

## **Bible Study Notes for 2-12-25**

### ***THE BOOK OF JOB*** ***Job 42:7-17***

***By Dr. James E. Potts***

Job is still on the ash pile, but there is a difference. No longer is he testifying to his innocence, declaring his righteousness, and demanding that God justify his suffering. Instead, he bows in the Presence of the Holy, confesses his unworthiness, repents of his pride, affirms his trust, and is reconciled with God. Even though he is still on the ash pile, grace has made him whole.

The Book of Job is classified as wisdom literature in the Bible. It is also a book of prophecy. Although thousands of years would pass before the coming of Jesus Christ, Job's story promises our redemption from sin and our reconciliation with God through the gift of grace. Grace is "unmerited favor." It cannot be earned, bought, or inherited. Through suffering, Job had learned to trust in God rather than in his own righteousness. When he did, grace flooded his soul, and he was healed, even with dust and ashes on his head.

John Wesley, the father of Methodism, is another example of a man who tried to become "perfect" in righteousness through self-discipline. From his earliest childhood, his mother taught him to fear God and shun evil. Later, in his university days at Oxford, he and his brother Charles formed "The Holy Club" with rigid rules and rigorous accountability as the condition for membership. Their search for righteousness was so rigid that their fellow students mocked them as "Methodists."

But in spite of all the discipline and the following of rules, holiness and heart continued to escape Wesley even after he received appointment as an Oxford don, was ordained as an Anglican priest, and commissioned as a missionary to America. His spiritual self-discipline would shame most of us who live self-indulgent lives today. Yet, he never found the assurance of salvation until he went reluctantly to a little chapel on Aldersgate Street in London where someone was reading from Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans.

When the reader came to the words describing faith as the divine work of God in us and totally independent of good works, Wesley said, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, and Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

## Bible Study Notes for 2-12-25

In that moment Wesley not only discovered the meaning of grace, but he also experienced the gift of grace. When he testified, “I felt I did trust in Christ, and Christ alone, for salvation,” he dumped a lifetime of spiritual discipline and good works in his search for true righteousness. From then on, he and his brother Charles sang and preached the message of grace as “free in all, and free for all” until England was spiritually revolutionized. Wesley at Aldersgate and Job on an ash pile are companions in grace.

Nothing more needs to be said to Job. God and His servant are completely reconciled, the lines of communication are open, and their relationship is deeper and closer than ever before. So, God now turns to Job’s three friends and speaks directly to Eliphaz, the eldest.

It is God’s turn to be angry (42:7). Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had taken it upon themselves to defend His character and define His Truth. Now, mincing no words, God tells Eliphaz, “. . . *for ye have not spoken for me the thing that is right [you haven’t said the right things about Me] as my servant Job hath*” (42:7). Who knows the mind of God? Humanly speaking, it seems as if Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar argued honestly on behalf of God’s wisdom, power, and justice. It was Job who ranted and raved that God was unfair and did not even know what He was doing, or did not care, or could not do anything about it. Why then was God displeased at the three friends rather than Job?

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar from all outward appearance had defended God and His truth, but they were protecting their own egos and their own interpretation of truth. In a word, they were the Pharisees of Job’s day. As with the Pharisees, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar focused on a narrow and static doctrine of justice which they carried like a club in condemning Job.

We have already mentioned the saying, “If Satan cannot keep us from righteousness, he will try to make us self-righteous.” The doctrine of justice which Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar believed in so strongly was not wrong until they made it a rigid and closed religious system which limited new spiritual insight and stunted their faith. Job may have been guilty of self-righteousness, but Eliphaz and his friends were guilty of hypocrisy. And by strict definition, hypocrisy means misrepresenting God either by our words or our actions.

Nothing disturbs God more than when He is used as an excuse for judging and oppressing people. Job, at least, protested his suffering in all honesty and did not blame anybody else for what was happening to him. In so many words, he told his

## Bible Study Notes for 2-12-25

friends, “The argument is between God and me.” Could it be that God is not offended by our honesty, but He certainly rejects our hypocrisy?

Our Job writer now tells us that God gave Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar some specific instructions. They are told to take seven bulls and seven rams and sacrifice them as a burnt offering on behalf of themselves. But that is not all. They are to ask Job to pray for them because God tells them He will hear Job’s prayers but not theirs. And three times during this sequence God refers to Job as “*My servant.*” After their long self-righteous outbursts against Job, it must have been more than a little humiliating to be required to ask Job to pray for them.

