

## **BE PREPARED TO FACE SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES**

*1 There lived a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and turned away from evil. <sup>2</sup>Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. <sup>3</sup>His possessions consisted of seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.*

*<sup>4</sup>His sons used to take turns hosting feasts in their homes; and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. <sup>5</sup>When a round of feasting had ended, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, for he said, Perhaps my children have sinned and renounced God in their hearts. Job did this continually.*

*<sup>6</sup>One day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Jehovah, Satan also came among them. <sup>7</sup>Jehovah said to Satan, From where have you come? Satan answered Jehovah, I have been roaming throughout the earth and walking here and there in it. <sup>8</sup>Then Jehovah said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and turns away from evil. <sup>9</sup>Then Satan replied to Jehovah, Does Job fear God for no reason? <sup>10</sup>Have you not put a hedge all around him, as well as around his household and all that he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his flocks spread out over the land. <sup>11</sup>But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and I swear that he will renounce you to your face. <sup>12</sup>Jehovah said to Satan, Look; everything that he has is in your power; only do not lay your hand upon the man himself. So Satan went out from the presence of Jehovah.*

*<sup>13</sup>One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine in the oldest brother's house, <sup>14</sup>a messenger came to Job and said, The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby <sup>15</sup>when the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They killed the servants with the sword. I am the only one who has escaped to tell you. <sup>16</sup>While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the flocks and the servants, [totally] consuming them. I am the only one who has escaped to tell you. <sup>17</sup>While he was still speaking, there came yet another messenger who said, The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on the camels and captured them. They killed the servants with the sword. I am the only one who has escaped to tell you. <sup>18</sup>While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, Your sons and your daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, <sup>19</sup>when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on the young people and they are dead. I am the only one who has escaped to tell you. <sup>20</sup>Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head; then he fell to the ground and worshipped. <sup>21</sup>He said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I return there. Jehovah gave, and Jehovah has taken away, blessed be the name of Jehovah. <sup>22</sup>In all this, Job did not sin by foolishly accusing God [of wrongdoing].*

*2 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Jehovah, and Satan also came among them to present himself before Jehovah. <sup>2</sup>Jehovah said to Satan, From where have you come? Satan answered Jehovah, I have been roaming throughout the earth and walking here and there in it. <sup>3</sup>Then Jehovah said to*

*Satan, Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and turns away from evil. He still maintains his integrity—even though you moved me to take action against him to ruin him without [just] cause. <sup>4</sup>Satan replied to Jehovah, Skin for skin! A man will give all that he has [in exchange] for his life. <sup>5</sup>But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and I swear that he will renounce you to your face. <sup>6</sup>Then Jehovah said to Satan, Look; he is in your hand; only spare his life.*

*<sup>7</sup>So Satan went out from the presence of Jehovah and afflicted Job with severe boils from the sole of his foot to the top [of his head]. <sup>8</sup>So he took a potsherd with which to scrape himself as he sat among the ashes. <sup>9</sup>Then his wife said to him, Are you still maintaining your integrity? Renounce God and die! <sup>10</sup>But he said to her, You are speaking like one of the foolish women. Shall we only accept good from the hand of God, and shall we not accept calamity? In all this Job did not sin with his lips. (Job 1:1-2:10)*

A note on the Scripture text that accompanies each individual message: The *American Standard Version* and the *New International Version*, along with the original Greek and Hebrew, have been used in an effort to achieve the greatest degree of accuracy and clarity. Where words or phrases have been added to the original text in an effort to better express its meaning, those words or phrases have usually been indicated by means of [brackets.]

## **Introduction**

In March of 1934, as the Major League baseball teams headed south to Florida for their annual spring training, the World Champion New York Giants prepared to defend their title. In an interview conducted a few weeks before the opening of spring training, the Giants' manager said that he expected St. Louis, Chicago, and Pittsburgh to be the toughest teams in 1934. A reporter then asked him what he thought of the Giants' cross-town rivals, the Brooklyn Dodgers.

“The Dodgers?” replied the Giants' manager, “Are the Dodgers still in the league?”

By making such a statement, the Giants' manager had unwittingly issued a challenge—a challenge that would come back to haunt the Giants.

The Giants were scheduled to close their 1934 National League season with two games against the lowly Dodgers. The Giants were fighting for the pennant when the end of September rolled around and the Dodgers came to town to play their last two games against them. The Dodgers remembered what the Giants' manager had said about them six months earlier just prior to spring training. Now the Dodgers rose to the challenge. They defeated the Giants in both games; and by so doing they helped to deprive them of the National League pennant.

In the opening chapter of the Book of Job we find an analogous situation. We find the LORD inviting Satan to consider the life and character of this man Job, whom the

LORD describes as “*my servant*.” We then find Satan responding by requesting that Job’s faith and integrity be put to the test—that Job’s identity as a servant of the LORD be put to the challenge. Throughout the course of the book we find that Job—by the grace of God at work in him—meets the challenge and proves himself to be a true servant of the LORD.

What is true in the life of Job is, to one degree or another, also true in the life of every Christian. As Christians, we may expect to encounter trials that will challenge our devotion to the LORD. As we study Job 1:1-2:10, let us consider the subject, “Be Prepared to Face Spiritual Challenges.”

## **I. Be Prepared to Face Spiritual Challenges, Especially If You Lead a Diligent Christian Life**

In verse 1 Job’s Christian character is revealed. Job is described as being “*blameless and upright*” (vs. 1.) The Hebrew word translated “*blameless*” (כִּמְצִיִּק) frequently is used to describe a sacrificial animal as being “spotless, without blemish.” As applied to a man, it refers to personal integrity, not sinless perfection (Hartley, John E.; “The Book of Job,” *The New International Commentary on the O.T.*; p. 67.) Note Joshua 24:14, where כִּמְצִיִּק is translated “sincerity” or, “faithfulness,” “*Now fear Jehovah and serve him with all faithfulness (כִּמְצִיִּק). Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve Jehovah.*” When Job is described as being “*blameless and upright*” he is being defined as a man who walks before God, as becomes evident from such passages as Genesis 6:9, “*Noah was a righteous man, [one who was] blameless (כִּמְצִיִּק) in his day; Noah walked with God*” and Genesis 17:1, “*Jehovah appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless’” (כִּמְצִיִּק)* The way to be “*blameless*”—the way to stay clear of great transgressions, the way to stay on course spiritually—is to always consciously live in the presence of God—to walk before God. Job is further described as one “*who feared God and turned away from evil*” (vs. 1b.) What motivated Job to lead a blameless life was his godly fear; a deep reverence and respect for the holy majesty of God, which in turned caused him to depart from evil.

Verses 2-3 go on to describe the covenantal blessings Job enjoyed: the abundance of these blessings were the result of his godly life and a testimony to that life. He had numerous children (seven sons, three daughters.) He had an abundance of material possessions (7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys.) He also had a large number of servants. He is described as being “*the greatest man among all the people of the East,*” (i.e.; Job occupied a high position of honor as a consequence of his godly character.)

Finally, verses 4-5 present Job’s piety. Job’s sons were in the custom of hosting feasts in their homes, literally, they “*held a feast in the house of each one upon his*

*day.*" This is not depicting a frivolous life of endless feasting; rather, it is referring to their tradition of holding family gatherings to celebrate special days, such as birthdays (Hartley, p.69.) Following his children's celebration, Job was diligent to have them purified and offer a burnt offering for each of them.

Job himself explains the reason for his action: *"Perhaps my children have sinned and renounced God in their hearts."* Job was very concerned that none of his children should depart from God, forgetting God or forsaking Him. The depth of Job's piety is seen from his concern for the state of his children's hearts: he recognized that true godliness originates from the heart and involves the heart. Job carried on this practice of offering sacrifices on behalf of his children *"continually"*—here is steadfast devotion to God.

