

Why, God, Why?

SCOTT HOEZEE

A while ago, I saw a movie in which a character points to a dire set of circumstances that some people might soon face. If that happens, he says, those folks will regret the day their fathers met their mothers. In other words, they will wish they had never been born. We all hope we never feel that way, but the biblical figure of Job did. In fact, that is where the book of Job begins; and today on *Groundwork*, we will begin to explore this important book. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee. We are beginning now today a new series on the book of Job; and no surprise, throughout this series, we are going to be occupied with the key question that preoccupies this biblical book itself, and that is the question of suffering...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Evil; why do we suffer?

DAVE BAST

Right; Job is a classic expression of this. I mean, it is recognized, not just in the Bible, but outside of it. Philosophers and thinkers and theologians have looked at this book from the ancient world—the ancient Hebrew scriptures—as a classic exposition of this struggle to understand...understand the things that happen to us in the light of a belief in God, as most people share; a belief that there is a God who is good; a God who governs the world; a God who is in charge of things; a God who cares about us, who watches over the details of our lives; and still it seems like these terrible things happen to us so often, or to friends or loved ones, and we wonder why.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

If God is so good, you know, the classic way of expressing it: If God is good, he must not be great—he must not be powerful enough to stop this. If God is powerful, he must not be good, because otherwise he would not, you know... Why the holocaust? Why childhood cancer? All those kinds of questions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is a universal question, as you say, Dave. People wrestle with it even if they don't believe in God; but if you *do* believe in God, as Job does, as we do, that makes it even harder. How do you square the goodness

and power of God with this? And that is, atheists actually use this as an attempt to disprove the very existence of God, because, as you just said, Dave, that is the classic statement: If God were all powerful; he could head off all evil. If he were all good, he would, but he doesn't, and since God, by definition, should be all powerful and all good, therefore, there must not be any God at all. That is where the atheists go with it...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Christians, of course, face those same questions. We do not deny those questions. For the believer, it makes faith more complicated. You have to ask some questions that people without faith do not need to bother with.

DAVE BAST

And I think if there is one thing we should take away from the book of Job—the story of Job in the Bible—and the fact that it occupies such an important place there, it is that the answers are not going to be simple or simplistic. This question is complex, and life is complicated. It is not so straightforward to explain, well, God is doing this and therefore that, and you are experiencing the other. The whole point of Job, and the reason it is so long, and at times, even, it can get tedious, you know, with all of the speeches and all of the debates, but the whole point really comes down to this is not an easy question, and there are no easy answers.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, whole theological and philosophical conferences and colloquia and seminars and long encyclopedia articles have been devoted to this, but we all know this is not an academic matter, right? All of us have it where sometimes it just feels like my life or your life has become kind of an ash heap...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we sit there and we say: Why did my grandchild die? Why did my marriage fall apart? I loved my job, I worked thirty years and bang, I was fired. Why does cancer eat away at my loved one's body, and Alzheimer's at my loved one's mind? These are *not* philosophical questions...

DAVE BAST

No, no.

SCOTT HOEZEE

These are acute pastoral questions asked from the ground level of life, not the ivory towers of academia. We know what this is from the inside out.

DAVE BAST

And you know, Jesus knew, too, because it is the classic question...the haunting question he himself asked on the cross: My God, my God, why?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Why, why?

DAVE BAST

And we cannot help but ask that. What is happening? What are you doing, God? And that is really the story of Job.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, this is the premier place, certainly in the Old Testament, if not in the whole Bible, where we wrestle with this. So, if we look at the book of Job, lots of people in history, and today as well, look at this book and sort of say, did it ever really happen just this way? The truth is, the book does have a kind of a once-upon-a-time...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And time*less* quality to it.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, Job is not a Hebrew...he is not an Israelite. It does not take place in Jerusalem. This is how the book opens: ^{1:1}In the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. ²He had seven sons and three daughters, ³and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred donkeys; and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

So, you know, Job is not even a Hebrew; he lives out in the East somewhere, and there is a kind of a, well, you know, maybe he is a figure. He is not necessarily a real person—historical person. He is meant to be a symbol or an image...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And you know, that is possible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are not told when he lived. Scholars will say nobody knows where Uz was. The land of Uz, it could be the Land of Oz. I mean, nobody knows where that was; so, there is a timeless quality to it, but it gets even stranger in Job 1. We do not know where on earth this happened, but soon we are brought to a scene in heaven, which is very strange. Listen to this from Job 1:6:

One day, the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. ⁷The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it." ⁸Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant, Job? There is no one on earth like him. He is blameless and upright; a man who fears God and shuns evil."

