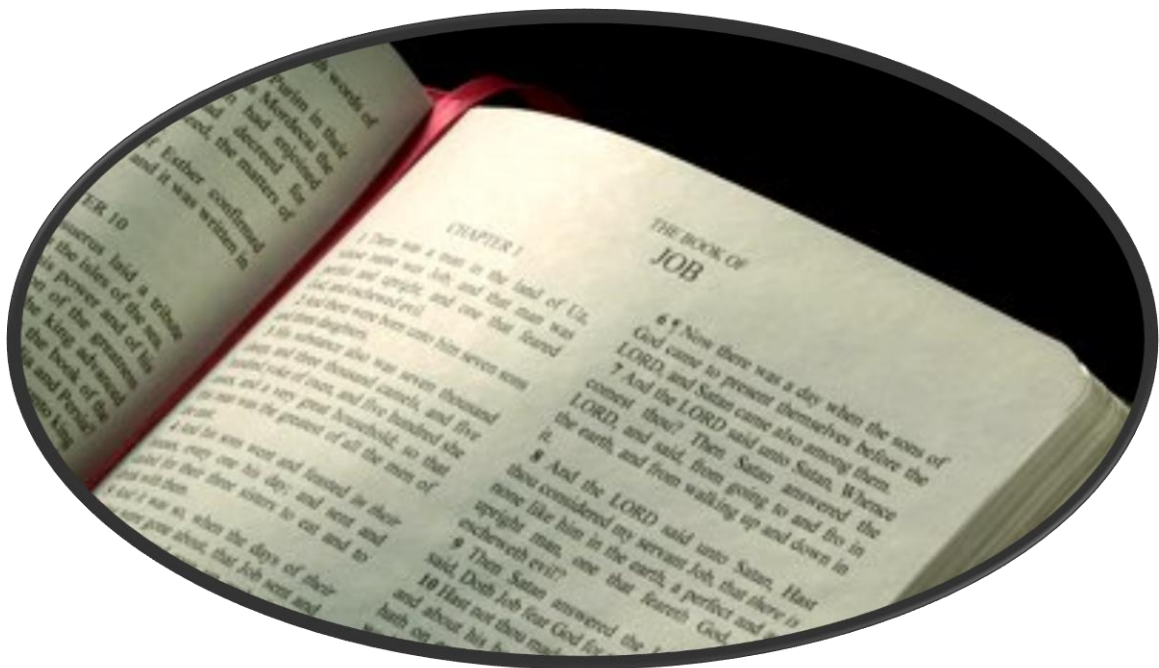


JOB

JOB'S PERSPECTIVE



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Job 25:1-30:15: Job's Perspective

Job understands God, but doesn't understand himself.

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Thank you.

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1 Job 25:1-26:14 (ESV)

Then Bildad the Shubite answered and said:

"Dominion and fear are with God; he makes peace in his high heaven. Is there any number to his armies? Upon whom does his light not arise? How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure? Behold, even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in his eyes; how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm!"

Then Job answered and said:

"How you have helped him who has no power! How you have saved the arm that has no strength! How you have counseled him who has no wisdom, and plentifully declared sound knowledge! With whose help have you uttered words, and whose breath has come out from you? The dead tremble under the waters and their inhabitants. Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering. He stretches out the north over the void and hangs the earth on nothing. He binds up the waters in his thick clouds, and the cloud is not split open under them. He covers the face of the full moon and spreads over it his cloud. He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters at the boundary between light and darkness. The pillars of heaven tremble and are astounded at his rebuke. By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he shattered Rahab. By his wind the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent. Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?"

Bildad's point isn't false; no man is *in the right before God*. But the same point has been made at least three times already. Does that explain his abrupt ending? Did he suddenly realize that he's being boring? Did Job just cut him off? We can't know, but in any case he's done.

Job's reply begins with his usual point – you guys aren't helping. But then he gets into a great truth – God deals with things beyond our view. We can't see the dead. *Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering*. He sees the Earth from an outer space point of view. *He stretches out the north over the void and hangs the earth on nothing*.

Wait. What? This is amazingly early in human history to be saying something so counter to the flat Earth theories. Job doesn't completely describe the heliocentric model of the solar system but what he does say is accurate.

And he's light years ahead of the folks who think the earth sits on the backs of turtles.

Despite its title, the book of Job isn't about Job; it's about God – and this passage reflects that. The main theme of the book is that God's priorities are not our priorities. Here, the point is that God's perspective is not our perspective.