Throughout Job’s extended period of suffering from the loss of family, material wealth, and health, all of which had exposed his pride and had taken him more than once to the border of blasphemy, the personal and spiritual relationship between Job and God had remained intact. Even when we struggle in our hard times of suffering, when we question Him, God still wants us to know, “You belong to Me, I love you, and I’m proud of you.” In other words, God Himself participates in our suffering even as He participated in Christ’s suffering on the cross. At no time was God indifferent to Job’s suffering, and at no time can we be indifferent to the suffering of our neighbors across the street or across the world.

It is this quality or attribute of God that repeatedly in the Psalms is referred to as His mercy. For example, the Psalmist wrote, “*I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy*” (Psa. 31:7). The Hebrew word used for “mercy” is an important word throughout all of the Old Testament. It is translated “mercy” or “love” or “steadfast love” or “loving kindness” or “unfailing love.”

The Lord’s instruction to ask Job to pray for them has a strange twist to it. Throughout all the earlier conversations Eliphaz had assumed the role of intercessor on Job’s behalf, and he had promised Job that if he would repent and get right with God the Lord might also give him a similar honor. For Eliphaz the role of intercessor was self-appointed. But now, God has turned the tables as He tells Eliphaz that Job will intercede and pray for him and his two friends. This had to be a bitter pill for the three wise men from the East to swallow.

It is wrong to think that our times of suffering and doubt mean a break in our relationship with God. Pain is the price we pay for being alive. As tough as our times of pain and suffering may be, the tougher truth is that we only learn and grow through pain. Elihu had been right—through his suffering Job had learned lessons that he would have missed otherwise.

## Bible Study Notes for 2-12-25

Elihu has now disappeared from the scene. God has nothing to say about him and his role as Job's critic and counselor. This is the way it is so often with people who prepare the way for God to speak. They appear briefly on the stage of human history, speak their small part, and then move off the stage into darkness. As with John the Baptist, their sole purpose is to prepare the way for God. After a moment on center stage, their parting word echoes that of John the Baptist, "***He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease.***" Elihu had fulfilled his role as God's preparer of the way, speaking with the "***Spirit of understanding***" through the "***breath of the Almighty.***"

Grace received; grace given. That is the spirit of people who have seen God and received His love. Jesus is our example. After He taught us to love our enemies, He showed us the meaning of His words on the cross when He spoke so graciously, "***Father, forgive them for they know not what they do***" (Luke 23:34).

When Job prayed for his friends, two things happened. First, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were restored in their relationship with God. And then all of Job's losses were restored to him double—health and wealth, fame and family.

Some Old Testament critics feel that the restoration of Job's health, wealth, fame and family cancels out the value of the Book of Job. They argue that God restored Job to prosperity because of his repentance, thereby confirming the belief of Job's friends that sin produces suffering and repentance produces prosperity. Also, they argue that Job's restoration proves that Satan was right when he said, "***Doth Job fear God for nought [nothing]?***" (1:9). But to think that way is to fail to understand the meaning of grace.

According to this part of our Scripture lesson, Job's losses were not restored after his repentance but after his intercession. His prayer for his three friends-turned-critics is linked with his restoration by the conjunction *and*: "***And the Lord turned the captivity of Job [restored Job's losses], when he prayed for his friends***" (42:10).

It is God's grace that makes the difference. Job still sat on the ash pile after his repentance. He had no assurance that he would ever be healed physically or restored to prosperity. Yet, having given up all claim to self-sufficiency and having confessed his total trust in God, he had peace of mind and soul. With the assurance of grace, nothing more is needed.

Remember that Job never lost his reputation as a man of integrity. As a matter of fact, he had passed the most severe test of character after he was accused of sin, se-

## Bible Study Notes for 2-12-25

cret sin, social sin, and the sins of the rich and famous. Not one single accusation could be held against him. And then he received the grace of God.

In the Job story we see demonstrated the spiritual traits that distinguishes Jesus Christ as a person who was ***“full of grace and truth”*** (John 1:14). The divine fusion of grace and truth which makes Jesus so desirable to us has become the rare quality which puts Job far beyond his earlier reputation for being righteous and wise. To be righteous, avoid evil, and fear God is good, but to be full of grace and truth is both better and best.