It is this very man—a man characterized by outstanding piety and godliness—who is subjected to great spiritual challenges. His faith is about to be subjected to great spiritual trials. As Christians, we must be prepared to face spiritual challenges, especially if we are leading a diligent Christian life, as we are called to do. Why? One reason is because such experiences are a part of sharing in *"the fellowship of [Christ's] sufferings"* (Phil.3:10.) Note the parallel between the case of Job and the life of our Lord Jesus Christ:

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River to John, in order to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup>But John would have prevented him, saying, I have need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? <sup>15</sup>But Jesus answering said to him, Allow it now; for it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he allowed him to be baptized. <sup>16</sup>And Jesus, when he had been baptized, immediately came up out of the water; and the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon him. <sup>17</sup>And a voice was heard speaking from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. <sup>4</sup>Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matt. 3:13-4:1)*

By submitting Himself to baptism, the Lord Jesus was demonstrating His piety, His complete devotion to God His Father, His willingness to submit Himself totally to His Father, even unto death, since baptism is symbolic of death. Following Jesus' baptism, God the Father publicly acknowledged His Son's devotion by declaring, *"This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."* *"Then Jesus was] led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."* God the Father allowed the devil to challenge Jesus' devotion in order to demonstrate and verify the truth of the Father's proclamation concerning His Son's devotion and righteousness. By faithfully withstanding temptation, Jesus verified His righteousness and demonstrated that the Father's proclamation of His Son's devotion was justified. A second reason we as Christians may expect to encounter spiritual challenges is because God possesses the right to test our devotion in order to verify its genuineness—and God exercises His divine prerogative as He sees fit, therefore, we should be prepared to face spiritual challenges.

## II. Be Prepared to Face Spiritual Challenges, Because It Is God's Prerogative to Prove Our Faith

Satan (the name means "Adversary") came and presented himself before the LORD (1:6.) Note that Satan is completely subject to God. He must appear before the LORD, the God of all the earth, he cannot act as an independent agent, he must give an account of his activities (1:7.) He must be granted permission before he can subject Job to trial and testing. He will be used by the LORD to accomplish the divine purpose of verifying Job's devotion unto the glory of God.

The LORD now directs Satan's attention to Job, applauding Job's godly character and devotion (1:8,) repeating the same description of Job as that given in verse one. The LORD Himself identifies Job as "*my servant Job,*" thereby stressing Job's commitment to the LORD and the fact that such commitment is acknowledged and honored by the LORD. Note that the LORD's acknowledgement of Job as His faithful servant is made not only to Satan personally but before the whole assembly of the sons of God, i.e.; the angelic host (1:6.) This public acknowledgement of Job is the equivalent of the Father's public affirmation of Jesus at the time of His baptism when the Father declared, "*This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.*"

Satan now challenges the divine assertion that Job is a true servant of the LORD (1:9-11.) Satan's contention is that Job's motivation in serving the LORD stems from selfish, self-centered reasons, his service and commitment are not motivated by true love and devotion to the LORD. Satan suggests that Job serves the LORD only because the LORD has blessed him and only for the LORD's blessing (1:9-10.) Satan maintains that if the LORD were to remove His blessing from Job's life, Job would "*renounce you to your face*" (1:11.) Satan's contention is that as soon as the blessing ceased, Job's devotion would cease, being replaced by the same blasphemous defiance of the LORD as that exhibited by the devil himself. Satan's argument amounts to this: Remove the divine blessing and you remove the reason/the motivation for Job's devotion, thereby demonstrating that his devotion is no true devotion at all. His devotion is not motivated by genuine love and reverence for the LORD his God, it is motivated only by self-interest.

True devotion stems from the awareness that the LORD is our God and the whole purpose of our existence is to serve Him: "*Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the [whole] duty of man*" (Eccl. 12:13.) True devotion is a devotion that is accompanied by the confidence that, because the LORD is both good and just, He will eventually and inevitably honor those who honor Him: "*Jehovah, the God of Israel, declares ... 'those who honor me I will honor'*" (1 Sam. 2:30b.)

