

The Wise Man of Uz

When Lightning Strikes – Part I

Job 1:1-5

Introduction – Life is Difficult

There are several books that I have been reading that begin with words like,

*Life is difficult; [this] blunt, three-word statement is an accurate appraisal of our existence on this planet.*ⁱ

One author began his book by quoting some proverbs with a hint of humor; like the French proverb that says, “Life is like an onion which one peels while crying.”

He added this one, which I thought was both humorous and realistic, “Life is a tough proposition, and the first hundred years are the hardest.”

He went on to write the first words of his book which began, “Life and tough stuff go hand in hand; they typically appear as gradually intensifying storms.”ⁱⁱ

Another book I recently began reading begins with the words, “Life is full of suffering.”ⁱⁱⁱ

By now, you are probably thinking, “Stephen, you should read something positive for a change.”

These are Christian books that I am reading. The commentaries and devotional works from which I have just quoted, were written by evangelical theologians and pastors who wrestled with their readers over the question of trouble in a world that God controls.

They are all trying to answer the question, “Why do the children of God have troubles?”

This is the age-old question, and everyone has it on their mind sooner or later. It is not just about big troubles, but little troubles; everyday stuff as well!

One author of a student devotional put this in language students might understand. He entitled his book, *If God Loves Me, Why Can't I Get My Locker Open?*

Have you ever felt like that? Maybe for you, it was not your locker, but your car door. Perhaps you wondered why your washing machine decided to break down just before company arrived or you slept through the alarm and missed your appointment or your final exam, or you tore your dress right before the big event.

This is little stuff that is just so ill-timed and irritating. Why does it happen?

A seminary student with whom I attended school told me of a wedding he had performed. It was in a small country church during the dead of winter. He arrived and found that it was almost as cold inside the little sanctuary as outside. The janitor had been detained and arrived late. When he got to the church, there was only about thirty minutes to spare. He went down to the basement and turned on the heater. The church had the type of heat vents that ran along the bottom of the sanctuary – blowing warm, dry air. The problem was, he forgot to turn it off until it was too late.

During the processional, the trumpet player fainted. A little later, a bridesmaid fainted and then, the bride as well. She was revived with a cold cloth and stood back up on her feet, but she fainted again. During the rest of the ceremony, she and the groom

knelt at the kneeling bench with a cold cloth at the back of her neck.

My friend told me that after the ceremony, she refused to go on the honeymoon because she could not remember getting married. She had absolutely no recollection of any of the event. She insisted that they watch the video so she could hear herself saying the vows. They did and, after the video, sped off to their honeymoon destination.

That is a wedding to remember!

What about more serious problems that we would all call true suffering?

Jerry Bridges, a long time missionary with the Navigators, prefaced his book, *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*, by writing,

When I was fourteen years old, my mother died suddenly, without warning. I was in the adjoining room and rushed in just in time to see her gasp her last breath. I was stunned and devastated. My older brother was away at school, and my dad was too stricken with grief to help me. Worst of all, I did not know how to turn to God in times of trouble. I was alone in my adversity.^{iv}

What would you say to a fourteen year old who had experience that?

A few years ago, a young man who once attended our church sensed the Lord directing him into vocational ministry. He and his wife were enthusiastic and made plans to eliminate debt and begin Bible College. After months of preparation, they were accepted and left for an out-of-state school. During his first semester, he developed a nasal infection that required surgery. The doctor blundered in surgery, cutting through sensitive nerves. What began as simple outpatient surgery became a nightmare.

This young man was wracked with incredible pain in his face – his eyes, nose, teeth, mouth, jaws all screamed with constant pain. He was told that surgery would not repair anything and that only time might heal him. After two years, his recovery was still incomplete. He had to drop out of school and was unable to work. He and his wife lost what little they had and eventually, moved back home. When he came to see me, he could only sit for a few minutes – he was on the maximum pain medicine allowable, with a morphine pack on his hip. Even still, he sat in my office with a lollypop in his mouth, laced with more drugs to help the pain in his mouth and teeth.

Some pain is sudden, traumatic, and devastating. Other adversities are chronic, persistent, seemingly designed to wear down your spirit over time.^v

What do you say to someone who has lost their job or their mate or their health or their child or their dream? What do you say to someone who is asking, “Where in the world is God?”

Certainly our world is mesmerized by this question. Every time a tornado strikes or a hurricane levels homes or a killer goes on a shooting spree or terrorists enact murderous plans, the question comes, “Why? Why would God allow this to happen? Where is God anyway?”

Some authors try to answer the problem of suffering by saying God does not exist, so He cannot help us anyway.

Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1986, is one such author. His biographical work entitled *Night*, has sold hundreds of thousands of copies. In the book, Elie describes his suffering as a Jewish boy in the concentration camp at Auschwitz.

I recently read this book and Elie’s suffering at the hands of the Nazi’s, who hated Jews with demonically inspired hatred, was truly tragic. However, even more tragic was the fact, as Elie wrote with finality, that in the concentration camp, standing below the limp body of a little Jewish boy who had just been hung by the neck, he was convinced that God was dead.^{vi}

Elie’s solace was a retreat into practical atheism. In other words, there is no way God could exist and something like this still happen.

Another famous book by Harold Kushner, attempted to answer the problem of evil in the world and the existence of God. His book, also a best seller, is entitled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. I have a copy in my library and have read most of it. In his book, Kushner offers something that seems better than a God who is dead, but not much better. In the end, in fact, the reader is left with just as much despair, confusion, and doubt. Kushner writes that God exists and is very loving, but He is not sovereign. He writes, “God wants the righteous to live happy lives . . . but it is too difficult even for God to keep cruelty and chaos from claiming innocent victims.”^{vii}

Kushner’s answer was not atheism, but was a version of God that is just as empty and hollow.

Now, halfway through this sermon, I am sure you are beginning to wonder if I am going to get to some answers.

Not today. In fact, I am convinced that we are too quick with answers – with a happy verse or two; with a spiritual slap on the back that leaves the suffering believer just as cold as when he or she entered the sanctuary.

We will get to some answers, but first we need to identify the questions. Let us start with these questions:

- Why do the righteous suffer?
- Where is God when tragedy strikes?
- If God is all-loving, how can He allow human suffering?
- Does God really care about us?
- Does God charge His children money and loyalty for His goodness?
- Where is God when it hurts?
- Why is God silent while we suffer?^{viii}

These are just a beginning.

If I were to ask you where we should turn to hear both the questions and the answers, you would most likely say, “Turn to the book of Job.”

I would agree. Job is universally recognized as the ultimate sufferer – and rightly so.

Turn to the book of Job and let us begin a study through this book. I plan to take about a year to finish. I am serious.

I could do the same as one country preacher. Chuck Swindoll wrote in his commentary on Job of a friend who was driving across Texas late one night searching for something to listen to on the radio to keep him awake. Finally, he tuned in to a country preacher who was preaching on Job. The sermon title was, “I Can’t Eat by Day, I Can’t Sleep by Night, and the Woman I Love Don’t Treat Me Right.” That is Job in less than twenty words!^{ix}

Highlights of the Book of Job

Before I read the first paragraph of this book, in which we will cover verses 1 through 5 today, as God sets the stage for the suffering of His servant Job, let me give a few highlights.

The book of Job is really one very long poem. The poem stretches from chapter 3 all the way to chapter 42 verse 6. Before the poetic form begins, chapters 1 and 2 form the prologue to the poem. After the poem is finished in chapter 42, there are eleven verses which form the epilogue.

J. Sidlow Baxter, the faithful pastor in Great Britain during the last century, wrote that this inspired account was a dramatic poem framed in an epic story.^x

It is believed by many to be the oldest book in the world. In fact, although the book of Genesis appears first in the Bible, and rightly so, the book of Job may have been written years earlier and was perhaps edited later by Moses.

Most conservative scholars believe Job lived during the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or perhaps somewhat earlier. The fact that he will offer sacrifices himself places him before the law of Moses, when only the priesthood of Aaron’s descendants could do so.

Before the law was given, men offered the sacrifices to God. This was true of Noah, Abraham, and Job.^{xi}

By the way, the book of Job contains the longest place in the Bible where [God the Father] speaks – four chapters in all. It is also, in fact, the longest place in the Bible where Satan speaks.

Job will use many Hebrew words not found anywhere else in the Bible. The book will provide a rare inside look into heaven and a conversation between God and Satan in the presence of the angels around the throne of God. Every time I read it, it leaves me amazed.^{xii}

Think about it – the book that is not only the oldest book in the Bible, but perhaps the oldest in the world, preserved to this day, is a book that deals with the issue that everyone still wants to know about; that is, suffering and the endurance of life.

Job – The Wise Man of Uz

Let us begin with Job 1:1a.

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; . . .

When we read this phrase, we might wonder if the story of Job is indeed true. The phrase, “There was a man in the land of Uz . . .” sounds sort of like *The Wizard of Oz*.

Job was not the wizard of Oz, but he was the wise man from Uz.

Uz was also a real place. It appears first as the name of Shem’s grandson (Genesis 10:23) – the great grandson then, of Noah. The land of Uz, which was more than likely named after Noah’s great grandson, occupied the southern region around the Dead Sea, later known as Edom.

