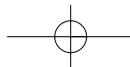


*CRYING OUT*  
FOR  
*VINDICATION*



THE G O S P E L A C C O R D I N G T O  
THE O L D T E S T A M E N T



A series of studies on the lives  
of Old Testament characters, written for  
laypeople and pastors, and designed to  
encourage Christ-centered reading, teaching,  
and preaching of the Old Testament

TREMPER LONGMAN III  
J. ALAN GROVES

*Series Editors*

*CRYING OUT*  
FOR  
*VINDICATION*

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO  
**JOB**

DAVID R. JACKSON

**R&R**  
P U B L I S H I N G  
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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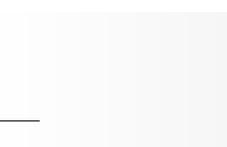
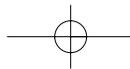
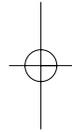
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*Dedicated to the memory of the saints who were martyred at Eichenfeld, Ukraine, between 1919 and 1920, and to those who inherited the blessings of their faith and faithfulness, including my mother-in-law, Verna Schroeder; my wife, Patricia; our children and grandchildren; and to all the saints who faithfully maintain their testimony to Christ before the beast today so that others may have the opportunity to hear the gospel and be saved.*



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## FOREWORD



*The New Testament is in the Old concealed;  
the Old Testament is in the New revealed.*

—Augustine

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. (1 Peter 1:10-12)

“In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with

Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:22–27)

The prophets searched. Angels longed to see. And the disciples didn't understand. But Moses, the prophets, and all the Old Testament Scriptures had spoken about it—that Jesus would come, suffer, and then be glorified. God began to tell a story in the Old Testament, the ending of which the audience eagerly anticipated. But the Old Testament audience was left hanging. The plot was laid out, but the climax was delayed. The unfinished story begged an ending. In Christ, God has provided the climax to the Old Testament story. Jesus did not arrive unannounced; his coming was declared in advance in the Old Testament, not just in explicit prophecies of the Messiah but also by means of the stories of all of the events, characters, and circumstances in the Old Testament. God was telling a larger, overarching, unified story. From the account of creation in Genesis to the final stories of the return from exile, God progressively unfolded his plan of salvation. And the Old Testament account of that plan always pointed in some way to Christ.

#### AIMS OF THIS SERIES

The Gospel According to the Old Testament Series is committed to the proposition that the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is a unified revelation of God, and that its thematic unity is found in Christ. The individual books of the Old Testament exhibit diverse genres, styles, and individual theologies, but tying them all together is the constant foreshadowing of, and pointing forward to, Christ. Believing in the fundamentally Christocentric nature of the Old

Testament, as well as the New Testament, we offer this series of studies in the Old Testament with the following aims:

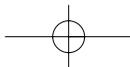
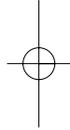
- to lay out the pervasiveness of the revelation of Christ in the Old Testament
- to promote a Christ-centered reading of the Old Testament
- to encourage Christ-centered preaching and teaching from the Old Testament

To this end, the volumes in this series are written for pastors and laypeople, not scholars.

While such a series could take a number of different shapes, we have decided, in most cases, to focus individual volumes on Old Testament figures—people—rather than books or themes. Some books, of course, will receive major attention in connection with their authors or main characters (e.g., Daniel or Isaiah). Also, certain themes will be emphasized in connection with particular figures.

It is our hope and prayer that this series will revive interest in and study of the Old Testament as readers recognize that the Old Testament points forward to Jesus Christ.

TREMPER LONGMAN III  
J. ALAN GROVES



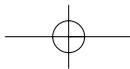
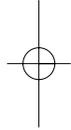
IN MEMORY OF  
J. ALAN GROVES



**A**fter the death of Ray Dillard in 1993, Al Groves and I saw to the publication of our beloved friend, mentor, and colleague's book, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy*, and in doing so launched a new series. This series, *The Gospel According to the Old Testament*, aims to show, as Christ himself declared, that "all the Scriptures" speak of our Lord's suffering and glorification (Luke 24:27).

It is with sadness that I report that Al Groves recently died at the age of fifty-four. The sadness of our loss is tempered by the joy we feel that he is now with the Lord he loved and served so well in this life. We owe Al for his insightful teaching, his incisive writing, his work on the Hebrew text for computer use, and, for those of us who knew him, his friendship and encouragement.