DAVE BAST

⁹"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. ¹⁰"Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land; ¹¹but now, stretch out your hand and strike everything he has and he will surely curse you to your face!" ¹²The Lord said to Satan, "Very well then, everything he has is in your power; but on the man himself, do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there is a scene for you...

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is kind of weird.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which probably we do not want to take too literally. It is very hard to imagine Satan just sort of casually mingling with angels coming before God; harder even still to think that God and Satan are kind of moving us around like pieces on a chessboard...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But that is the premise of the book...of this sort of once-upon-a-time book. Job, unbeknownst to him, is going to become the object of a test; to test his faith, to test the faith, by proxy, of all people.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Satan wants to know, do people only worship God because God is nice to them, or do they really love God no matter what happens?

DAVE BAST

Right, exactly; and you know, the word *satan* is a Hebrew term. It is *shatan*, and it means the accuser—the adversary. So Satan is playing his role to the hilt here in this heavenly scene, as he appears before the Lord; and again, we should not push the details of this. This is almost like a parable, where you want to get the main point without necessarily pressing home that this is the way it is in heaven, that Satan can kind of stroll in and out; that he has, you know, an open door policy. He has come...he appears in the story as the accuser, and his accusation is the cynical statement to God that, you know, Job only serves you because of all the stuff you have given him; and if you take that stuff away, he will turn against you in a flash, and he will curse you to your face; and God says: Okay, let's try it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That's right; and of course, maybe it is the wrong question to ask: Did this ever really happen, because it keeps happening. It is still happening.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a true story in the sense that it is our story. We find ourselves in bad circumstances that try our faith.

DAVE BAST

Right; it is the nature of faith. What is faith anyway? Is it believing in God because of, or is it believing in God in spite of what happens?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that is the question; and so, in just a moment, we are going to see what happens to Job and his initial response. We will take that up in a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and today we are beginning a study of the biblical book of Job, a book that really helps us wrestle with our questions about why God allows suffering, and how are we going to react when suffering comes. So, we already saw that, unbeknownst to Job, he has become kind of the target of a gambit—a bet, almost, between God and Satan. So, we will not go through all of it, but suffice it to say that once God gives Satan permission to touch Job, Job loses everything...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He loses his property, his animals, his servants, and tragically, all of his children.

DAVE BAST

One thing after another...one calamity, like a hammer blow, follows the other, and Job is literally brought low. He is sitting in the dust; he has torn his clothes; he is in abject misery; and whether we read the story literally as a history of an individual...it could be...or whether we are inclined to read it more symbolically or theologically as a sort of parable of human experience, we know this is true to life. This is what happens. We are brought low; and sometimes, you know, we will say of somebody, they are living the life of Job. How can one person experience so many bad things?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

It does happen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Did Job ever really live? My answer to that is, he still lives...he is still alive.

DAVE BAST

Yes, he might be next door; he might be living in your house.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It could be me; it could be you; but Job is stripped of everything. In verse 20, we read this: At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. He fell to the ground in worship, ²¹and said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." ²²And in all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

DAVE BAST

So, there he is; in this deeply moving scene, he is still worshipping. He is not charging God; he is not accusing God; he is certainly not cursing God to his face, as Satan said that he would; but he has not reached rock bottom yet. So, as the story goes on, now Satan comes back, and he says to God: Well, yeah, okay, fine; he has lost a lot of stuff, but you have not really touched *him*...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right; that is where Job 2 begins. Satan doubles down on the gambit...on the bet, and so God says: Fine; go ahead; and so, Satan afflicts Job with some horrid and putrid skin condition. His body is ravaged; he is in great pain; but again, now in Chapter 2, here is how he responds.