If there was ever any doubt among the Jewish people that Job existed, the prophet Ezekiel settled the score when he referred to Daniel, Noah, and Job as equally godly, righteous men. (Ezekiel 14:14)^{xiii}

Now, as the book of Job opens, God wants to clear any doubt not only that Job existed, in an actual time, in an actual region, with actual children and a wife and friends, and with possessions, but more importantly, God wants us to know that Job was everything we would expect a man to be in order to be incredibly blessed.

It is as if God wants us to understand beyond a shadow of a doubt that Job will suffer and he did not deserve it. If anyone ever had the right to say, “Life is unfair,” it would be Job.

Six words that characterize Job’s life

I want to give six words that characterize Job’s life that are remarkable; that set the stage for the shocking development of incredible suffering.

1. The first word is righteous.

Notice in Job 1:1b.

... *and that man was blameless,*

This word does not mean perfect, but it does refer to integrity. In fact, the noun appears twice more in Job – once when God is praising Job before Satan in chapter 2:3, and the second time when Job’s wife asks him, “Are you still holding on to your integrity?” (2:9)

The Hebrew word is also used in Genesis 20:5 in connection with moral innocence and later in Judges 9:16 where the word is related to someone telling the truth.^{xiv}

2. The second word that characterizes Job is not only the word righteous, but the word real.

He is also called, in Job 1:1b,

... *upright,* ...

This Hebrew word “Yashar” indicates ethical behavior. In fact, it is a word that refers to relationships.^{xv}

Job was not one thing on the Sabbath and another thing on the job site.

He was unlike one well-known executive who said, “On the weekend, my priorities are God, family, and business; when I arrive at the office on Monday morning, the order is reversed to business, family, and God.”^{xvi}

“Yashar” is used by the prophet Isaiah to refer to a straight path; a level road.

There was nothing crooked about Job. His handshake meant something. He was a man of his word, and people knew it.

3. He was righteous; he was real, and thirdly, Job was reverent.

Job 1:1b adds that Job was a man who was,

... *fearing God* ...

Fearing God brings to mind someone cowering before a King. In the Old Testament, the concept of fearing God meant to hold Him in high esteem; to take Him seriously. To honor who He is; to obey what He says . . . it refers to being in awe of and having respect and reverence for Him. In other words, Job did not take God lightly!^{xvii}

There is a key distinction. So often we treat God as if He is not really important; we treat His word flippantly; we heed His commands casually. We do this until we begin to suffer; until trouble comes; until pain comes through our front door uninvited, and *then* we want to reverence Him; *then* we dust off our Bibles and become reacquainted with our sovereign, gracious Lord.

The significant thing to discover about Job is that he is this way before trouble comes. He has not taken God for granted. He does not need a trial to bring him to his knees. He does not need pain to focus his perspective on God’s greatness and glory. Job revered God now!

4. One way we reverence God is found in the next word which characterizes Job – he was resistant.

Job 1:1b concludes by telling us that Job was continuously,

... *turning away from evil.*

This is not the way of the world. When someone is wealthy and powerful, they experiment with sin . . . they deserve a little sin . . . they get away with sin . . . they have connections . . . things get shoved under the rug. Everyone says, “Well he owns the place; this is his company; this is her shop; this is his business . . .”

Not Job. The more he owned and the greater he became, the more concerned he was that he would sin against God.

5. Job was righteous, real, reverent, resistant, and now we are invited onto his Biltmore estate where we discover he was incredibly rich.

In Job 1:2-3, we are told of Job's wealth.

Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. His possessions also were 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

This was a rare combination – a man who was both wealthy and godly; a man who had treasure in heaven and at the same time, enjoyed treasure on earth.^{xviii}

It is possible for someone to have treasures in heaven and none on earth – to die poverty stricken, yet godly in faith and character. It is possible to have treasures on earth and none in heaven – to have lived only for self. It is incredibly rare for someone to have both.

Job was that man.

He is called in verse 3,

... the greatest of all the men of the east.

This is not the kind of person we would ever expect to experience incredible suffering, and a God who will remain, for a long time, silent.

6. One more word that characterized Job – he was a reformer.

Notice Job 1:4-5.

His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

We could call Job a reconciler; a revivalist; a reformer.

He cared deeply about the spiritual condition of his children. And mark this – they were grown and on their own. They had their own homes and their own families.

The text says that they used to have a feast "on his day". Perhaps this is a reference to their

birthdays; perhaps they held birthday parties for one another.

Job was concerned that in the feasting and partying, one or more of his children had sullied their minds. Perhaps they drank too much or said something wrong or off-color – something that would not be honorable to God.