The LORD now grants Satan the permission to test Job's devotion (1:12.) Satan's purpose is to disprove the LORD's claim that Job is a true servant of the LORD. The LORD's purpose is to have His claim about Job demonstrated to be true and



thereby verified; and this can only be accomplished by subjecting Job to trial and testing. Note: The LORD grants Satan permission to subject His servant to trial, but with this stipulation: *“only do not lay your hand upon the man himself”* (1:12.) There is a divine limit imposed upon what Satan may do; the LORD guards the souls of His people,

*My sheep respond to my voice; I know them and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life—they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup>I and the Father are one. (Jn. 10:27-30)*

We are now informed as to what calamities were inflicted upon Job (1:13-19.) A marauding band of Sabeans invades Job’s farmland, killing his servants and stealing all his oxen and donkeys (1:14-15.) A tremendous bolt of lightning strikes Job’s flock as it is grazing, killing both the sheep and the shepherds (1:16.) Three bands of Chaldeans plunder Job’s camels and kill the servants in charge of them (1:17.) While Job’s children are feasting (1:13,) the east wind (the fierce sirocco wind that sweeps in from the wilderness) strikes the house of the eldest son, causing it to collapse upon Job’s children, killing them all (1:18-19.) “These four plagues revealed to Job that all the forces of heaven and earth had turned hostile toward him ... the causes of destruction alternate between earthly and heavenly forces coming from all four points of the compass: the Sabeans from the south, lightning from a storm out of the west, the Chaldeans from the north, and the treacherous sirocco blowing off the desert to the east” (Hartley, p.77.)

Chapter 2, verses 1-6, describes a second round of testing and trial. The LORD points out to Satan that Job has shown himself to be a true servant, he has maintained his integrity—his commitment to the LORD—even in the face of “unprovoked” calamity. The calamities that have come upon Job were *“without [just] cause”* (2:3.) That is to say, they were not administered against him as a judgment for some sin he had committed in violation of the LORD’s law and departure from his devotion to the LORD his God.

Rather than accepting the fact that Job has demonstrated the genuineness of his devotion to the LORD, Satan insists on having Job subjected to further trial: he now calls upon the LORD to afflict Job’s body (2:4-5.) Satan’s contention is that Job is utterly self-centered, he is willing to accept the loss of his possessions and even the loss of his own children, so long as his own life is spared. But if his very body is afflicted, then his self-centered nature will be revealed: he will renounce God.

Once again the LORD grants Satan permission to subject His servant Job to further trial (2:6)—doing so in order to remove any question as to the

genuineness of Job's devotion. Once again the LORD protects Job's life (his soul), He does not permit Satan to take his life (2:6.)

Having secured permission, Satan now proceeds to afflict Job *"with severe boils from the sole of his foot to the top [of his head]"* (2:7.) Job's affliction (severe boils from the sole of his foot to the top of his head) was a form of the divine curse. Moses warned Israel that if they were to rebel against the LORD their God, *"Jehovah will afflict your knees and legs with painful boils that cannot be cured, spreading from the soles of your feet to the top of your head"* (Deut. 28:35.) By undergoing such an affliction, Job's confidence in the LORD and his devotion to the LORD would be tested to the very limits. This is exactly what Jesus experienced on the cross, namely, being exposed to the divine curse of God:

*"When the sixth hour [of the day] arrived, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. <sup>34</sup>At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' (which, being interpreted, means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')"* (Mk. 15:33-34.)

Jesus responded with steadfast confidence in God His Father and continued devotion to Him:

*It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, <sup>45</sup>for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup>Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.* (Lk. 23:44-46)

As Christians, we must be prepared to face spiritual challenges, because it is God's prerogative to test the genuineness of our faith:

*You shall remember all the way in which Jehovah your God led you in the wilderness for these forty years, [he led you in this way so] that he might humble you, in order to test you, so that he might know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments.* (Deut. 8:2)

*... now for a little while, since it is necessary, you have been brought to grief by all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup>[This has happened] so that the genuineness of your faith—being of greater value than gold which perishes—having been tested by fire, may be verified, resulting in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* (1 Pet. 1:6b-7)

### **III. Be Prepared to Face Spiritual Challenges, and, by God's Grace, Respond in a Godly Way**

Job's response to these unexpected and unprovoked trials is first the response of worship: *"he prostrated himself upon the ground and worshiped"* (1:20.) In so doing, Job is acknowledging God's lordship over his life; He is acknowledging

his unswerving obligation to submit himself to God in devotion, regardless of earthly gain or loss.