Without minimizing the fact that God Himself restored Job’s losses with a doubling of his blessings, we can be sure that it was Job’s new attitude toward God, himself, and others that speeded his restoration. He made his first fortune by doing business as a man of integrity in a land of cut-throat competition; he gains his second fortune by being a man of truth and grace in a land where such a blend of integrity and compassion was rare, if not unknown. Integrity deals with truth; grace deals with people. As we noted earlier, we show that we have received grace when we in turn show grace to others.

Job’s second test of grace come after he is restored to health and wealth, fame and family. ***“Then”***—another key connecting word which indicates that one event is triggered by another—all of Job’s brothers, sisters, and friends who had abandoned him during his time of humiliation and suffering appear at his doorstep. They have come to eat with him bearing gifts of silver and gold. After the trouble is over, Job’s brothers, sisters, and friends’ comfort and console him ***“over all the evil [troubles] that the Lord had brought upon him”*** (42:11).

Hospitality ranked near the top of the unwritten code in the culture of the ancient East. Because survival in their wild and dangerous environment was a common need among the people of Uz, they put a premium on entertaining strangers who came to their door. Job’s friends-turned-critics had accused him of being hostile to strangers, either turning them away or giving them leftovers for food. But Job had refuted their accusations by insisting, ***“The stranger did not lodge in the street: but I opened my doors to the traveler”*** (31:32). Job insisted that he went the extra mile by pleading the case of strangers in a court of law (29:16).

Justice underlaid the code of hospitality for the land of the ancient East. Everyone became a stranger as they traveled across the long and lonely stretches of desert. As the code of justice dictated “an eye for an eye,” the code of hospitality ruled “a meal for meal and a bed for a bed.”

## Bible Study Notes for 2-12-25

Nothing in the code of hospitality, but said anything about brothers, sisters, and friends who abandon you in your difficult times of suffering and then return to favor when you when you regain your status. Often one feels terribly violated when you know you are being wooed by people whose motives are transparent. Sugar-coated words and sweet smiles fail to cover up their selfishness. It is obvious that such people are using you to achieve their purposes.

Job's brothers, sisters, and friends came back to him with this same corrupt motive. Simple justice would have sent them away with these words ringing in their ears, ***"Where were you when I needed you?"*** Instead, Job showed them the hospitality of grace. It goes far beyond the code of entertaining strangers to the gift of welcoming reckless people and accepting them even though they may deserve nothing but contempt.

As we read about the celebration at Job's house, we can see a parallel to a New Testament parable. The prodigal son left his father, wasted his inheritance, indulged in gross sin, and ended up scrapping with pigs over empty husks. When the young man came to his senses, he returned to his father's house expecting to be treated like one of the servants. But his father had been anxiously waiting for him, and when he saw him in the distance, ran to meet him, welcomed his wayward boy home, and threw a huge welcome home party for him.

But the young man's older brother heard the noise of the party with anger. He grumbled about the injustice of celebrating his brother's return when he had never been treated to a party, even though he had stayed home and served his father faithfully on the family farm. In response to his complaint, his father answered, ***"It was meet [right] that we should make merry and be glad [have a celebration]: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found"*** (Luke 15:32). Only pure grace could say that.

It was the spirit that Job had caught in his confrontation with God. There is no room left in his heart for retaliation against the family and friends who had deserted him. The grace of God calls for celebration of life, not for retaliation against wrong.

Next, the Job writer goes into some detail as he describes what happened now, ***"So, the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning [the end of his life more than the early part]: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke oxen, and a thousand she asses [donkeys]. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first [daughter], Jemima; and the name of the second [daughter], Kezia; and the name***

## Bible Study Notes for 2-12-25

*of the third [daughter], Keren-happuch” (42:12-14).* Job was blessed with seven sons. The number seven in the Bible signifies perfection, it was the perfect number for Job’s inheritance.

It is important that the Job writer devotes more space and detail to the three daughters. While the seven sons remain nameless, we are given the names of the daughters and we are told that they were the most beautiful women in all the land (42:15a). Since their father Job was not doing the writing, we can assume the writer reported accurately.

In addition, the meaning of their names is most descriptive and validates the judgment of the writer. Jemima means “turtledove,” the songbird with the sweetest song in the ancient East. Kezia means “cinnamon,” the most precious spice in the ancient East. And Keren-happuch means “horn of paint,” the ancient cosmetic case associated with the beauty of the women.