Job's examples are surprising: the view from the grave, and the view from outer space.

The Bible is nothing if not surprising. It's supposed to stretch our minds. It's an infinite subject.

2 Job 27:1-23 (ESV)

And Job again took up his discourse, and said:

“As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter, as long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit. Far be it from me to say that you are right; till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.

“Let my enemy be as the wicked, and let him who rises up against me be as the unrighteous. For what is the hope of the godless when God cuts him off, when God takes away his life? Will God hear his cry when distress comes upon him? Will he take delight in the Almighty? Will he call upon God at all times? I will teach you concerning the hand of God; what is with the Almighty I will not conceal. Behold, all of you have seen it yourselves; why then have you become altogether vain?

“This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage that oppressors receive from the Almighty: If his children are multiplied, it is for the sword, and his descendants have not enough bread. Those who survive him the pestilence buries, and his widows do not weep. Though he heap up silver like dust, and pile up clothing like clay, he may pile it up, but the righteous will wear it, and the innocent will divide the silver. He builds his house like a moth's, like a booth that a watchman makes. He goes to bed rich, but will do so no more; he opens his eyes, and his wealth is gone. Terrors overtake him like a flood; in the night a whirlwind carries him off. The east wind lifts him up and he is gone; it sweeps him out of his place. It hurls at him without pity; he flees from its power in headlong flight. It claps its hands at him and hisses at him from its place.”

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar claim that God protects the righteous and that the wicked perish. Job has been shredding their argument with countless examples of evil people prospering.

But now he shifts gears. Something nasty does await the wicked – hell. *For what is the hope of the godless when God cuts him off, when God takes away his life? ... Terrors overtake him like a flood; in the night a whirlwind carries him off.*

Most of our understanding of hell comes from the New Testament. Job is way ahead of his time. To these guys, Job is thinking outside the box. They've been thinking about justice in a purely temporal way. Job is expanding their perspective. Yet again, we get back to theme of perspective.

I needed the help of a senior executive to resolve a minor administrative impasse at my job. I was hesitant to take his time for something so trivial. Then it hit me – prayer is that on steroids.

Then I met the executive's son. He gets access over trivial things all the time. That's like prayer too.

God has time for us because he loves us. Nothing we could ever say to God would be interesting by any normal measure.

But with us it's different. It's personal.

3 Job 28:1-28 (ESV)

“Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place for gold that they refine. Iron is taken out of the earth, and copper is smelted from the ore. Man puts an end to darkness and searches out to the farthest limit the ore in gloom and deep darkness. He opens shafts in a valley away from where anyone lives; they are forgotten by travelers; they hang in the air, far away from mankind; they swing to and fro. As for the earth, out of it comes bread, but underneath it is turned up as by fire. Its stones are the place of sapphires, and it has dust of gold.

“That path no bird of prey knows, and the falcon's eye has not seen it. The proud beasts have not trodden it; the lion has not passed over it.

“Man puts his hand to the flinty rock and overturns mountains by the roots. He cuts out channels in the rocks, and his eye sees every precious thing. He dams up the streams so that they do not trickle, and the thing that is hidden he brings out to light.

“But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its worth, and it is not found in the land of the living. The deep says, ‘It is not in me,’ and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’ It cannot be bought for gold, and silver cannot be weighed as its price. It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, in precious onyx or sapphire. Gold and glass cannot equal it, nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal; the price of wisdom is above pearls. The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it, nor can it be valued in pure gold.

“From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and Death say, ‘We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.’

“God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When he gave to the wind its weight and apportioned the waters by measure, when he made a decree for the rain and a way for the lightning of the thunder, then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. And he said to man, ‘Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.’”

The earth gives us a bounty of riches. By digging and by harvesting, we get many valuable things.

But none of them can compare to wisdom. You can't find wisdom by digging for it and you can't buy it with any of those things you can dig up. You want wisdom? God Himself tells us how to get it.

Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.

The US has a holiday to celebrate the earth's bounty – Thanksgiving. But it's a Christian holiday too, explicitly giving the glory to God for the harvest. Of all the Christian holidays in the US, Thanksgiving is the least corrupted. It hasn't been taken over by commercial interests or turned into a spring break party. It still is what it was in the beginning – a time to honor God's provision.

In a curious twist, its perception as a secular holiday seems to have shielded it from being secularized.

