

Job: A Man Stripped Bare-J Vernon McGee

The Book of Job tells a true story but, since it comes out of the ancient Middle East, you may get the impression that it's far removed from life in modern America, that the story, and even Job's experience, are out of step. But it's very interesting that one of the most successful plays to appear on Broadway was a play entitled J.B. It's the story of the Book of Job brought up to date, and it illustrates that today people encounter the same problems that this man Job faced.

When the author of J.B., Archibald MacLeish, was asked why in the world he picked a biblical theme, he said, "There are those, I know, who will object that...the God of Job is God the Creator of the Universe, and science, they say, now knows that there is no such Creator." But he continued, "Einstein has told us that he had sometimes the sense that he was following, in his plumbings and probings of the universe, the track of an Intelligence far beyond the reaches of his own."

May I say to you today that this book tells out the story of a man who finally came into the presence of his Creator. The story is told in three scenes, actually. The first scene is set on earth in a peaceful valley. Job, I suppose, could have sung "How Peaceful Is My Valley." Then the scene shifts, and the curtain is raised for the second scene in heaven. But the scene where most of the story takes place is out on the ash heap, the ancient city's dump.

Now, the first scene introduces us to a man who was probably the most prosperous man of his day. These are the things that are said about him:

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and shunned evil. (Job 1:1)

This man lived in the land of Uz, and his name was Job. May I say, that's all we know about him, and that's precious little. To begin with, who knows where the land of Uz was? Now, you may have a map that locates it. If it's a reliable map, you'll notice it has a question mark after "Uz," and that means the geographer had to put it down somewhere, so he put it down -- somewhere. No one knows where the land of Uz really was.

The time? No one knows the time, either. It is the belief of a great many, including myself, that the Book of Job is the most ancient book in existence. It evidently comes from the time of the patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There are several reasons to believe that. To begin with, there's no mention, for instance, of the Exodus; no mention of the nation Israel; no mention of the Mosaic Law. Also, the length of life corresponds to that of the patriarchs; and the fact that Job was the high priest in his family definitely places him in that period of history.

Why did God give this story to us with so little background information? I think the reason is that this man might have been Job, or he might have been J.B., or he might have been Mr. Jones from Chicago or Mr. Smith from San Francisco. He could be almost anyone, if you please. His was the experience that men have down here. It is a saga of suffering, but this book teaches more than that.

Although we have to put a question mark after the time and the place Job lived, we're told this man was perfect. What does God mean when He says that he's perfect? It means simply that he was a complete man, that he did all that God asked a man to do in that particular dispensation. In other words, this man offered the sacrifice that God required. It's one of the first things we find Job doing -- performing the part of a priest in his own family.

He was also a prosperous man. When we move into the valley in which he lives, there is a calmness. It's a scene of serenity and tranquility. In fact, it's almost too good to be true. It's the kind of scene you don't find down here very often or for very long.

But now we'll shift our attention to another breathtaking scene -- one of the most startling scenes imaginable. Here's where the Word of God differs from all other books. God gives us a glimpse of heaven, and only God can tell us what takes place up there! If man wrote this book, it would be speculation, merely a fairy story. But here we're allowed access into the very presence of God in heaven.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the

LORD, and Satan came also among them. (Job 1:6)

Evidently, God's created intelligences are accountable to Him and have to turn in a report from time to time. But the most startling thing of all is the statement, "...and Satan came also among them."

How'd he get in? Who left the door open? What business does he have there? May I say this to you, even he has to give an account to God, because he's a creature. I bet he hates it, but he has to give an account. Every created thing must give an account

to God -- including the creature, Satan, so he came also.

The thing that's amazing is that Satan has access to heaven. He really does. The fact of the matter is, Satan has never been in hell, because hell hasn't been opened yet to do business. It won't be opened until we get to the end of the Book of Revelation.

But today Satan has access to heaven, and in Job's day, he had to turn in his report. So God said to him, "Where've you been? What have you been doing?"

Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. (Job 1:7)

He has perfect freedom in this earth in which we live today. Peter says he goes up and down this earth "like a roaring lion...seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8+). Satan today is the great enemy, our great enemy. He has perfect freedom in this world, for he took over the dominion that Adam lost in the Garden of Eden when he sinned.

And from that day when sin entered this world, it's doubtful whether the term "normal" could apply to any member of the human family. Sin has put man off the track and has derailed him physically, mentally, emotionally, volitionally, and spiritually.

