

# Abiding Fruit

*Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart*

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## **Where Were You...?**

### **Job 38:4**

The book of Job is a masterpiece. It has stood the test of time as to its validity and relevance. It is a book that deals with the human condition at its profoundest level. It puts human suffering into perspective. It is about one man's personal holocaust. I doubt any person alive today suffers in the way Job suffered. First of all, physical suffering is experienced by all. Secondly, spiritual suffering seems relegated to few in comparison to the many. Physical suffering may never be resolved in this life, but spiritual suffering can be. Job experienced these in degrees that we probably have not. Our Lord Jesus, of course, went way beyond Job in suffering, since he suffered for Job also. Job is like us, just flesh and blood. He serves as an example. Outside of the book of Job, job is mentioned three times (Ezek. 14:14, 20; James 5:11). In these passages, Job is recognized as being righteous and steadfast. The book of Job mentions him more than 50 times.

Job is not about a conflict between Satan and Job. Satan makes his appearance early in the book and vanishes from the scene. He is an instrument in the hand of God. He is permitted to do only that which God permits him to do and nothing more. God is sovereign over all the affairs of men and women. He will permit events and things to happen in our lives that we so often pass off as evil believing they come from the devil or elsewhere, but we ignore the hand of God. We do this all the time when we hear of the suffering of others. We immediately remove God from the equation because surely God would not be involved in evil, yet God is precisely involved in evil, not as the author of it, but as the sovereign who uses evil for the accomplishment of His purposes. You cannot interpret the Holocaust, for instance, in any other light than this, Great evil done by the hands of monstrous men! Can we then say that God was not involved? There were a few Christians who saw that God was involved.

God sets up kings only to bring them down when they have accomplished what He first intended. Hitler's rise to power, and the subsequent evil, should be seen as useful to the German Church as a purifying agent. Most of them did not see it. When we see evil in our country today, we must look for God first. What is He saying to us? We must never minimize the evil of men and their accountability to God, but we must never ignore and separate God from that evil and for those who perpetrate it. More importantly, we must not separate ourselves from the events of history, since they have occurred because God has brought them about. It is only in this light that we can understand God and how He works in history.

Then problem of evil is raised by the three friends of Job in this book, with each of them accusing Job of failing to submit to God. His suffering, they surmise, must be because Job has sinned against God. In order to correct his problem, Job should acknowledge this. On the other hand, Job knows that he has sought to be righteous before God. Job becomes overwhelmed at the immensity of what has happened to him. We almost wish we could reach across the centuries of time, and tell Job that it is God who is doing something and all will be well in the end.

This reminds us that in every trouble, God surely is present and ultimately God will be vindicated and glorified. In the first 2 chapters, the scenes shift between heaven and earth. Job is on earth. God is in heaven. In heaven dialogue takes place between God and Satan. This raises a dilemma for us because, how can Satan be in heaven? The result of the conversation between God and Satan produces disasters

for Job on earth. A second conversation occurs between God and Satan and this produces personal undeserved affliction for Job.

Satan's involvement in heaven should be seen in the light that the sons of God (angels – probably unfallen and fallen) came to present themselves to God (give an account of their activities). God questions Satan as to his activities, to which he responds by saying that he has been roaming throughout the earth. Revelation 12:10 speaks of Satan's accusations against the people of God in heaven. Satan could not deny God's assessment of Job (1:8), so he questioned the reason why Job was so righteous. Satan said it was because God had placed a protective hedge about Job that everything was going well for him. Satan suggested that Job was serving God because of what Job got out of the deal. If God removed his protection and destroyed what he had then Job would curse God. God gave His permission to Satan and the result of losing everything including children produced worship from Job. The second dialogue (chp.2) goes through the same routine. Satan states that the problem is that if God would only touch Job's life, that then Job would curse God. Even Job's wife seems to desire to lay the blame on God when Job is afflicted with his severe boils, but Job 2:10 tells us that in all these sufferings Job did not sin with his mouth against God.

The visit of Job's three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar) produces a round of discussions that last from 2:11 – 31. At this point, Elihu, a much younger man enters the picture to lay before Job the reason for his suffering (Job 32 – 37). Finally God takes us the discussion with Job in chaps. 38 – 42.

Throughout all of these discussions, Job has protested his innocence. He rejects the theory of his friends that he is suffering because God is retributive (Job must have done something wrong to suffering in such a way). Job desires that God would speak to him so that he could defend himself against the unfairness of God in causing him to suffer. Elihu points out that Job was sinning because he was suffering (in questioning God). Elihu suggests that Job can benefit from suffering (33:17, 28, 30; 36:17). Job should not complain against God (33:13; 34:17), but rather should humble himself (33:27; 36:21; 37:24). Elihu's handling of suffering is far better than Job's three friends.

God finally enters the picture to contend with Job. Job has desired to speak with God (13:22; 31:35); he has desired a mediator to speak on his behalf (9:33); and he has desired an intercessor (16:19, 20). In chapters 38 – 41, God asks Job a battering ram of questions that are unanswerable except to say that God alone is the cause of all the things that God brings before Job. Job desires that he and God should legally resolve the issues between them (in a courtroom style setting). God does not answer Job's questions about injustice, instead God questions Job.

God does not explain the theory of suffering to Job nor does he explain the role of suffering in a person's life. Rather, God rebukes Job for challenging and questioning Him. God lays before Job, at least 70 questions, and each one of them cannot be answered by Job. God's discourse covers the entire creation (inanimate and animate objects). The dazzling display of God's incredible power is delivered with stunning force that it causes anyone who ponders these chapters to bow before the greatness of this Sovereign God who does as He pleases. God shows Job that man cannot comprehend the Almighty God. Job is too impatient and ignorant. If Job cannot comprehend God's ways in controlling the forces of creation (nature, stars, etc) how can he question God about how He deals with man? God does not explain His ways to Job – He simply shows them to Job. God is the Sovereign and Sustainer of all things. The question, "*where were you,*" is sufficient to drive us to our knees. We are nothing and Job was nothing, yet God has been pleased to show Himself to us in a personal revelation. God desires our worship and adoration for who He is. Job's response is repentance (42:1- 6), and God's reward to Job is to give him back everything in greater numbers (42:7 - 17). We must learn, like Job, to have the proper response to God in the midst of our troubles and afflictions.