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. – 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (ESV)

4 Job 29:1-25 (ESV)

And Job again took up his discourse, and said:

“Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness, as I was in my prime, when the friendship of God was upon my tent, when the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were all around me, when my steps were washed with butter, and the rock poured out for me streams of oil! When I went out to the gate of the city, when I prepared my seat in the square, the young men saw me and withdrew, and the aged rose and stood; the princes refrained from talking and laid their hand on their mouth; the voice of the nobles was hushed, and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard, it called me blessed, and when the eye saw, it approved, because I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him. The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know. I broke the fangs of the unrighteous and made him drop his prey from his teeth. Then I thought, ‘I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand, my roots spread out to the waters, with the dew all night on my branches, my glory fresh with me, and my bow ever new in my hand.’”

“Men listened to me and waited and kept silence for my counsel. After I spoke they did not speak again, and my word dropped upon them. They waited for me as for the rain, and they opened their mouths as for the spring rain. I smiled on them when they had no confidence, and the light of my face they did not cast down. I chose their way and sat as chief, and I lived like a king among his troops, like one who comforts mourners.”

Something's wrong here. Job's lack of humility is disturbing. He longs for the good old days when he was king of the hill. That's OK, but he dwells too much on what a great guy he was.

Given his incredible suffering, Job can be forgiven for some amount of narcissism, but it's still wrong.

He's starting to forget that all his blessings came from God.

Success is poisonous. Many of the people who rise to the top of their profession are injured by their success. They see themselves as better than everyone else, and it makes them insufferable.

The tricky part is that, in a sense, they often are better than everyone else; that's why they're on top. In the same way, Job is better than everyone else. God said so Himself.

But even that is by the grace of God. Everything good in your life, even the things you did, are by the grace of God – your talents, your good works, your faith.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. – Ephesians 2:8-9

5 Job 30:1-15 (ESV)

“But now they laugh at me, men who are younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock. What could I gain from the strength of their hands, men whose vigor is gone? Through want and hard hunger they gnaw the dry ground by night in waste and desolation; they pick saltwort and the leaves of bushes, and the roots of the broom tree for their food. They are driven out from human company; they shout after them as after a thief. In the gullies of the torrents they must dwell, in holes of the earth and of the rocks. Among the bushes they bray; under the nettles they huddle together. A senseless, a nameless brood, they have been whipped out of the land.

“And now I have become their song; I am a byword to them. They abhor me; they keep aloof from me; they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me. Because God has loosed my cord and humbled me, they have cast off restraint in my presence. On my right hand the rabble rise; they push away my feet; they cast up against me their ways of destruction. They break up my path; they promote my calamity; they need no one to help them. As through a wide breach they come; amid the crash they roll on. Terrors are turned upon me; my honor is pursued as by the wind, and my prosperity has passed away like a cloud.”

Time out. This actually happened? His neighbors started picking on him after his downfall? Do they actually *not hesitate to spit at the sight of Job*?

Apparently so. That says something. Why would people act this way towards someone who had treated them so well? What strange aspect of sin is at work here?

This sounds like the bizarre treatment of Christ by the crowds during his trial. They suddenly switched from adoring him to mocking him. Why? What strange aspect of sin was at work there?

It's covetousness. People hated Job for the same reason the Pharisees hated Christ – he makes them look bad. Jesus “wrecked the curve.” Next to him, everyone else looks mediocre (or worse). Seeing great people brought down is a cause for joy because it feeds people's pride.

This may explain a curious modern phenomenon. Lots of people resent the so called “one percent” but seem to make an exception for sports stars. Why?

They don't seem to have a problem with not being able to dunk a basketball, but resent someone else succeeding in business.

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.” – Exodus 20:17 (ESV)

This is a universal sin. Many great pieces of literature are devoted to it. Here's a classic.

<http://www.mrlocke.net/EnglishOne/Novel/Pearl/Chapter1.htm>

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Consider the size of the universe. The fastest any manmade spaceship has ever gone is about 100,000 miles an hour (that's New York to LA in 2 minutes). At that speed, it would take hundreds of centuries to get to the nearest star. Our galaxy is thousands of times bigger than that, and the whole of creation dwarfs our galaxy. What kind of priorities should the creator of all that have?
2. So you sometimes feel uncomfortable asking God for small favors?
3. Are you bothered by the corruption of holidays? What do you do about it?
4. Do you know someone who was ruined by success? Do you know someone who wasn't?
5. Why do people resent it when others are blessed?

Items for prayer: