Lessons from Job

"There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil."
—Job 1:1

THE BOOK OF JOB IS unique in many ways and, because of this, some Bible critics have suggested that perhaps it should not be classed with the other writings that we consider to be the inspired Word of God. We are convinced, however, that the weight of evidence surely identifies it as part of God's Word. Notice the Apostle James' reference to Job. He not only vouches for the credibility of this book, but suggests also an approach to our study of it in order that we might draw the intended lessons from it. These verses read, "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."—James 5:10,11

In the above verses, we see Job classified with the prophets of old who have spoken in the name of the Lord. James further suggests that Job's experiences were to be "an example of suffering affliction, and of patience"—an example for the church during this

Gospel Age. Additionally, he invites us to notice the tender mercies of God inasmuch as after being faithful in afflictions, he was richly rewarded by God. He received double for all that he had lost.

THE ACCOUNT OF JOB

Let us turn to the Book of Job and notice its very classic beginning. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east." (Job 1:1-3) These verses present all we know about Job as far as his background is concerned.

The patriarch Job lived in the desert city or area of Uz, which is believed to have been somewhere between Moab and ancient Chaldea. While Job was going through the experiences recorded in this book, the Israelites were dwelling in the land of Goshen in Egypt, which gives us an idea of the time setting. There is a clue which helps to pinpoint this as the time that Job lived, having to do with one of Job's comforters, Eliphaz, and the genealogy of Esau given in Genesis 36. We will not go further into this specifically, as it does not bear on the lessons in the Book of Job.

Job became the center of a controversy between Satan and the Lord God. Satan suggested that Job reverenced God only because he had 'hedged' him about and made him to prosper in the land. He

suggested that if God would take away all that Job had he would curse him to his face. So the Lord allowed Satan to bring all these calamities upon Job—his children were all killed, his flocks and herds and all his servants were destroyed so that he had nothing. He even brought a scourge of boils upon him—from the crown of his head to the bottom of his feet. The only thing he could not do was take Job's life.—Job 1:6-12; 2:1-8

Even Job's wife turned against him for a time, Satan suggesting, through her, that he "curse God, and die." Job had nothing left but his life and his faith in God, and what a test of faith this was. The account says, however, that "In all this did not Job sin with his lips." (chap. 2:9,10) Although he did not sin or complain, he was very perplexed and could not understand the situation. It occurred to him that ashes might be good for curing the boils so he made his way out of town to the city dump and found an ash heap where he sat down and covered himself with ashes.—vs. 8

JOB'S 'COMFORTERS'

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar—three friends of Job who heard about his miserable condition—came to comfort him and found him sitting on the heap of ashes with all these boils and smeared with ashes from head to foot. They could hardly believe their eyes. In fact, they were so shocked they couldn't utter a word. They just sat there looking at each other for a solid week. The account reads, "When they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their

heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great."—vss. 12,13

Finally, Job began to pour out his heart to his three friends. These three were supposedly God-fearing men, and came with the express purpose of comforting their friend Job. While all three of these so-called comforters became very eloquent in speech and rose to high platitudes of thought in their dialog with Job, they turned out to be his accusers more than his comforters. In fact, they suggested that all of Job's problems were punishments from God because of his sin. They accused him of being a sinner, a hypocrite, and a liar. The account of Job's conversations with these three 'comforters' is recorded in chapters four to thirty one.

During Job's conversation with his three friends, another young man, named Elihu, came on the scene. He had been listening to the discussion and could not contain himself any longer. He delivered a rather well-worded lecture, rebuking Job's friends for their attitude and speaking many profound and truthful things concerning God. However, Elihu also failed to provide the answer that Job was seeking—as to why God was permitting him to suffer all these calamities.—chaps. 32-37

GOD SPEAKS TO JOB

When all human help seemed to fail, God spoke to Job and began to open up his understanding concerning himself and his attitude. We see in this that, while Job never lost faith in God, he did, nevertheless, have some important lessons to learn to

offset his tendency toward self-righteousness and pride. He needed to be humbled.

Job had never had any adversity in his life. He needed this experience in order to learn the value of obedience under adverse conditions. When the Lord saw that he had learned the lessons, he brought an end to his misery. Job had overcome, and because of it the Lord blessed him with substance far greater than he had had before—doubling his wealth, giving him a new family and extending his years of life. This, in brief, is the story of Job.

SIMILARITIES—JOB AND JESUS

We believe there are some lessons in Job's experience that can be a help to us in our Christian walk. First, however, we note some parallels between the experiences of Job and that of our Lord Jesus.