DAVE BAST

⁸Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. ⁹His wife said to him, “Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!” ¹⁰He replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?” In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Job is maintaining his faith and his integrity, much to the chagrin of Satan, no doubt; and Satan certainly does not win the day. Satan disappears from this book after this. He will not make a reappearance at the end; only God will have the last word here; but Job is still left with all of these questions. But, Dave, what is interesting, Job clearly believes this was all dished out to him directly by God; but the reader knows something Job doesn't. It is not actually coming directly from God; it is coming directly from Satan. Now, that does not take God out of the picture, he still gave him permission, okay? But you know, in our lives, too, it is one thing to chalk up, you know, oh, my business is succeeding, my children are happy, and what great blessings from God; but sometimes when bad things happen, some people say, well, this is God's will for my life. My 3-year-old got run over by a drunk driver, but God sent it to me for a reason. Sometimes we are pretty sure God sent it. The book of Job itself says: Hold on. There might just be more going on than you know about, and it is not all the direct will of God.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; and that is something that we as believers find ourselves needing to remember. We have to kind of resort to a way of saying this that gets at the truth that *is* complicated. So, sometimes we talk about God's permissive will versus his active will; and you know, you can push that too far, and maybe it does not hold water philosophically or logically; but there is this sense that God has set limits to how much Satan can do to Job. That comes through quite clearly. Another way of getting at this...I think it was Martin Luther; I read this once, that Luther said God does some things with his left hand. It is trying to say the same thing, that we cannot attribute everything to God's *direct* intentional will. God does not do evil; God does not do sin; God does not do things that are wrong, and yet, they happen; so, how do we fit that together? That is what is trying to be said here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And another thing I think we need to note from Job 2. Job does not sin; he figures this is from God, but he figures God cannot do wrong, so he is not going to curse God or accuse God of wrongdoing; however, precisely because Job still has faith, he does do something that people of faith do, and that is lament; and so, moving into Job 3, now, let's listen to these words from Job, where he laments, beginning at Job 3, verse 11: Why did I not perish at birth and die as I came from the womb? ¹²Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? ¹³For now, I would be lying down in peace. I would be asleep and at rest. ²⁴For sighing has become my daily food; my groans pour out like water. ²⁵What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. ²⁶I have no peace; no quietness. I have no rest, but only turmoil.

DAVE BAST

That is pretty grim stuff; in fact, he not only wants to die, he wishes he had never been born...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, he wishes he had been the stillborn child.

DAVE BAST

His pain is so great...so intense...and somehow I think this can help us, maybe, to sympathize with people who are perhaps caught in the grips of clinical depression, or of such deep loss and sorrow that they just...you know, they are in such a deep hole...and Job is there, too. It is not an easy place, and again, there are no quick solutions or simplistic answers.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, yes; as we have said before, now and then we run into somebody whose life is in such bad shape we say that guy is like Job—he is living the life of Job; but people do not always sink that low, but all of us know people in our churches and our congregations who are hurting; and so, as we think about how we interact with them and what do we say to them, what can we learn from Job? We will ponder that as we close this program in a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are just opening the book of Job. We are beginning a series that looks at this classic biblical example of a man who suffered unjustly; suffered, as he thinks, at the direct hand of God; suffered from the attacks of Satan. He has lost everything. He has lost his property, his wealth, his possessions, his children, and his health; and yet, he sits on the ground still and worships. He bows his head and says the Lord gave, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Words that have spoken, really, comfort to millennia of believers; and then he goes on to lament, too, lest we think this is an easy thing for Job to just say oh, easy come, easy go; I am still worshipping God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He wishes he had never been born. His pain is so intense; he just wants to escape.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think we said, as we close the program, Dave, that we want to think about, you know, what lessons can we take from this book when we are faced with sisters and brothers in our own families, in our congregations—our churches—who are hurting; and you know, we always struggle...you know, you go to the funeral home or you run into somebody at the store, and you...what do I say? What do I say; and we do not want to say the wrong thing, although people often do...well meaning, but they say the wrong thing; and we are going to start to see that in the next program, when some friends of Job's show up and are faced with that question; but, so far, just in these first three chapters, what can we learn? Well, again, we said one thing: Job does not know everything that was happening behind the scenes. We readers know, but Job does not know. So, he is pretty sure that for whatever the reason, it is God who directly willed and sent this stuff to him; but we know it is not quite that neat. Now, we said the whole scene of God and Satan betting on Job...we maybe don't want to overextend that imagery to take it too literally. It is sort of like, if this is almost like a lived-out parable, then it reminds you of Jesus' parables, like the rich man and Lazarus; and Jesus did not tell that parable to tell us, oh, when you are in heaven you will be able to see people in hell, like the rich man and Lazarus see each other...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, do not overextend it. So, we do not want to overextend it, but this much we can say, and that is that if we struggle to know what to say to somebody who has lost something...a child or whatever...we should be a little hesitant to say: Well, clearly this was God's will for your life, so you must accept it from God's hand. It might be more complicated than that. It was for Job.