It's small comfort trying to console ourselves with the thought that we are normal simply because we are average, especially when we discover how they arrive at "normality." Certain tests are given, and the place where the majority fall is called "normal." Those who are out ahead of the crowd are "super-normal." Those who don't quite keep up with the crowd are "sub-normal." The one out in front is a genius and the one behind may be feeble-minded, but both groups are deemed the abnormal folk. It's the crowd in the middle who are called normal.

It was the Quaker who, one night after reading the paper about the strange happenings of the day, said to his wife as he looked across the table, "Why, I think the whole world is peculiar but thee and me." Then, having thought a moment, he said, "Sometimes I think thee is a little peculiar."

It's impossible, therefore, to find a full-orbed personality, a well-balanced individual who's totally integrated. All of us are off-center in one direction or another.

May I say to you, therefore, that normal behavior is what most people do, and abnormal behavior is what people do who depart from the majority. Let me illustrate.

Most of the human family walk on two legs when they go down the streets of Los Angeles. That's considered the normal way. But, as far as I know, there is no law against getting down on all fours in order to walk. However, if you do that, chances are you will be labeled an abnormal person.

What we call normality today just means that we're average. But the question is: How do we know that the average, the majority, are normal?

May I say that this creature called man is frail, he's feeble, and he's faulty. It's easy to get him to depart from the pattern, to upset his equilibrium. A slight blow on the head may cause a traumatic condition, or he may have some great emotional disturbance. In either case, my beloved, we'd say he's "off." It's easy to cause man to "tip the scale" today. But God has been gracious to us since sin came into the world. He has placed around us certain "props" to make us stand upright.

The writer of Ecclesiastes says,

...God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many devices. (Ecclesiastes 7:29)

God has clothed man with an armor for his protection and security, and He makes it rain on the just and the unjust (see Matthew 5:45+). He has given to all men, godly and ungodly alike, certain aids to help them stand. The wicked today get just as much sunshine as the godly, and those who are in rebellion against God have just as much air to breathe and they're just as healthy as God's people. God always wants to prop, to hold, man up.

Now the devil knows how to get at a man. Satan knows he can get to man if he can remove those props; if he can strip man of every vestage of aid; if he can take away the soft garment of his security; if he can upset man; if he can turn him upside down and inside out and destroy his morale and rearrange his thinking. He attempts to brainwash a man so he can turn him against God.

Therefore, God has always done something for those who are His own. Back in the Old Testament He put around His own a hedge to keep the devil out. Today He says, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4+).

But sometimes the devil is permitted to crash the gate. He's permitted to strip a man down to his naked soul -- and God permits that for a purpose.

And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant, Job...? (Job 1:8)

Why do you suppose God asked him that question? I think the reason is obvious. Satan had been sniffing around the hedge, trying everything he could to get to this man. He probably said to himself something like this: Job has the greatest influence for God in this area, and I've got to destroy that somehow. He's too great of an influence for God!

That's still Satan's method. He tries to wreck the influence of those who are standing for God. And, believe me, he doesn't have any trouble finding tools.

In His sovereignty, God permitted the devil to attack this man Job, and the Book of Job presents that deliberate and determined stripping of a soul.

I'm not sure the Book of Job offers the solution. The fact of the matter is, I think you have to go to the New Testament to get the answer to the problem. But, may I say, that's where we'd expect to find the answers -- in the back of the book.

When I studied algebra in school, the place in my book that was mostly worn was not where the problems were, but back where the answers were given. I certainly gave the back of the book a workout.

May I say to you, my beloved, you'll find the problem stated in the Book of Job in the Old Testament; you'll find the solution when you come to the New Testament. God puts the answers "in the back of the book." The Old Testament, in one sense, is the most unsatisfactory book that's ever been written -- it's a book of expectation. The New Testament is the book of realization and satisfaction.

Watch Job as the devil brainwashed him, for Satan stripped Job of every vestige of covering that he had until that man stood yonder a naked soul in this universe, with no props, nothing to lean on at all.

Prop Number One

The first thing the devil did was strip Job of all the physical things of this life, material substance, what we consider the basic needs of man -- food, clothing, and shelter.

These are the three things that make big business succeed in America today, that which deals with the necessities of man. We're engaged in the business of building barns and having flocks and herds and lands -- and that's proper. May I say to you that God has given us richly all things to enjoy, and you will find that He's very careful to tell us this ability is something He has given to man.