TREMPER LONGMAN III



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



**I**t is appropriate when reflecting on a work such as this to recall those who have had a significant input into one's thinking and understanding. Usually this list includes pastors, academics, and critics—among whom have been the late Alan Begbie, George Robinson, Reg Piper, Terry Dean, Don MacPhail, Greg Fox, Noel Weeks, the late Ray Dillard, the staff and students at William Carey Christian School, and in particular my year 12 classes. A special thank-you is due to the series editor, Tremper Longman III, for his encouragement and helpful criticisms.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge some people whose input has come in another form. Without invading their privacy or wishing to embarrass them, it is appropriate to speak of those whose examples of persevering faith have put flesh on so many aspects of the gospel according to Job.

In the first place, I would like to thank my wife, Patricia, who has constantly brought grace, encouragement, comfort, and wisdom when this man has needed it, often when she herself was most in need.

Second, I have been blessed to know a lady who would, at first glance, appear to be a frail and somewhat timid believer. Some, in passing, might see in her only weakness. To those who have known her, even from childhood, she has been a model of courage in the face of fear, patience through adversity, faith through fire, and always a model

of gentleness, meekness, kindness, and generosity that has proven surprisingly powerful. As such I thank God for my mother, Violet Jackson, better known as Pidge, for her love, wisdom, and example.

Significant aspects of the lessons of Job have been made so much more accessible for me through the wisdom and fellowship of Warwick and Ruth Wilkie, John Goldsmith, and Jan Waterhouse, colleagues at William Carey Christian School. I offer them my heartfelt thanks.

With these are a cloud of witnesses, many easily missed, not found among the stars on stage or in public view, but who continue to overcome by faith and who, each week, take their place in the assembly of the saints.

It is a humbling thing to take one's place in such company—it can only be by the grace of Christ.

## INTRODUCTION



**O**n a garbage heap, in pain, in desperate mourning for the loss of his children, in poverty, under accusation of friends and provocation of his wife, in an intensity of human emotions that scandalized his pious friends, a man spoke boldly to God and asked “Why?”

At some point in our lives we too have been on that garbage heap and howled to the Lord our “why.” It may not be about us but about those closest to us. Sometimes we can see our suffering fitting into a pattern of God’s plans and purposes—when it results from persecution or is a direct consequence of our own sin. But at other times it seems random and without purpose—even just plain cruel. At such times we feel ambushed. It is as if an enemy has jumped out of the trees and attacked us.

I discovered Job when I was sitting by my wife’s hospital bed, waiting for her to wake up after a miscarriage. We had prayed for this child’s safety and salvation since before the child was conceived. We had prayed all that night that the child would survive the present crisis. The answer was no. I sat there, looking out the window of the hospital at sunrise, and watched a bird fly across a cloudless sky as the sun rose. I asked the Lord, “How come that wretched bird could soar through such a sunrise, and our child, made in your image, never see the light of day?” I opened my Bible to Job because I figured he might have something to say at a time like this, and flipped through the pages to roughly the end of the book. I was looking for God’s final speech to Job. My eye fell

on the questions, “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations? . . . Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place? . . . Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? . . . Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom . . . ?” I sat and wept and remembered Job’s words, “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.”

Knowing the Lord at such times is desperately important. Knowing that a sinful response will only increase the pain keeps us from losing perspective. But understanding and being at peace with God at such times is a much bigger issue altogether.

Certainly a good knowledge of God’s Word at such times is essential. When the fire of emotions is at its hottest—when the ambush happens—it’s too late to want to know. That’s the time when we most need to draw on knowledge of the truth that is stored away. It is also a time that creates a hunger to know and understand more.

At such a time I turned to the study of Job, and I invite you to do the same, because through Job we come to Christ. In Jesus our questions and confusions are resolved, our faith vindicated, and our suffering redeemed.

## I

## READING JOB



The book of Job is different in form and style from any other book of the Bible. It is one of those books that you have to be in the mood to read. Many people check it out and put it aside. For those who take the time and get into the issues, reading it is an amazing experience. Somebody once asked my son what his favorite book of the Bible was. I think he was in his early teens at the time. The look on the questioner's face when he said "Job" was worthy of the front cover of any photography magazine. Have you ever met a twelve-year-old who thought Job was the most interesting book of the Bible? He was seven years old when I preached a series on Job in our church. We had lots of fun getting various people in the congregation to read parts as we presented the book of Job as a serialized radio play each week. What made it live was the fact that some harsh things were happening to people in our church at that time, and the book of Job spoke to us of Christ and his part in our struggles. My son didn't know all of the stories then—but the Word of God did come to life as we studied and listened and prayed together. So let's take a moment and think about how we are going to approach this part of God's Word.