So, as in the days of the Patriarchs where the fathers served as priests, Job sacrificed on their behalf.

What an example to every father! What a challenge!

This is especially so for a generation in which we have handed our children to youth leaders and Christian schools and Christian artists and camp directors and pastors and Sunday school teachers and AWANA workers with the attitude, "Here – you teach them . . . you train them . . . you instill godly values and character in them . . . you lead them . . . – it's your job."

Job becomes an example of a shepherd who cares about his own family and exercises a priestly example and a godly walk for them to follow.

Job was:

- righteous;
- real;
- reverent;
- resistant;
- rich;
- reformer.

Do you see what God is doing in this introduction? He is introducing us to the best representative of God's purpose for man on earth.

Application

Let me give a couple of applications from our study today.

1. God's people are not immune to trouble.

Christians are not inoculated at conversion against grief. There is no guarantee to wealth and health and easy times.

Those who teach such nonsense will themselves experience their own chapter of suffering.

God's people are not immune to trouble. We would probably all agree with that principle of application, so let me say it a little differently.

2. Godly people are not exempt from trouble.

The reason this seems hard to take is because it seems so unfair.

Perhaps you are at this point right now. You have wondered if it was worth the effort . . . the discipline . . . the commitment to marriage . . . the persistent resistance to sin . . . all the efforts at integrity and honesty . . . the reverence toward God and the things of God . . . the efforts of parenting with godly purpose . . . when all of it answered with severe trials.

In Steven Lawson's comments on Job, he re-tells the tragic event that occurred during the 1991 U.S. Open at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Minnesota. It was a beautiful summer day at first, but the front wave of gray clouds rushed in and within minutes, turbulent skies blackened and swirling banks of electricity collected overhead. Lightning was spotted – a golfer's worst nightmare. Storm sirens blasted as a fierce thunderstorm blew in, threatening the safety of one of the largest single-day crowds in the history of professional golf. Forty thousand spectators scrambled for any makeshift covering – a refreshment stand; an umbrella; a tree . . . anything.

One group of spectators sought shelter under a thirty foot willow tree near the 7th tee to keep from being drenched. At the height of the storm – *BOOM* – a lightning bolt struck that tree. A dozen bodies toppled like bowling pins. Six men got up. Six remained dazed on the ground. One died – with his hands still in his pockets.

One of the survivors recalled later, "Somebody said it would be just our luck if lightning hit this tree. We all laughed. Seconds later, we were hit."

Suddenly, unexpectedly the tallest tree drew the fire.

Could this be an analogy to the fires of hell's attacks that Job will soon feel? The taller you stand, the more likely you are to feel the strike of the enemy.^{xix}

God will say, just a few verses later, to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? He's the tallest tree around! There is no one quite like him . . ." (Job 1:8 paraphrased)

Then, lightning will fall. And that tree will shudder and shake and even split apart, but the roots will stay – deep and grounded in faith. New life will eventually come.

However, let us not get ahead of ourselves. We are going fast, but not that fast!

Lightning is about to strike this wise man who lived in the land of Uz. The storm is already gathering against one of God's tallest trees who lived 4,000 years ago. Proving once and for all,

- God's people are not immune to trouble.
- And even more significantly,
- Godly people are not exempt from the storms of life.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/7/2007 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance (W Publishing Group, 2004), p. 1.

ⁱⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, Getting Through the Tough Stuff (W Publishing Group, 2004), p. ix.

ⁱⁱⁱ Steven J. Lawson, When All Hell Breaks Loose (Navpress, 1993), p. 9.

^{iv} Jerry Bridges, Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts (Navpress, 1988), p. 9.

^v Ibid., p. 14.

^{vi} Elie Wiesel, Night (Hill and Wang, 1972).

^{vii} Harold S. Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People (New York, Avon Books, 1983), p. 43.

^{viii} Holman Old Testament Commentary: Job (Holman Reference, 2004), p. 1.

^{ix} Swindoll, Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance, p. 5.

^x J. Sidlow Baxter, Explore the Book (Zondervan, 1960), p. 26.

^{xi} Henry Morris, The Remarkable Record of Job (Master Books, 1988), p. 13.

^{xii} Holman, p. 2.

^{xiii} Morris, p. 15.

^{xiv} John C. L. Gibson, Job (Westminster Press, 1985), p. 6.

^{xv} David J. A. Clines, Word Biblical Commentary: Job (Word Books, 1989), p. 12.

^{xvi} David McKenna, Mastering the Old Testament: Job (Word Publishing, 1986), p. 30.

^{xvii} Lawson, p. 19.
^{xviii} Lawson, p. 21.
^{xix} Lawson, p. 24.