Job had special reason for being proud of his daughters. Remember, he had a damaging and disgusting disease that had forced him into quarantine on an ash pile outside the city walls that had made him the butt jokes for the rowdy kids who happened along. No doubt, after God had given him a new family every time Job looked at his daughters, he saw in their beauty the symbol of God’s grace.

There is another dimension of grace here that should not be overlooked. While Job’s wife is not mentioned in this part of the story, daughters need mothers as well as fathers. Maybe a gift of grace was given to Job’s wife in the beauty of her daughters. Although earlier she had urged Job to curse God and die, there is no indication that she abandoned her husband. So, without much of a stretch of the imagination it is possible that the seven sons and three daughters were a sign of whatever forgiveness was needed between Job and his wife or between God and Job’s wife.

All our speculation falls short at the fact that Job gave his daughters an inheritance in addition to the inheritance allotted to their brothers (42:15b). Now, it would be easy to pass over this brief comment and not attach any significance to it. But that would be a mistake, because it gives us insight into the growing sensitivity of Job, and it also tells us that Job’s pride has undergone a spiritual experience.

Men ruled society and families in the ancient East. Women were looked upon as commodities/property to be bought and sold, as baby-makers to bear sons, and as second-class citizens without voice or vote. Even when Moses received the Law of God, the for passing down the family inheritance provided for daughters only if there

## Bible Study Notes for 2-12-25

were no sons to claim their rights. But Job broke the code of culture, the laws of the land, and the expectations of people when he gave his daughters equal shares, along with their brothers, of the family inheritance. Legally, they had nothing coming. Yet when their father left them a full share of his wealth, they received a gift of grace.

At one time Job believed that he was entitled to his blessings because of his special relationship with God, but that was no longer true. When Job repented of his pride on the ash pile, he knew that God did not owe him anything. His blessings came only through God's grace. It is not surprising, then, that when it came time for him to distribute his inheritance, he remembered the grace of God and gave his daughters an equal share.

There is an analogy in all this that is extremely important. As non-Jews—gentiles—we identify with Job's daughters. Job's sons symbolize the people of Israel who were considered the natural heirs of God's salvation. On the other hand, the daughters symbolize gentiles—people without a name or nation who were considered without rights spiritually.

Centuries before the time when the Apostle Peter arrived at what for him was a shocking conclusion—that Christ died for everyone, not just for Jews—Job modeled God's grace for the world. In the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christians at Rome, gentiles are compared to wild olive shoots that have been grafted in among the natural branches and share equally in the nourishment that comes through the root. Then to this picture of grace, Paul adds the warning, ***“Boast not against the branches [Do not be proud because you are just a branch] . . . For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee [if God did not spare the natural branches, the Jews, He won't spare you either]” (Rom. 11:18-21).*** This simply means that by His grace God includes us, and we celebrate that grace by giving grace to others without limit.

One more gift of grace is given to Job (42:16). We are told now that he lived one hundred and forty years longer and realized his dream of seeing four generations of children and grandchildren. Of all human relationships, Job suffered most when he lost his children. God knew this and saved the greatest blessings for the last. Job's restoration was complete when, once again, he could enjoy the richness of having his children with him (29:5-6).

***“So, Job died, being old and full of days” (42:17).*** His epitaph is simple but meaningful. As a reminder that the mortality rate for human beings is still 100 percent, Job died. The grace of God did not save him from death, but it helped him die well.



## Bible Study Notes for 2-12-25

Even in his death there is the footnote that gives us a clue to the quality of his life. He died, “*full of days.*”

At first, we might assume that “*full of days*” refers to his longevity. But it could also refer to the quality of Job’s life. If so, it means that he lived to the fullest every day until he died. Some people limp through their days more dead than alive. They have no joy and make others miserable.

Other people are so busy focusing on the future that they miss the fullness of the moment. Many of us, almost every day, catch ourselves anticipating what is ahead rather than discovering the richness of the “now.” But when we do stop long enough to take what the present moment offers, life fills up with peace and joy. This is what Jesus meant when He promised, “*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10).

To live fully each day of our lives is a gift of grace. We do not fret about the past because grace covers our sins. We are not anxious about the future because grace is promised a day at a time. We can live as Job lived and die as Job died, “*full of days.*”

Job was introduced as a man “*perfect*” in righteousness. We will remember him as a man “*full*” of grace.

02/5/25 & 02/12/25