No one knows who wrote this book or when, and that is not our primary concern in this study. But it is interesting

and worth thinking about if it helps us picture accurately what happened. The book of Job isn't an ancient myth or a timeless story set in never-never land. Myths are about people or creatures who are not located in any identified place or time and are stories that could never be verified. The book of Job is about real people, identified by family name and location, in a real place at a particular time—and so are we.

### LISTENING TO JOB AS DRAMA

The book of Job appears to be written in the form of a drama. We have little idea about how this book would have been read or presented in the community where it first appeared. We do know that it would have been read aloud to an audience, since books were copied by hand and were far too expensive for most people to have direct access to a copy.

We know almost nothing about drama, or even if there was something akin to what we call drama or the theater in the ancient Near East.<sup>1</sup> Probably there wasn't. But Job does appear to be written as if a narrator were telling a story and people were reading their parts.

We might imagine the book being presented to an audience much in the way a radio play was presented back in the twentieth century. Even if all the parts were read by one person, there remains an element of drama in the cycle of speeches. Most likely it was presented by a professional reader or storyteller similar to people who ply their trade in many nations today.

The book of Job would be different from what we know as theater because there is no action. The drama is found in the ideas, passion, and logic of the arguments. The audience is drawn into the issues, as into a whirlpool, as the reader gives expression to the frustration and agony reflected in Job's situation and the various ways of trying to make sense of it all.

The hook that draws the audience in is the fact that we all suffer, and from time to time we all see examples of suffering that we think are undeserved, random, or even cruel. All of us struggle with (or try not to think about) the hard questions.

The arguments presented aren't abstract issues. It is about me. It is about the loss of my child. It is about the family I know with two autistic kids. It is about a husband caring for a wife with leukemia. It is about the God who rules a world where a righteous man, a kind and godly man, is murdered. And we all want to know why. Some people want to accuse God, and others want to defend him, but we don't know why he would allow such things to happen. And it hurts.

So we want to jump out of our seats and argue with these men. Like film critics or talk-back radio, we can't just sit and be entertained by this reading of the script. We want to have our say too. And sometimes, when it is all too close to the bone, we want to run away.

The people who heard this drama for the first time would have found it shocking. Job's passion is undignified and confrontational. The friends become so angry they can't even speak. There is a young man who makes a fool of himself by providing the audience with sudden comic relief after all the tension of the argument, just in time to prepare them for the Lord to speak.

Things are said that seem not only to go against the religious beliefs and gods of the local culture, but even to ridicule their claims. As a dramatic reading, Job would invite a pagan culture to rethink everything and challenge its worldview at every point.

In the book of Job we come across references to figures we now know are mythical characters or pagan gods, and who held great significance in the beliefs and customs of a range of people in the ancient Near East. We hear about Mot (Death), Behemoth, Leviathan, and the stars

that sing when God lays the foundations of creation. Various speakers allude to ancient myths about Yam (the Sea), Tannin, and Rahab the sea monsters. There is considerable use of poetic imagery drawn from various understandings of the place of the dead. Much of this is difficult to understand because we have an inadequate knowledge of the various forms and developments of these myths in the different communities that passed them down over hundreds of years. What is clear is that Job and his friends are working out the truth in the face of some fearful myths. In that context, Job and others are determined to present God as much more powerful than, more transcendent than, and completely in control of the objects that their contemporaries held in fear and reverence. It is like saying that our God is greater than Superman, Alien, Predator, Godzilla, or Rambo.<sup>2</sup>

This is evangelistic theater and theologizing with a passion. Arguments begun in the public reading of the book of Job have continued up to our time.

In this swirl of passion and ideas, beliefs and fears, Job dug in his heels and fingernails and would not let go of what he knew of “the words of the Holy One,” which were God’s promises and declaration that he, Job, was righteous.

In this furnace of suffering and confusion, Job’s understanding was stretched, and what he knew led him to discover things he didn’t understand.

So, let’s find out some more about this extraordinary man.

## THE SETTING

It is possible that this is the first book of the Bible to have been written. Certainly the events described in this book occurred before any book of the Bible had been written. Immediately we are intrigued. We have the full text of the Word of God in Scripture—for Job, there are no more

books to come. This man Job had none of them, so on what basis and with what resources did he manage to go through such experiences without sin (Job 42:7–8)?