DAVE BAST

That is very true; so, we speak about God's left hand, maybe, or God's permissive will and Satan being the real enemy and adversary; but I also think it is possible to take away from Job an example of someone who went on worshipping God even in the face of loss; someone for whom faith meant believing in God despite, not because. I do not know if I have shared this before on a *Groundwork* program, but my own family history...my father lived the life of Job. You talk about the life of Job, he lost two wives at a young age to disease, each time left with young children; and then as he was aging, he lost a son, and I still remember gathering with the family at the dinner table the day we heard of my brother's death. My dad took the Bible out and wanted it to be read after supper, as we always did, and we read these words from Job: The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. And then, from the Psalms: Bless the Lord, O, my soul; and somebody said, no, we shouldn't do that now. Let's not... And my dad said, no, you keep reading. That is exactly what I want to do, I want to worship God, and he bowed his head like Job. So, this too is a reality, I think...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

That believers have found.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and to say also...and perhaps your father and others would also have agreed with this, that it is also okay to lament...

DAVE BAST

Yes; absolutely, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is okay to tell God this is lousy. Job does: You know what? I almost wish I had never been born, because this hurts so bad; and you know, we are...and it seems like this has been increasingly true in more recent times...we in the Church shy away from lament. When we hear others lament, we wonder if that is a sign of weak faith or, you shouldn't say that because if God sent this to you, then how dare you complain about what God sent you. A third of the book of Psalms...there are 150 psalms in the Bible, and almost fifty of them are psalms of complaint and lament. It is not weak faith that laments, it is strong faith that believes God can take it, and believes that this is not the final will of God for my life, so it is okay if I lament. Job does, and I think we need to give people...we need to give ourselves, but also the other people in our church...give them space to lament, and do not tell them that that is a bad way to pray.

DAVE BAST

You know, in our tradition for many of us, descendants of northern Europeans, you know, you have the kind of stiff upper lip idea of you've got to put a strong, passive face on things, and do not let anyone into your innermost feelings, and keep a tight rein, you know, on your emotions, and all that; and nothing could be further from biblical faith. These Hebrews, you know, they let it all hang out. They were Middle Easterners. They screamed and they cried and they cried out to God, and God accepts that. In a sense, it is good to do that because that, too, is a sign of faith. You know, if you are just simply a stoic, there is no reason to object to the bad things that happen in life...the evil in the world...because why should it be otherwise? If it is all just luck...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Luck, good fortune...

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is the belief...this passionate belief that God is good, and God wants to bless us. That calls it forth from us, and we cry out our pain to him, and it is all okay.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and if Job proves anything, it is that...you know, what I think we fear when we chide other people for lamenting is that we think it means you are blaming God...you are accusing God. Job made it clear he is not blaming God...he is not accusing God. You can lament without accusing God of doing something wrong, and that is a balance we want for our lives and for those around us.

DAVE BAST

So, it is okay. You do not always have to say when somebody asks how you are doing: Oh, I'm fine. You can let the veil slip once in a while. If there is one thing Job teaches us, it is that this too can be an act of faith. Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we examine and test against scripture the most common questions many of us wrestle with as we try to explain and understand experiences of suffering.

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