Job—was the richest man in all the east. Jesus, or the *Logos*—the riches of the universe were his. He was second only to God in glory.

Job—submitted to the Divine will in giving up all that he had, including his own health. He spoke of himself as being 'as good as dead.' Jesus—laid aside his heavenly glory and sacrificed his perfect human life on the cross. "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."—II Cor. 8:9

Job—was persecuted by his three comforters, all speaking eloquently concerning God but accusing Job of being a sinner, hypocrite, and liar. Jesus—was persecuted by the three religious sects of his day, the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. They claimed to worship God, but they called our Lord a sinner, hypocrite, and liar.

Job—learned the value of faith and obedience to God under adverse conditions. Jesus—"learned . . . obedience by the things which he suffered."—Heb. 5:8

Job—the LORD returned the prosperity of Job, giving him far more than he had before. Jesus—raised to glory, honor, immortality, the Divine nature—a far greater glory than he had with the Father as the *Logos*.

LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH

If the above correspondency exists between Job and our Lord, then certainly there are some valuable lessons for those who are following in the Master's footsteps. We, like Job, are in a sense a subject of controversy between Satan and our Heavenly Father. We, too, have some profound lessons to be learned, principally humility, in order to be drawn into a closer and deeper relationship with our Heavenly Father. Some of these difficult experiences that come upon us may be instigated by our adversary, the Devil, in his effort to destroy our faith, but they are permitted and carefully overruled of God, that humility and all the beautiful fruits of righteousness may be worked out in our life, if we are rightly exercised by them.

In the case of Job, the primary battle was between pride and humility. Satan had calculated that Job would lose his faith in God entirely if he took away all the things that appealed to his natural pride and vanity. God, on the other hand, believed that these same experiences, overruled by him, could break down the pride and self-righteousness of Job and help him develop the beautiful godlike quality of humility.

Let us call to mind the story in chapter 22 of Luke, beginning with verse 24. Strife had developed among the disciples of our Lord as to who would be the greatest among them. This suggestion which had come to them was of satanic origin. Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."—Luke 22:31,32

We see how Satan tried to use the spirit of pride as a wedge to destroy the faith of the disciples even before they had become Spirit-begotten sons of God at Pentecost. The Lord in his wisdom provided this stern reply to the intent that the weaknesses of Peter's own flesh would be a means of humbling him so that he might become very useful in the ministry of Truth after Pentecost. The result, we know, was that Peter was a faithful servant and apostle of the Lord, even unto death.

The Apostle Paul is another example of how Satan's efforts to destroy were carefully overruled of God in such a way that Paul might prosper spiritually. Have we ever thought of Satan having anything to do with Paul's blindness? The apostle said, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in

persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."—II Cor. 12:7-10

Paul learned to rejoice in these difficult experiences. This, too, was what Job learned in his life. This is what the followers of the Master must learn also. If the Lord's people have reproaches, persecutions, and distresses for Christ's sake—we should rejoice in them. It is a means of bringing us low, humbling us under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt us in due time. The spirit of pride, vainglory, and self-righteousness cannot be taken into the kingdom. We must get rid of it here—while we are on this side of the veil.

UNDERSTANDING OUR EXPERIENCES

Job sought wisdom and understanding, as had others in olden times, most notably Solomon and Hezekiah. We read, "Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12) Job could not understand why God was permitting these terrible things, according to the flesh, to come upon him, so he came to the conclusion that God had forsaken him, and rather than try to communicate with God about the matter Job first went to his worldly friends for advice and comfort, instead of seeking God.

Sometimes we make mistakes along this same line. Perhaps we have had a severe trial come upon us and then sought out advice from every means available, practically moving heaven and earth, before seriously taking the matter to the Lord and seeking his guidance and overruling. Oh, how pleasing it is to our Heavenly Father if we, rather, turn to him immediately in times of distress, for "God is our

refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."—Ps. 46:1

Job was gradually learning a new dimension of faith—the value of obedience through the things that he suffered. As he carried on the dialog with his friends sitting on a heap of ashes, he was becoming aware of the fact that he was not going to receive any useful advice or help from them. Then his mind began to turn more toward the Lord, and he uttered these words, "Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God." (Job 13:3) This seemed to be a turning point in Job's attitude as he began to more fully humble himself under the mighty hand of God.

Job's faith now was becoming stronger, and he was able to utter, as recorded in verse 15 of the same chapter, those immortal words that have rung down through the ages and have been such an encouragement and blessing to us—"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Have we reached that point in Christian development where we can utter these same words, and where we never murmur or repine at what the Lord's providence may permit? Or, rather, do we find ourselves complaining at times? If so, then perhaps there are still further lessons we might learn from Job's experiences.