The saga of Job is probably set in the period between Abraham and Moses, although it could even be pre-Abrahamic. We know that Job lived in “the east” (Job 1:3), which refers to the land east of the Jordan River. It could be anywhere from Edom (Judg. 6:3) to northern Syria (Haran, the home of Laban; Gen. 29:1). He came from the land of Uz, and a young man who engages in this dispute, Elihu, was a Buzite.

We know of two men named Uz. The first was a son of Aram (Gen. 10:23). The line of covenant succession does not include Aram but follows the line through his brother Arpachshad (Gen. 10:22, 24; 11:11–13). The second man named Uz had a brother named Buz, and these men were Abraham’s nephews (Gen. 22:21), sons of his brother Nahor. Nahor’s homeland is called Aram-Naharaim. Nahor’s son Bethuel was the father of Laban and Rebekah and grandfather of Leah and Rachel. Uz and Buz were Bethuel’s brothers. Both Bethuel and Laban are called “the Aramean” (Gen. 25:20; 31:20). It seems as if names such as Aramean or Buzite could be used to identify a man either because he was descended from the one who bore that name originally or because he came from the land once owned by the family of that name. We often find that more than one person will bear the same name. Thus Uz and Buz have a nephew named Aram. While it is possible that Job lived before Abraham, the correlation of the two names, Uz and Buz, lends some probability to a time between Abraham and Moses.

By the sixth century BC, it looks as if the descendants of Uz and Buz may have moved south, into the land of Edom. Jeremiah refers to “the kings of Uz” (Jer. 25:20) in company with the Philistines, Edom, Moab, and Ammon, and the people of Buz (Jer. 25:21–23) in company with

Dedan and Tema in northwestern Arabia. Lamentations locates the Edomites in the land of Uz (Lam. 4:21). In Job 1:15, 17, the raiders who stole his flocks and herds and killed his servants were Sabeans (Arabs) and Chaldeans. The Chaldeans were a people originally associated with the Arameans but who eventually migrated into southern Mesopotamia. If the land of Uz were somewhere near or within the area known as Aram, the distribution of herds and flocks would seem quite logical. Each of these peoples attacked Job's herds and flocks separately. So it is probable that some of Job's flocks and herds may have headed off seeking the pastures south from Aram, along the eastern side of the Jordan, while others went southeast along the Euphrates Valley. It is more difficult to picture them all heading north from a location in Edom and extending along a line of such distance.

In either case we can be reasonably sure that if Job came from the land of Uz, he was descended from Abraham's nephew of that name and that his homeland could have been located anywhere from Aram (northern Syria) to Edom.

Job's children lived in houses, not tents, one of which, when hit by a "mighty wind," fell on his children and killed them (Job 1:19). He was therefore not a nomad, so he and his family would have had to live close to a permanent source of fresh water. His ownership of the land would have involved inheritance and possibly further purchases. He was involved in the breeding of herds of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys (1:3), which would require large areas of pasture land and servants who would move with the herds and flocks from one pasture to another, possibly covering significant distances over territory not owned by anyone in particular, making them more vulnerable to raiding parties.

## IN THE PINK ZONE

This places Job outside the line of the Abrahamic covenant community. The Bible traces the line of promise from Noah to Jesus, noting along the way that God cut off various branches of this family tree (Ham and Japheth, Ishmael, Esau, and eventually the tribes associated with Joseph) to leave Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Judah to David and eventually to Jesus. It has been common, on some genealogical charts used for classroom instruction, to trace this line in red. So some Bible teachers speak of the red line that traces the gospel promise from Genesis 3:15 to Jesus.

On such a chart we could say that Job is located in the pink zone. He would be off to the side along with Bethuel, Laban, and Lot.

Throughout the Old Testament, we are repeatedly presented with examples of God's grace to people who lie close to the direct line of God's covenant promises but who are not in that line. Sometimes we are hard-pressed to know this is a matter of kindness or in some instances we might be dealing with saving grace. We can think of people such as Lot (Gen. 19), God's grace to Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 16:1–16), Laban and his daughters (Gen. 22–35), and later figures such as Ruth, who was a descendant of Lot. Moses' father-in-law was a "priest of Midian" (Ex. 3:1) and seemed to be well accepted within the fellowship of Israel (Ex. 18). God warned Moses and the Israelites not to "abhor" the Edomites because they were "your brothers" (Deut. 2:8–9; 23:7; cf. Num. 20:21). David sent his family to safety in the care of the king of Moab (1 Sam. 22:3).

