindicate him. He had also just repented of his past faults. In the final statements of his final speech to Job, Eliphaz had declared that Job, if he were to repent, an outcome in which Eliphaz probably had limited confidence, he would be restored and would indeed be able to act as an intercessor for others. Chapter 22 verses 26 to 30.

For then you will delight yourself in the Almighty and lift up your face to God. You will make your prayer to him and he will hear you and you will pay your vows. You will decide on a matter and it will be established for you and light will shine on your ways. For when they are humbled, you say, it is because of pride, but he saves the lowly. He delivers even the one who is not innocent, who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands. The irony is that Job does indeed get established as an intercessor on his restoration, but for Eliphaz and his friends. The fact that Abraham's self-description of himself as dust and ashes also occurs in the context of an act of intercession is perhaps worthy of further reflection. The way that the Lord deals with the friends is a departure from strict retribution.

[9 : 04] He does not deal with them according to their folly, but shows them mercy on account of the prayers of Job. It's important to see in this, for instance, the freedom of the Lord's dealing with his creatures in their sin and folly. God's justice has a free and creative character to it that human justice lacks.

It is so much more than just an administration of a retributive code, even though it includes retribution as an element. As Gerald Janssen observes, the freedom of God's own grace and forgiveness offers the possibility of actions on the part of Job and his friends that restore and overcome the breaches between them and open up the possibility of a future liberated from the evils that have befallen them and had occurred between them. Job must forgive and seek the good of his friends, much as the Lord had dealt graciously with him, and the friends, for their part, have to humble themselves before the Lord and acknowledge their fault against Job and seek good through reconciliation with him. In the creative liberty of God's action in the face of sin and folly, he can liberate us from the bondage of past sins and wrongs, whether committed by us or against us.

We should also consider the contrast between the accusations of Satan against Job at the beginning of the book and Job's intercessions for his friends at the end. The friends are instructed to offer sacrifices for their fault. As James Bajan notes, that they are instructed to offer seven sacrifices of each kind may be assigned to Job, who had offered such sacrifices for his sons at the beginning of the story of the book. Perhaps God is giving Job a reassurance of the fact that his earlier sacrifices and prayers were also received by him, and that his lost children will be reunited with him at the resurrection of the just for which he had so longed. The full restoration of Job occurs after Job heals the breach with his friends. This restoration is again an act of God's gracious and good freedom, bringing about a fitting outcome, not a strict reward or retributive justice, giving Job his just desserts. Commenting on the possibility of an allusion to Exodus chapter 22 verse 4, and the law demanding that double restitution of a stolen sheep be made, mentioned by Francis Anderson and others,

Janssen argues that perhaps, rather than thinking of the action of God and Job in terms of the law, we ought to think of the law in terms of the action of God and Job. He suggests that rather than regarding the law as a formulaic retribution and a narrow demand, we might see it in terms of a felicitous enactment of freedom. These final verses of the chapter alternate between divine action and human action within Job's restoration. The visiting of Job's kinsfolk and their gifts in verse 11 overcome the social breach that had occurred between him and his relations and his society. It also grants him the comfort necessary for the grieving process to proceed. The book of Job began with an enumeration of Job's family and then of his possessions. Job chapter 1 verses 2 to 3.

There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. It concludes chiasmatically with an enumeration of his possessions and then of his family. Now, however, the numbers of Job's livestock are doubled, both in their total number and for each type of animal. As it was in the opening prologue, the number seven is prominent in the epilogue.

[12 : 34] The number of Job's sheep and camels in the prologue was 7,000 and 3,000, a 7 to 3 ratio, which both adds up to the number 10 and represents in the single numbers fullness and glory. We see a similar ratio in the number of Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines in 1 Kings chapter 11 verse 3, which while not recorded in praise of Solomon, is an indication of the greatness and prominence that he had as a king by near eastern standards. The ratio here is the same as that of the prologue, but the number of the animals has doubled. Job's sons and daughters are not doubled in their number, perhaps because his lost sons and daughters would be restored to him at the resurrection.

This said, some have seen in the unusual form of the Hebrew word used for the number of Job's sons in verse 13, a dual form of the number seven, suggesting to some that he had 14 sons after his restoration. The number of daughters is not doubled, however, which is one of the considerations weighing against such a reading. On the other hand, in 1 Chronicles chapter 25 verse 5, we have another biblical character, Heman David Seer, who is said to have been exalted by being granted 14 sons and three daughters. Surprisingly, it is not upon the sons, but upon the daughters that the text elaborates.

We are given their names and their birth order, Jemima the oldest, Kazia the second, and Keren Hapuk the youngest. David Klein suggests that their names mean turtle dove, cassia, and horn of coal, suggesting that they might invoke the three senses, Jemima, who is associated with the turtle dove, hearing, kazia, taste or smell, being cassia, and Keren Hapuk, whose name means horn of coal, associated with eye makeup, would be sight, possibly. Whatever else we are to make of their names, the names do seem to be suggestive of their delightful and pre-possessing appearance and characteristics. Indeed, their remarkable beauty is then mentioned. Just as Job was uniquely great in the land in the prologue, his daughters are uniquely beautiful within it in the epilogue.

What might the beauty of the daughters and their names add to the story? The beauty of the daughters and the language of sensual delights by which they are named implies that not merely the strength that sons chiefly offered was restored to Job, but also the delight, the joy, and the colour that is more particularly associated with young and beautiful daughters. Job's life, which had been under the darkness of affliction, all of the colour sapped out of it, is once more vibrant with life and youth in its season of new love. Daughters did not usually inherit as sons did, save in exceptional situations where no sons were born in a clan, as we see in Numbers chapter 27 verse 8 and the case of the daughters of Zelophehad. While other daughters of wealthy families might have enjoyed a generous dowry, it seems likely that Job's daughters had something more. The point of this note might be that since Job had such bountiful wealth, he did not have the same worries that a poorer man might have had about the significant diminishing of his wealth as it might be sapped into other families as his daughters married. Job had so much that he could give as much to his daughters, who would leave for other families, as to his sons, who would more continue the legacy of Job's own clan. Another possible aspect of this is the gracious character of Job's bequest. Job isn't merely doing what is expected in the law and cultural custom, he is going over and above in a gratuitous generosity.

Job lives for 140 more years, twice 70, which is described elsewhere as the typical human lifespan. That said, Job is set in a patriarchal period where human lifespans were longer. He sees four generations of his offspring. The blessing on Job continues to those that follow after him. When he finally dies, he dies as an old man and full of days, not prematurely as we might have thought he would earlier on in the book. James chapter 5 verse 11 declares, Behold, we consider those blessed who remain steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. Finally arriving at the conclusion of the book of Job, what are we to make of the purpose of the Lord? Toby Sumter perceptively maintains, in keeping with James, that the Lord's purpose was never merely winning the challenge with Satan, with Job's sorrows as collateral damage and the blessing at the end merely compensatory. No, the Lord's intention was always one that involved raising Job up to a new level of sonship. Job learns obedience through the things that he suffers. He is rendered a sort of sacrifice. He suffers a death and is, in a sort of resurrection, raised up to a new level of maturity and glory at the end of the book. At the end of the book, he enjoys a greater glory. He is also advanced in his knowledge of and relationship with the Lord.

[17 : 23] He receives a double portion of what he had once enjoyed, perhaps suggesting a rise to the status of firstborn son. A question to consider, how might the Christian reader of this book see the character of Job as a type of Christ?