LEARNING THE LESSONS

Job was now beginning to learn some of the lessons God had purposed for him. He had prayed for wisdom, and he was beginning to get understanding. As he started learning these things, he expressed his confidence in God, when he said, "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried

me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10) Is not this also true with the Lord's people of today? He knows the way that we take, and wisely allows us to go through the fiery trials that are so necessary if we are to 'come forth as gold.' The Apostle Peter, having learned this valuable lesson through experience himself, said, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you."—I Pet. 4:12

Job now had come to understand what his character weaknesses were, and he knew what God was trying to do for him. He then talked freely of his former condition of pride, vanity, and self-righteousness. "My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand. Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel. After my words they spake not again; and my speech dropped upon them." (Job 29:20-22) We were no better than Job in this respect. The Lord is carefully pointing out to each one of us, through our experiences, that we too must first recognize, and do something about this 'pride of life,' vanity, and self-righteousness that are so much a part of our fallen human nature.

HUMBLING OURSELVES BEFORE GOD

We recall again, as stated earlier, after Job had completed his dialog with his three friends, there was the young man Elihu who spoke out eloquently in words of counsel to Job. He did not fully understand Job's problem, but he did speak some profound truths concerning God. His description of the Almighty is certainly worth noting. "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he

will not afflict. Men do therefore fear him: he respecteth not any that are wise of heart." (Job 37:23,24) What a precious gem humility is when we begin to see these lessons in our lives! Perhaps if we could see ourselves as God sees us we would work much more diligently in this job of rooting pride out of our character.

Finally, God himself spoke to Job and seemed to finish the work of humbling him and breaking his pride and self-righteousness. Beginning with chapter 38, God sought to further humble Job by pointing out to him that the wisdom and knowledge which he had as one of the intellectual giants of his day was nothing compared with the wisdom of God. He asked Job to answer a number of questions concerning the Creation of the heavens and the earth, the preparation of the earth, and the laws that control it. Job, of course, had no answers to these questions.

Job, for the first time, began to see himself in the proper light. His estimation of his own wisdom and knowledge had been greatly reduced. We have his response to God in this regard, "Then Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." (Job 40:3-5) Later, Job continues to pour out his heart to the Lord, saying, "I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of

thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."—Job 42:2-6

Sometimes we hear the Lord with our ears but do not see him with our eyes. We will see the Lord with our eyes only when we are able to apply the lessons we learn in our daily experiences. This is where we see the hand of God in our lives, and he will give us experiences that are calculated to help develop in our individual lives the humility of character needed to be faithful. It was through the eye of faith that Job finally saw God's hand carefully overruling in the great ordeal he had gone through, and it will be with the eye of faith that we are able to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and see him working out through experiences the precious gems of a Christlike character in our lives.

SATAN—THE FATHER OF PRIDE

Let us also notice chapter 41, where God talks about the "leviathan" and goes into great detail concerning its appearance and other characteristics. A leviathan is a serpent, or dragon, and probably the mythical dragons we sometimes hear about are based, in part, upon the description that we have in the book of Job. This chapter provides a symbolic description of Satan and his attributes. Indeed, Satan is called "the dragon, that old serpent." (Rev. 20:2) The last verse of Job 41 reads, "He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride." This is a fitting description of the "god of this world." (II Cor. 4:4) Satan has infected the whole world with the spirit of pride, vainglory, and self-righteousness.

The battle line was pride versus humility in the controversy between Satan and God in respect to Job. This is precisely what the issue is also in our lives as followers of Christ. If the Lord is to have the victory in our lives, then we must purge out all willfulness, self-righteousness, and pride and fully humble ourselves before him. May our strength be found in the power of his Spirit working in our lives, and may his Word of Truth be our counsel.

A GLORIOUS OUTCOME

The story of Job had a very happy ending. His comforters apologized and sacrificed to him. Job prayed for them and God forgave them. What a lesson is in that for us! We, too, must love our enemies and pray for them. We should pray for the world that God's wonderful kingdom of blessings may soon come and restore all things.

In the end, Job received much more than he had lost—double of all his substance. Our simple minds are not capable of comprehending the wonderful things that God has in store for those that love him. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."—I Cor. 2:9

Much has been said about the goal of our High Calling. May that goal inspire us to more fully humble ourselves in every aspect of our lives, under the mighty providential hand of God, that we may, if faithful, be highly exalted and have the privilege of a part in the wonderful work of blessing and uplifting all the families of the earth. Oh, what a joy our Heavenly Father has set before us. Let us not "neglect so great salvation!"—Heb. 2:3 ■