And so, while the line of promise may point us to Christ, those adjacent to that line seem also to have come within the pale of God's grace in various ways. Who knows but how many of them will be found among the company

of God's faithful people on that day. What is clear is that there is grace, even saving grace, to some who were born in the pink zone, and Job would be one such.

### JOB'S PLACE IN HISTORY

We can fairly conclude that Job lived between the time of Abraham and Moses. We draw this conclusion based on several indications in the text.

First, there is no mention in the book of the name or nation of Israel.

Second, in Job's day there was no centralized sacrificial system based within the nation of Israel, located at the one tabernacle or temple and serviced by priests descended from Aaron. Rather, we find the same practices that we see in Genesis, where the patriarch, as head of his family, acted as priest by offering sacrifices and praying for his household (Job 1:5). Like the patriarchs, Job could pray for people other than his family (Job 42:8-9; cf. Gen. 20:17).

Third, Job's lifespan must have been around 200 years. He lived long enough to marry and raise a family of adult children who had in turn all been married and then killed. Then he lived another 140 years (Job 42:16). As such, Job's lifespan is longer than that of Moses and the generations after him and is more in keeping with those of the patriarchs closer to Abraham's day. According to Genesis 10, the lifespan of people after the flood dropped quickly. Between Shem and Peleg, people lived for something just over 400 years. With Peleg, the age span dropped suddenly to less than 250, and as we move from Abraham to Joseph, the drop continued steadily. So Abraham's grandfather Nahor lived for 148 years; his father, Terah, 205; then Abraham died at 175 (Gen. 25:7), Isaac at 180 (Gen. 17:1), Jacob at 130 (Gen. 47:9), Joseph

at 110, and Moses at 120. Job's lifespan thus would place him earlier rather than later in the patriarchal period.

Fourth, apart from the book of Job, the name Job occurs in the Old Testament only in Ezekiel 14:14, 20, where Ezekiel refers to the biblical Job. Outside the Bible, however, the name occurs in a nineteenth-century BC Egyptian curse on a Palestinian clan chief; on an eighteenth-century Egyptian list of slaves, some of whom bear Semitic names; on eighteenth-century tablets from Alalakh and sixteenth-century tablets found at Mari; in the fourteenth-century Amarna letters; and in the thirteenth-century Ugaritic texts.<sup>3</sup> So, we can be fairly sure that Job lived some time between 2000 and 1400 BC.

#### AND OURS

We live at a time when more Christians are being persecuted and killed for the sake of the gospel than at any other time in history. There are so many Jobs on ash heaps in more countries than ever before. And in various ways, all who put their faith in Christ will have to deal with the same issues and challenges.

Here we discover, with Job, more of the depth of God's grace to us in Christ—who, by his own choice, suffered more than Job to save us from the cruelty and domination of sin. At the worst of times, when we are ambushed and wounded, we need to know, to believe, and to cling to these things. And so we join the audience and come to learn the wisdom of the gospel according to Job.

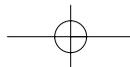
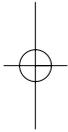
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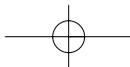
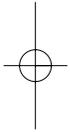
1. What are some of your "why" questions that you would like God to answer?

2. What aspects of the gospel do you find difficult or confusing?
3. Apart from life itself, what is so valuable to you that its loss would have the possibility of breaking your grip on Christ and the gospel? Where is your faith vulnerable?

# PART ONE

A TIME TO CRY OUT





## 2

## THE SCENE IN HEAVEN

( 1 : 6 – 2 : 1 3 )



Probably the best window into a generation's thinking is the music or the movies that hit the harmonic for them. The period from about the ages of twelve to twenty-five seems to be the time when so many issues are decided and so much of life is being shaped on the forge. It helps to listen to the music of the next generation and to check out the movies that younger people like, because through them we can pick up "the wind" of the times.

In the late 1970s we had a wave of movies featuring the hero who had to step outside the law to bring justice and protect us all. For the past twenty years, we have been subjected to waves of songs and movies that reflect the idea that we are victims of conspiracy and that we are essentially helpless. In 1986, the heavy-metal group Metallica<sup>1</sup> sang about the "Master of Puppets" who controls your life by getting into your mind and dreams, leaving you blind and screaming.

