

Title: Beach Reads: WHY? Restored

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Scripture: [Job 42:1-6](#)

Text: [Job 42:7-10](#)

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The worst that can happen is behind the best person known. That's where we are in this year's Bible beach. In the Old Testament, the best person known is Job and over the last three weeks, we've looked at his story. It is a divinely inspired folk story, told for thousands of years

around campfires to ask the question, why? If God is all-good and all-powerful, why do terrible things happen? It was likely acted out as an ancient play. It has four acts and two stages. That's an important thing to remember. There is an upper stage in heaven and a lower stage on earth. You have the privilege of seeing both. The writer intends for us to have this unique perspective. But it's crucial to understand that Job only knows what has happened on his stage.¹ Let's have a quick review.

Scene one of Act 1 begins on the lower stage where we are introduced to the best person, Job. Job is incredibly rich, a Jeff Bezos rich in the ancient world with 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 pair of oxen, 500 donkeys, and many servants. He also has a large family, seven sons and three daughters. He was incredibly blessed and extraordinarily devoted to God, offering sacrifices not just for himself but also for his children, just in case they sinned. All of this is revealed in the first scene on the lower stage.

In scene two of Act 1, our eyes shift to the upper stage in heaven, where the court is in session. God is on the bench, the heavenly beings are in the courtroom and the chief prosecutor is "the Satan." God brags about Job being blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. But Satan said to the Lord, "Why wouldn't he? You've given him everything. If you took everything away from him he would curse you to your face." God says, "...very well,

everything he has is in your power but on the man himself do no lay a finger." (Job 1:12)

Satan leaves to do the very worst that he could imagine to the very best anyone knows. Our eyes shift from the upper stage back down to the lower stage, to scene 3 of Act 1. In one day, Job loses his livestock, his wealth, his children, everything. Unbelievably, Job responds by tearing his robe, shaving his head and worshipping God. Despite all of this happening, Job did not curse God.

The lights come on the upper stage and the scene changes once again. Satan stands before God in the heavenly court, frustrated for having failed to get Job to curse God. But he suggests that if he can physically torture Job, "...strike his flesh and bones, he will surely curse you to your face." (Job 2:5) So God gave Satan permission and He decides to cover Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. With one more shift from the upper to the lower stage, we now see Job sitting on an ash heap, scraping his skin with a piece of broken pottery. His wife comes to him and says, "Curse God and die!" But Job did not curse God.

Three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar come to see him, to sit "Shiva" with him, suffering in silence alongside Job. The curtain falls on the lower stage; the upper stage disappears altogether as Act 1 comes to a close.

Act 2 begins with a curse. Job curses the day he was born and his friends decide that they now have permission to speak. They offer their own explanations of why he was suffering. They believe that everything happens for a reason, and that Job was suffering for some secret sin that he had committed. "You reap what you sow. Bad things happen to bad people. You've sinned." Job protests, saying that he is innocent. But they persist for nearly thirty chapters. During this time, Job never curses God. He does express lots of anger and frustration. Job begins to believe that God doesn't care and if God did, he doesn't have the capacity to intercede. God isn't compassionate and powerful. God is cold and inept. ²

Job begs for an audience with God, not once but three times. "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" he says, "that I might come even to his dwelling. I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with

arguments.” (Job 12:3-4) And that is how Act 2 ends with Job feeling alone, on an ash heap of whys.

In chapter 38 Job gets his wish, an audience with God. God comes down from the upper stage to the lower stage and speaks to Job out of a whirlwind. Can you imagine God speaking out of a storm, the power, the intensity? But what God says is not what Job wants to hear. “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man. I will question you, and you will declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (Job 38:2-4)

Here is the amazing thing. God doesn’t answer Job’s questions. God doesn’t explain what has happened in the upper stage. God doesn’t tell him why. God just asks Job questions, not one, not ten but seventy questions, seventy questions which Job can’t possibly answer. It can come off as a little cruel at first as if God is pointing out that Job has a finite mind and a limited point-of-view, as of course, all humans do: we don’t have a heavenly perspective.

There is definitely some of this. But more than this, God’s questions indicate who God really is; they reveal God’s character. God is a Creator who delights in His creation, who cares for every creature, who is intimately involved in the universe. Job finds out that God is irrationally loving, incredibly generous, and truly caring and compassionate. Job doesn’t learn anything about the upper stage because Job’s story is our story, where suffering happens, down on the lower stage, on earth. So he doesn’t get an answer to “Why?” He gets something better. Job finds out who God is.

It’s why as Act 3 ends, Job confesses. “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” (Job 42:3b) I am sorry for saying you don’t care and that you are powerless. I was wrong. I repent.