But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God; for it is he who giveth thee power to get wealth.... (Deuteronomy 8:18)

Prosperity is God's gift, and there's nothing wrong in having money and the things it can buy. The danger, of course, is in depending and leaning upon these things. Yes, they're props.

America is more prosperous than any nation in the history of the world. I don't think there's anything wrong today in America having all these wonderful possessions that go back, my beloved, not to free enterprise but to the fact that this nation was built on the Word of God! We've departed from it, and the danger is that our prosperity is giving us a false security because we're leaning on "things."

It's quite interesting that this sort of brainwashing has percolated into the church. Have you ever noticed who's called upon to give a testimony for Christ today? It's some successful businessman, some professional person, or somebody who's an outstanding athlete or well-known in the entertainment world. It's gotten so the average fellow just can't give a testimony, because, in the thinking of the glamour-seeking crowd, it makes no difference whether he's been saved or not. Too many folk measure a man by some standard of worldly success before they consider him a success with God.

My friend, when so much attention is being given to material and physical things, I'm of the opinion that it would be good for a Christian in this hour to get off to himself alone and take an inventory to see whether he's trusting in these things or in God, whether he's leaning on his possessions or actually looking to God.

My beloved, Job lost it all! This man was the John D. Rockefeller and the Henry Ford of his day, wrapped in one package. He was the greatest man of the East. The devil moved in on him and stripped him of all material things. He went all the way from prosperity to poverty, and when this man lost all that he had, he was moved, but he was not "re-moved" from the foundation. When Job lost everything he had, he was disturbed, but he was not defeated by any means.

Prop Number Two

The second thing God gives to prop us up in this life is loved ones. Children born into this world have a right to both parents and to their love, their care, and their protection. The little ones will go to their parents for love, for sympathy, and for understanding. We're told that without these things in their lives, children develop conflicts and complexes. They need somebody to go to. But as people grow to adulthood, they grow away from their parents; their love is transferred to their own children. They're concerned for their children and work to provide for them. You see, their love is centered and fastened there.

But this man Job lost all his children in one fell blow -- seven fine, stalwart sons and three beautiful daughters were snuffed out. I tell you, at a time of calamity such as that, many men fold up like an umbrella! But what did Job do, and what did he say?

Then Job arose, and tore his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. (Job 1:20, 21)

If there's anything that would crush a man, certainly this awful experience that Job went through would crush him; but this man was still upright, his head was erect. But I want to tell you, the devil was not through with him.

Prop Number Three

The third thing the devil stripped Job of was his health. That's a great factor in the well-being of man. When you're in good health, the world looks good and you like to go out and serve the Lord. But when you get infirm of body and you grow sick, you develop a jaundiced view of life.

May I say that over a period of years I've been very much interested in why people commit suicide, and without checking my statistics, I would say that fifty percent of those who commit suicide do it because of ill health.

Countless numbers of God's saints are laid aside and bedridden today. Like Job, they've lost their health.

So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. (Job 2:7)

Dr. Cedric Harvey, a great physician of London, England, said he's convinced that Job was suffering from psychosomatic dermatitis. Well, I don't care, my beloved, whether it was psychosomatic dermatitis or boils, it hurt just the same! The devil had said, "Skin for skin," figuring a man will give anything for his life and for good health.

At this point Job was in a terrible condition -- he'd been stripped of his possessions, his children, and his health. But the devil was still not through with him, because none of these disasters had in any way wrecked this man and his testimony for God.

Prop Number Four

Next Job was stripped of the sympathetic understanding of his wife. God has given to man the love and sympathy of a companion. When He created Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden, you remember that Adam was alone and God said he needed a helpmeet -- "I will make him an help fit for him" (Genesis 2:18+). God instituted marriage for the welfare and happiness of mankind.

Today many a man stands at the forge of life, faithful and stalwart and strong -- he faces the battle and the daily grind, brave and true. But you ought to see him when he goes home. He pillows his head upon the lap of a wife who understands and sympathizes, and he draws strength from her.