Since then we have had lots of movies about extraterrestrials or the Central Intelligence Agency or the Vatican (interesting juxtaposition of bad guys, isn't it?) running secret operations to control the world. My favorite

scene is the last one in *Men in Black*, when the camera zooms across the solar system and through all the galaxies until it comes out of the universe to find a large, weird-looking creature playing marbles. Our cosmos is one of his marbles.

Is that how it is? Are we little humans scurrying around on planet Earth like so many bugs (“unevolved pond scum,” as the bad guy in *Men in Black* put it), living helpless and pointless lives controlled by beings we neither see nor hear? Are we here for the amusement of some out-of-this-world beings who are bored?

Such ideas aren’t new. Similar ideas are found in the myths of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Canaanites, Greeks, and Babylonians, having all the dignity of ancient cultures, archaeological relics, exotic religions, and long-lost texts. For God’s people who lived in such cultural settings, these weren’t movies. These ideas were the state religion backed by some intimidating people in positions of power.

As Christians who hold to the Bible as God’s words of revelation, we are at a bit of a disadvantage when it comes to arguments about such things. We do have the Bible, and we do have a risen Savior who came into the world, died, and came back to talk to us. But we don’t have firsthand knowledge of heaven or what goes on there. We don’t have a detailed picture of what God is going to do or why he does what he does most days of the week. Speculation can fill that picture quite quickly with some exciting scenarios that sell lots of books. But most of the time we have to admit, “I simply don’t know.” On any given day, these things probably aren’t all that important for us, that is, until life hits the fan and the bits fly everywhere. So our author begins by giving the audience (but not Job) the information we need to make sense of what is about to happen. We are in on the conspiracy, and he is not.

## ACT 1, SCENE 1: JOB HOLDS COURT (1:5)

Job's seven sons seem to be enjoying an idyllic family lifestyle. As each one has a birthday (Job 1:4; cf. 3:1, where Job curses "his day" and proceeds to talk about the day he was born), the whole family assembles for a party. These parties seem to last for a week (1:5). Then Job brings everyone together and offers whole burnt offerings to cover their sin, just in case. Here is the head of the family summoning his sons for a series of sacrifices before they return to their homes and labors. Job's court is then a temple scene, a temple being a place where God and humankind meet. Here Job is priest and mediator representing his family before the throne of God.

## ACT 1, SCENE 2: GOD HOLDS COURT (1:6-12)

The scene in heaven is set deliberately as a parallel to the scene at Job's house. Here we have God, his sons, and one who appears to be an intruder.

This scene immediately brings us, and possibly the original audience, into some confusion. Who are these people? Throughout the ancient Near East we have a range of different versions of what one might see in the heavenly assembly. Across a number of traditions from Greece to Mesopotamia, one could fairly expect to find an assembly of gods with one god taking supremacy over the rest. Whatever other beings might be found there, it is these gods who determine what happens on earth, and more often than not they are found having all manner of disputes with one another.

There are several places in the Bible where allusion is made to this pagan conception of heaven. Many of these passages are hard to understand, and we need to tread carefully and not attempt to explain away lightly

the difficulties. Nevertheless, there are lines that need to be drawn. When the biblical writers call on “the gods” to worship Yahweh (Ps. 97:7), it doesn’t mean they are saying that there are many gods in heaven who need to vote for Yahweh and accept him as their leader. The men who translated the Old Testament into Greek before Jesus was born seem to have been troubled by this and other such passages (cf. Ps. 8:5; 138:1), so they translated the Hebrew word for “gods” as “angels.” Over time, the practice developed of identifying pagan idols with angels, and then realizing that these must be sinful angels. Where information is lacking, speculation will flow.

There certainly is a “host of heaven” (1 Kings 22:19), including spiritual beings that are not human. There are beings called “angels” and “spirits” (Zech. 6:5) or “watchers/guardians” (Dan. 4:13, 17, 23). It is difficult in some places to say whether the writer is referring to the pagan understanding of what is in heaven or whether he is affirming that this is reality. Even where we are sure the writer is describing reality, it is another thing to be able to sort out whether the creatures in view are all angels. It could be quite a leap to claim that since “sons of God” can appear in Yahweh’s court, they must be angels.

One of the things happening in the book of Job is a sophisticated polemic targeting such pagan beliefs.<sup>2</sup> The author of Job makes some heavy use of the mythology and culture of his time to portray Yahweh as the only God, creator, and sovereign over all else in creation. He makes ironic use of mythical figures such as Leviathan and Rahab to portray Yahweh as supreme, especially in Job 38–41. While wishing to be careful not to import pagan concepts into Job’s worldview, we need to admit that some passages in Job are particularly difficult to understand, and in such places we do well to postpone our thoughts in hope of greater light.