And it is why as Act 4 begins, Job makes an amazing statement. “My ears had heard about you...but now my eyes have seen you.” (Job 42:5) God came down from the upper stage to the lower stage so that Job can see who God is. Job admits that he now has a personal knowledge of God that he never before had. He confesses that his knowledge of God has been secondhand.³

That's the story of this book. It really ends right there. You can see it visually in scripture. The poetry end. But of course, it doesn't really end. There is an epilogue written in prose, to tie up all of the loose ends.

The first thing that happens is the Lord chastises the three friends of Job for their misrepresentation of God. They thought they were sticking up for God. But God says, "Nope, you were wrong; Job was right." "My wrath is kindled against you ...for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." (Job 42:8) But, God says, "...if you will offer a sacrifice and Job will pray for you, I will forgive you." Can you imagine the moment when Job's three friends ask him to pray for their forgiveness? And he does! Job prays and God forgives them, "And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends." (Job 42:10a) What were those fortunes?

First, it was family and friends. His brothers and sisters and all who had known him came to see him. They had avoided him like the plague. But they came back, had dinner, comforted him and showed him sympathy for all the suffering he experienced. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring.

Then God restores Job's his wealth. "The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys." (Job 42: 12) To the ancients' ears, it would have been like hitting the lottery if instantly reacquired. Likely it was accumulated through the rest of his life, but either way, it was an enormous amount. Now, think Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates combined.

Then, God restores Job's family. He has seven sons and three daughters, the same number of children that he had at the beginning of the story. You can't replace kids when they're gone; the loss of children is life's deepest grief. So in some ways, it's hard to imagine this blessing restoring Job. But all children are gifts and he has a family of ten again. But the story takes an interesting turn. We learn the names of his daughters, but not his sons. "He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters." (Job 42:14) This is unheard of in Hebrew literature where genealogy is always traced through the sons. Not to name the sons would have more than raised an eyebrow.

But the three names for Job's beautiful daughters are, well, are amazing, extravagant, even joyful. Jemimah was the Hebrew word for "dove" --a bird the shade of color considered particularly lovely in that culture. The second daughter is named Keziah which was their word for "cinnamon," a prized spice. The third daughter Keren Happuch has the strangest name of all. Keren Happuch meant "horn of eye shadow." Job names this daughter after make-up. ⁴

But hold on; there is even more here. Job gives Dove, Cinnamon, and Eyeshadow, along with their brothers, a share of his inheritance. In a male-dominated society, this was unheard of. Sons got inheritance because the money stayed in the family. Giving your estate to your daughters means you'll never see that money again. Why does the writer include this odd information? Because he wants us to know that Job now delights in giving. Job is being irrationally loving, incredibly generous, and truly caring and compassionate. Does that sound familiar? Job has taken on the very characteristic of God. He did so for a long time after his incredible trial of suffering. "Job lived one hundred and forty years and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. And Job died, old and full of days." (Job 42:16-17)

That's the end of the book, and to almost everyone's surprise, it is a happy ending. Some people don't like it for that very reason. They say it isn't realistic. I guess if they were telling the story of Job, he would have died broke and bereaved, covered in sores and sitting on an ash heap. But that would have missed the point of the story, to address the big question of Why? "If God is all-good and all-powerful, why do terrible things happen?" Of course, by now, you've discovered that this really isn't the question that the author was addressing, even if it was what he first set out to address. That question is beyond our capacity to comprehend. That question can only be answered on the upper stage, not the lower stage.

The real question of the Book of Job is this. Can a human being hold onto God and faith when experiencing incredible pain and suffering? One human could. Job. He models a way of remaining faithful even when others offer wrong thinking and doubts well up. Job's greatest discovery in this encounter is his personal experience of God and the understanding that he can continue to question God and through those questions, God will sustain, respond and eventually restore him.

Job's honesty has been described as patient and used now for thousands of years across inspire billions of people who suffer. A better translation might be perseverance. The author of James says it this: "As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. (James 5:11)

That's Job's story and but looking back on it in the 21st century, we know it is even more than that. It is also a glimpse of the day when God would once again come down from the upper stage to the lower stage, this time not in a whirlwind but in the person of Jesus. God would take on Job's suffering and your suffering and my suffering and our sin on the cross. It is a glimpse of when God will say to everybody on the lower stage. Whatever you are going through, come to me, give me your suffering and I will give you rest. I'm God and I will give you hope, I will give you comfort and I will hold your hand and never let it go.

Every one of us will suffer. Some of us are suffering right now; we're deeply hurting. Why? We don't know why. We can't know why. What we can know is this. How we respond matters. Job teaches us this. So hang on like Job, keep going, don't let go, don't give up, God will be discovered and you will be restored.

¹ Ortberg, John. God Is Big Enough to Comfort My Suffering. Retrieved by subscription at PreachingToday.com

² Hannah, John. Is There Any Comfort? Retrieved by subscription at PreachingToday.com

³ KUYPER, L. J. Repentance of Job. *Vetus testamentum*, [s. l.], v. 9, n. 1, p. 91–94, 1959

⁴ Ortberg, John.