I remember as a boy in West Texas a red-headed Irishman by the name of Kelley, and he was a wonderful man. He had a little, bitty wife, Bonnie, and she was the dominant member of that family. When the three-year drought came, he told my Dad that at the beginning of the drought he was worth a quarter of a million dollars, and he said, "My little wife did it all." But the drought came, and at the end of three years they'd lost it all, and he was ready to quit. She said to him, "Kelley, we came here in a covered wagon, we're going to leave in a covered wagon. We'll go somewhere else and start over." I never shall forget the day they left. They spent the last night with us and started out in the old covered wagon the next morning.

I remember that little wife -- why, one of those sandstorms would've blown her away, she was so small -- sitting by his side. They went down toward the Rio Grande to start over, and they made good because of her. How she sympathized and understood.

Oh, my friend, may I say to you, Job lost the sympathy and understanding of his wife.

Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die. (Job 2:9)

In other words, "Get out of this!"

But again, the devil wasn't through with him. He was still stripping. He stripped Job down to his soul.

Prop Number Five

Next, we find that Job lost his friends, and they were true friends. Now, not everyone agrees that they were true friends, but suppose you lost everything you had. How many friends do you have who would come from a great distance and sit down with you for seven days to mourn with you? Job had friends who did that, and they discussed with him his trials and tribulations.

The fact of the matter is, Job and his friends had a regular "word battle." It was a duel to see who could come up with the best solution. Back and forth it went, nearly forty chapters worth. Poor Job was exhausted!

So although Job had friends, they didn't understand him, and they began to criticize him and find fault; and when a friend begins to criticize and find fault, you've lost your friend. Eventually, Job had to say, "Miserable comforters are all of you; you're no help to me" (see Job 16:1, 2). Finally, the friends left and Job was alone.

Somebody says at this juncture, "What else can the devil do to Job now? He has taken away from him everything that can be taken away from a man in this life. It sounds like the brainwashing of communism or cultism."

My beloved, the devil hadn't even started on Job yet. He was getting ready to really take him apart. You'll see deterioration and disintegration of personality taking place in this man now.

Prop Number Six

I want to mention three more things that the devil stripped him of, and he'll strip you and me of these today if he gets the opportunity.

Job lost his sense of the worth and dignity of his own personality. My beloved, man is a sinner, it's true. But this sinful man happens to be the one for whom Christ died. This sinful man happens to be the one whom angels are watching. In fact, all of God's intelligences are watching this creature called man! When a man loses the sense of his dignity and his worth, he'll fold up every time, and Job lost that. Here was the result:

After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day. And Job spoke, and said, Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a male child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. (Job 3:1-4)

The man was going to pieces, friends. However, he was not through expressing the anguish of his soul.

Wherefore, then, hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? Oh, that I had died, and no eye had seen me! (Job 10:18)

What is the value of the human soul? The Lord Jesus raised the question: "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (see Matthew 16:26+; Mark 8:37+). My friend, if you had all the wealth of this world, it wouldn't be equal to the value of your soul.

Only God attaches any value to man. My generation witnessed the downgrading of man and his subservience to the state by Communism. That philosophy disturbs many people because it downgrades men, making them of no value at all. Only Christ gives value to a man! He says, "Ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31+), and He proved it on the cross by shedding the most precious, valuable thing in God's universe -- His own blood -- that He might redeem us, not with corruptible things, like silver and gold, but with His own precious blood (see 1 Peter 1:18, 19+).

I repeat, God attaches value to you today. Mueritus, one of the great scholars of the Middle Ages, was traveling through France when he took sick and fell by the wayside unconscious. He was picked up and taken to one of the hospitals of that day. They thought he was a bum, an outcast, no good at all. In that frame of mind, some of the doctors decided they'd experiment with him, so they took him in and put him on the table. But while they were getting ready, he came to and heard them discussing in Latin the fact that he was of no value. They were discussing making a guinea pig of him! Mueritus spoke out and said to them in Latin, "Will you call a creature vile and valueless for whom Christ died?"

Oh, my friend, the devil will seek to destroy the dignity and worth of your personality, but God has put tremendous value upon you today.

Prop Number Seven

The next thing the devil did was strip Job of his sense of the justice of God. May I say that when a man reaches that place in his thinking, as far as disintegration of personality is concerned, he's far gone. It's no sign of smartness today to talk about the injustice of God. It's a revelation of the fact that in your own personality you've disintegrated.