## SONS OF GOD

Amid the pagan conceptions of heaven we find a tradition, well represented in the Ugaritic literature, that represents “sons of the gods” as the spirits of the deceased, also known as “rephaim” (cf. Job 26:5; Prov. 21:16; Isa. 14:9). These spirits are in some way associated with the spirits of the dead kings. Throughout the ancient Near East, kings claimed that their right to rule was based on their relationship with a god or gods. Occasionally we find the claim that they either are gods or become gods when they die. More commonly, they were believed to be the sons of the gods. Against this arrogant and idolatrous boast, the biblical prophets occasionally spoke in terms loaded with sarcasm and judgment. Thus the two passages often understood to be accounts of the origins of Satan, Isaiah 14:3–23 and Ezekiel 28:1–19, are prophecies directed at the hubris of the kings of Babylon and Tyre, respectively, who had made such claims for themselves. King Herod’s acceptance of the people’s cries that he was a god resulted in his death by worms (Acts 12:20–23) and recalls this prophecy (Isa. 14:11–12).

Who, then, are the “sons of God” in Job?

With only a few possible exceptions (Gen. 6:1–4; Job 1:6; 2:1), throughout the Bible “sons of God” is always a reference to God’s believing people—his chosen people. About the third century BC, a Jewish cult arose that saw angels as “sons of God” and taught that they were the main cause of evil on earth. This cult is known today as Enochic Judaism, and it includes the Essenes, or the Dead Sea Scrolls cult. It would have been against this teaching that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews posed the rhetorical question, “For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’? Or again, ‘I will be his Father, and he will be my Son’?” (Heb. 1:5). In the forefront of this confrontation is the writer’s

understanding of the person of Jesus as *the* Son of God. Nevertheless, “the sons of the kingdom” are humans, not angels (Matt. 13:36–43), as are the “holy ones” to whom the kingdom is awarded in Daniel 7:22, 27. From Adam (Luke 3:38) to Israel (Ex. 4:22–23; Hos. 11:1) to David’s heir (2 Sam. 7:14), Solomon (1 Chron. 22:9–10), to us (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1), the title refers to humans.

There is no doubt that in Job 38:7 they are mythical beings, synonymous with the stars, who are depicted as singing when the foundations of the earth were laid. Jews who followed the teachings of *1 Enoch* saw problems with this verse. In the Aramaic Targum on Job that was found in their library (11Q10 xxx.5), the stars “shine” rather than “sing,” and “the sons of God” are “angels,” in keeping with the distinctive way the followers of the Enoch tradition developed their version of the cosmic conspiracy. According to their thinking, angels were in charge of, not identical with, stars, the sun, the moon, and everything that affected the seasons and the calendar. The problem with the picture in Job 38:7, however, is that according to Genesis 1, there were no stars (and presumably then no such “sons of God”) when the foundations of the earth were laid, because stars weren’t created till day four! Job is here borrowing another picture from pagan mythology as part of his polemic against those who feared the powers in the sky or the sea.

It was a scandalous concept then, as it is in some circles now, to conceive of human beings standing so close to the throne of God in heaven. Those who translated the Old Testament into Greek tended to word their translation so as to put as much distance as possible between God and men. For man to be next in rank under God was shocking, and so the statement in Psalm 8:5 is changed, placing man a little lower than the angels rather than a little lower than God, as the Hebrew text states (cf. Heb. 2:7). The New Testament writers stood their ground on the matter, with Paul firmly declaring that God’s people

would “judge angels” (1 Cor. 6:3) and that angels are servants sent by God to serve us (Heb. 1:14) and especially our covenant head, Jesus.

In a scene reminiscent of this one, the writer to the Hebrews calls on Christians to be aware of their place in this heavenly assembly. Yes, the heavenly assembly includes angels. But it is preeminently an assembly before the throne of God of “the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven . . . the spirits of righteous men made perfect” (Heb. 12:22–24). In the New Covenant church, the heavenly and earthly temples have merged—we have already come to Mount Zion.

It is particularly significant then that Job 1:6–12 does not mention angels. The satan’s challenge is in fact not just a charge against Job, but against all the sons of God present in that assembly. Job is simply the test case. The satan is challenging the right of every son of God to stand before the throne of God.