Job then proceeds to utter his testimony: *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I return there. Jehovah gave, and Jehovah has taken away, blessed be the name of Jehovah"* (1:21.) Job acknowledges that all the earthly benefits and blessings we experience are bestowed by the LORD, and are subject to His sovereign discretion: *"Jehovah gave, and Jehovah has taken away."* Job continues to steadfastly trust in the LORD's covenantal faithfulness, as is seen by the fact that he uses God's covenantal name: *"Jehovah"* (or, *"the LORD."*)

Job affirms that it is our moral obligation to honor the LORD and render devotion unto Him as an end in itself (*"this is the [whole] duty of man,"* Eccl. 12:13,) not merely when or because we are the recipients of temporal blessings or from the motivation of seeking to induce the LORD to bestow such blessings upon us.

In verse 22 there is made the editorial comment: *"In all this, Job did not sin ...* (despite all the great and, from his perspective, inexplicable, calamities he encountered, Job refrained from sinning: he did not forsake his devotion to God and turn to a life of godlessness) *... by foolishly accusing God [of wrongdoing]."* Job did not foolishly charge God with wrongdoing. It would be the height of impious foolishness for a mere mortal who is a sinner to assume the position of judge over God and to charge the LORD with wrongdoing. Although Job will come dangerously close to doing so, the LORD graciously intervenes to prevent him from committing such a sin of arrogance. Note: Verse 22b may be translated, *"nor did he attribute folly to God."* Job did not accuse God of acting foolishly by inflicting such calamities upon an innocent man who had done nothing to merit such treatment.

Seeing Job in his state of acute suffering and humiliation (*"he sat among the ashes,"* 2:8,) Job's wife offers her counsel: *"Are you still maintaining your integrity?"* Why do you still maintain your integrity? You are not receiving any benefit from it. On the contrary, you are receiving the exact opposite: calamity—the kind of treatment one would expect to be administered to those who have no integrity! *"Renounce God and die!"* She counsels Job to sever his covenantal relationship with God, even though she is aware that to do so means his death: he who breaks God's covenant is worthy of death, for he has rebelled against his sovereign LORD. Her position is self-centered and utilitarian, as opposed to being God-centered and truly pious. From her perspective, devotion is to be rendered unto God, not as an end in itself, not as the supreme purpose of man's existence; rather, devotion is to be rendered unto God as a means of deriving temporal benefits from God: if God withholds the blessing, one should renounce his devotion to God, even if it means incurring God's divine judgment.

In responding to his wife, Job charges her with speaking like *"one of the foolish women"* (2:10.) The counsel offered by his wife is 'foolish' (the Hebrew term,



נָבֵל, has the meaning, "impious.") This is the attitude of the ungodly who only view their relationship to God from a self-centered, utilitarian perspective and motivation. In Job 21:14-15 we will hear the wicked express their view: *"the wicked say to God, 'Get away from us! We have no desire to know your ways. <sup>15</sup>Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What will we gain by praying to him?'"* Job reiterates the fact that we are completely at the disposal of God our Maker. We readily accept the good we receive from His hand (many times without thanksgiving), should we not also accept calamity/hardship from His hand if He sees fit to bestow such things to accomplish His sovereign purpose?

Following Job's rebuttal to his wife the editorial comment is made: *"In all this [his grievous trials, as well as the additional temptation to renounce God suggested by none other than his own wife] Job did not sin with his lips"* (2:10b.) The Wisdom tradition taught that the one who controls his speech has his whole life in focus. Therefore, to say that Job did not sin with his lips is to state unequivocally that Job did not commit the slightest error (Hartley, p.84.)

As Christians, we must be prepared to face spiritual challenges; and, by God's grace, let us respond in a godly way. Let us acknowledge God's absolute lordship over our lives: *"O Jehovah, you are our Father; we are the clay and you are our Potter—all of us are the work made by your hand"* (Isa. 64:8.) Let us be confident that we shall inevitably experience His goodness: *"then Jehovah gave Job twice as much as he had before"* (Job 42:10b.) Note, too, the testimony of the Psalmist: *"Jehovah God is a sun and a shield. Jehovah will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. <sup>12</sup>O Jehovah of hosts, blessed is the man that trusts in you"* (Psl. 84:11b-12.)