At the beginning of his trouble, Job could speak like this:

Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips. (Job 2:10)

But eventually he got away from that. The devil had been removing every prop that was holding Job up, and finally Satan moved in on him and questioned the justice of God in his life. Because there were certain questions he could not answer, this man became critical and cynical. He said:

For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause. He will not suffer me to take my breath, but filleth me with bitterness. (Job 9:17, 18)

May I say that this man was far gone! He said, "God is doing this to me without a cause; He has no right to do that, and He won't give me a chance. Troubles are coming on me in such rapid fire, I can't even get my breath!"

And that's not all. In verse 22 he says:

This is one thing; therefore, I said, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.

"Why, God doesn't pay any attention! He just takes all men alike and destroys them."

If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent. (Job 9:23)

You don't think much of God, my friend, when you talk like that. It was a cry of a wounded spirit. It was the anguish of a soul in torment. Job is not the only one who raised questions about the justice of God. Abraham did, too. Abraham asked God the question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25+). And Habakkuk looked out upon the world in which he lived and said, "You've caused me to behold injustice. Why do You show me iniquity?" (see Habakkuk 1:3+).

When any man (and I don't care who he is today, he may be a college professor) gets so muddled in his thinking, gets such a blurry-eyed view of this world and begins to talk about injustice

-- that God is not just and Communism is as good as any other form of government -- disintegration of personality has set in, and I tell you, the devil is wearing at that man's soul.

Prop Number Eight

Now the last thing that I would mention is this: Job almost lost his sense of the love of God. Notice that I said "almost." Actually, I believe if he'd lost that, he would have gone under. I think the devil would've won the victory if Job had moved to the place where he lost completely his sense of the love of God. He almost did. Oh, when he lost all of his possessions and all of his children, he could still stand firm and worship God and say,

Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. (Job 1:21)

But, my friend, all that changed. In Job 6:4 we find him saying,

For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison of it drinketh up my spirit; the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.

And then his complaint went further:

Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me; then would I speak, and not fear him; but it is not so with me. (Job 9:34, 35)

Job said, "I've reached the place where I'm afraid of God, because I not only don't believe He's just, but I'm not sure I can believe He loves me. I don't think He cares anymore." And when a man reaches that bitter part of life, my beloved, when he thinks that God does not love him, he has reached the very bottom. That is total disintegration of personality. It's total deterioration of the soul of man when he reaches the place where he says, "God does not love me anymore."

At this point Job was stripped; he was a naked soul exposed to the universe. May I say that in the midst of his dreadful condition and plight, down deep in his soul, he was anchored to one declaration (and it's the reason I say he "almost" lost his sense of the love of God). In the midst of all his calamity he could still say,

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.... (Job 13:15)

Job said, "I don't understand. I've lost my view of God's justice. I'm not too sure of His love, but in spite of all that, I'll hold on." It's the same thing Peter said:

Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. (John 6:68)

And so, this man held on, and I hear the cry of his soul. I don't think he was complaining then to his friends. I don't think he played a part; he was not acting. This happened to be real. Here's the cry of this man's soul:

For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman between us, that might lay his hand upon us both. (Job 9:32, 33)

Job said, "I'm at a great disadvantage. I don't stand a chance before God. I wouldn't be able to state my case right. I need somebody who knows God, I can see that! And I need somebody who understands me! I need somebody who can take God's hand and also take my hand, someone who can bring us together!"

You won't find the answer to that until you get to the New Testament:

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

That "someone" is the Lord Jesus Christ. He came from heaven's glory and took upon Himself our frail humanity. He held on to God with one hand and took man with the other hand, and at this very moment Jesus Christ can bring man to God!

Job didn't have the benefit of the New Testament, but what faith we see in this man! I hear the cry of his soul again:

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. (Job 19:25, 26)

This is the one prop that held Job upright when he was robbed of all the others.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having an high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22+)

Many of us don't draw close to God until we face a crisis. We've heard it too much; we've heard it too often. It's like water off a duck's back. But God may move you into a crisis, and perhaps you'll hear Job encouraging you along with Peter, who said:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. (1 Peter 4:12, 13+)

When the props are knocked out from under you, let the love of Christ hold you up.

Is there no other way, O God,
Except through sorrow, pain and loss
To stamp Christ's likeness on my soul,
No other way except the Cross?

And then a voice stills all my soul,
That stilled the waves of Galilee,
Canst thou not bear the furnace heat
If midst the flames I walk with thee?

I bore the Cross, I know its weight;
I drank the cup I hold for thee.
Canst thou not follow where I lead?
I'll give thee strength -- lean hard on Me.

-- Author unknown