## THE SATAN

Who is this “satan”? Here the picture is very vague, and possibly deliberately so. None of our questions are addressed: “Where did he come from?” “What is he doing in the throne room of God in heaven?” In fact, Satan isn’t even his name here. He is “the satan,” a title that means simply accuser or opponent. Without any explanation, he appears in the way an ancient king’s spy might arrive at court to report on a corrupt official. He functions as a prosecutor and doesn’t have a name. To identify him as Satan or the devil requires further revelation such as came much later, as in Zechariah 3:1–7. We are not even told that the snake in the Garden of Eden was Satan until Revelation 12:9! It is only with this benefit of hindsight that we can identify “the satan” of Job with the one who bears the name

Satan, the devil, or a number of other titles in later revelation. One might fairly conclude that for the author of Job, he isn't that significant a person—or is this a polemical device to treat the enemy with contempt?

What we do know of Satan throughout the Bible helps us make sense of this scene—much more so than the original audience. For the sake of simplicity we shall therefore refer to him as Satan, keeping in mind that we do so with the benefit of the rest of Scripture.

We know that Satan was the one who tempted Eve and Adam. His success in Genesis 3 turned the order of the world upside down. Whereas God was owner and man and woman ruled the world under God (Gen. 1:28), now man and woman had declared independence from God and found themselves under the dominion of an animal. All of humanity thereafter, being born on Adam's side of the war with God, were born enemies of God—until Jesus! In him at last we find another man who enters the world without sin and so is entitled to rule the earth. This man had to face the same challenge, and Satan, to continue in power, had to bring him down.

Immediately following his baptism with water and the Holy Spirit, Jesus went off into what is significantly now wilderness and not garden, to face this enemy one on one. In the course of this encounter, we hear the enemy make this claim and offer:

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to." (Luke 4:5–6)

Jesus came to take possession of the kingdom of God. He came to be anointed (Ps. 2), and then enthroned as king in Adam's place (Rom. 5:12–21). He is "the Son of Man"

whom Daniel saw, who would ascend to heaven and be enthroned at the right-hand side of “the Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:13–14; Acts 1:9; 2:33). For him to have a people to rule, he would need to die on a cross to redeem them. In the wilderness temptation, Satan was offering Jesus a way to get the throne without going to the cross. I still delight to recall Les Sloat, our Greek instructor at Westminster Seminary, as he gave such expression to Jesus’ blunt reply to Satan in Matthew 4:10, where the Greek word is “Hoopagay”: “Get lost!”

Satan was defeated at this encounter. A man had chosen to suffer in order to maintain his faithfulness to God and thus to purchase righteousness for all the children of God! This same being, called “the satan” in Job 1, hopes no man would ever make such a choice. On a smaller scale prophetic of suffering, Job will show us that our Redeemer will make that choice.

We next hear of Satan in the Gospels, when Jesus says as the seventy return (Luke 10:18), “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” We have to wait till Revelation 12 to learn that, having failed to kill the promised child, Satan was thrown out of heaven. John tells us the good news that “the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down” (Rev. 12:10).

This means that the prosecutor who failed will become the vigilante who would kill. The age of persecution begins, and it is Satan’s last desperate attempt to keep the kingdoms of this world for himself (Rev. 12:11–17; Dan. 7:21–22; 24–27; 1 Peter 5:8).

The court case that we first hear about in Job 1–2 ends with Jesus. Now we have been given the right to be called the children of God (John 1:12). We have been vindicated at the cost of his suffering and death. Now we must face the beast in the flesh and suffer and persevere to gain the kingdom of God. And so the call to perseverance and faith rings long and loud through the pages of the New Testament as

the authors of those Scriptures began to experience what today is global and intense persecution. Together with those who have already overcome, we await the final encounter with Satan, when the heavenly court shall again convene and Jesus will open the books (Rev. 20:11–15), vindicate us, and bring an end to our suffering.

#### FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. Reflect on the movies and the songs that moved you when you were in your teens. Why did those songs strike such a harmonic with you then? What were the issues, and what answers did they offer? What answers did or will your generation pass on to the next?
2. What better answers from God's Word do you have now to pass on? With whom should you be having such conversations?
3. Are you intimidated when you tell others about the gospel? Why?
4. What do you know about what happens to us when we die? Can you find a basis for these ideas in the Bible, or is there an element of wishful thinking mixed in?
5. How much of what you know or believe about Satan can you find in the Bible?
6. Do you ever "believe" what you "imagine to be true"?