

Job Laments His Life

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Job responds to his suffering by lamenting his own conception, birth, and life
2. aim – To cause us to consider carefully how we, as Christians, answer the question of suffering
3. passage – Job 3:1-26

b. outline

1. Job Laments His Conception (Job 3:1-10)
2. Job Laments His Birth (Job 3:11-19)
3. Job Laments His Life (Job 3:20-26)

c. opening

1. an **introduction** to the “speeches” portion of the book
 - a. the **difficulty** of this portion of the book – what do we do with all this?
 1. **opinion:** I have never been a “fan” of poetry – I find it difficult to understand or interpret (and I suspect that many of *you* feel the same!)
 2. **however:** all Scripture is profitable (**2 Tim. 3:16**), and this section has been *inspired by God and providentially preserved* ... therefore, it must be important for us to consider ...
 3. **so:** although this will *probably* be the most challenging exegesis and exposition of Scripture I have ever undertaken, I believe that the Spirit of God will see us through it (**pray for that**)
 4. **but:** we will *not* be doing a verse-by-verse exposition of these speeches – my intention is simply to cover the speeches *in general*, pointing out specific verses **IMO** are important (**see below**)
 5. **contra:** Calvin, who preached **x159** through this book, exegeting *everything* – I appreciate his *thoroughness* (and belief that *every word* has meaning), but I don’t want to spend **>3** years
 6. **LOW:** I will leave it *to you* to read the chapters for yourselves as we go along ...
 - b. the **details** of this portion of the book – what are we dealing with in all this?
 1. chapters 3 through 41 (**x39**), along with the first six (6) verses of chapter 42, are **speeches**
 - a. Eliphaz **x3** (**4-5, 15, 22**); Bildad **x3** (**8, 18, 25**); Zophar **x2** (**11, 20**); Elihu **x1** (**32-37**)
 - b. Job **x11** (**3, 6-7, 9-10, 12-14, 16-17, 19, 21, 23-24, 26-28, 29-31, 42:1-6**)
 1. **i.e.** Job speaks of *his own volition* **x2** (**3, 29-31**), the rest are **responses** to others
 2. **e.g.** **42:1-6** is a response *to God*, the final words that “set” the point of this book
 - c. God **x1** (**38-41**); total speeches: **x21**
 1. sometimes we will *combine* a speech of a friend with Job’s response, sometimes not
 2. the **bulk** of this book is the musings of Job *himself* – a man *declared* to be righteous by God, who must wrestle with the realities of a fallen world *and his own flesh*
 2. a **clarification** of the nature of Job leading into this portion of the book (**see Calvin here**)
 - a. **twice** the writer notes that “*Job did not sin [with his lips] or charge God with wrong*” (**1:22, 2:10**)
 1. and (as I noted), this statement is the **basis** of the rest of the book: Job *maintains* his **status** as a “*blameless and upright man*” (**1:8, 2:3**) even as he “wrestles” with his suffering
 - b. but, this statement *does not imply* that Job was **sin-less** going forward
 1. **true:** his **status** as a justified man (by the declaration of God) *cannot change* (**IMO:** that is the point of the book)
 2. **rather:** as a *justified* man, Job will say *many* truthful and righteous things, but he will *also* find himself saying *sinful things* (or [maybe] things that “border” on sinfulness; **see below**)
 - a. **e.g.** Paul does not negate *Abraham’s* justification just because he sinned (**Romans 4**)
 3. **LOW:** Job, *like all justified men*, will continue to wrestle with the tendencies of the flesh (concupiscence) but, in the end, *will persevere in faith* by the power of God
 - a. as Paul outlines in **Romans 7** – in the *midst* of a discussion of *sanctification* (**chaps 6-8**), Paul *admits the reality* of the ongoing struggle between the *justified inner man* and the continuing outward flesh – **i.e.** *sanctification* is truly *distinct* from justification, and that those who trust in God *by faith* will continue to “wrestle” with that reality until *glorification*
 - b. or ... the chapter reminds us that we have a tendency to “focus” on the *outward struggle*, rather than resting in the *fact of our justification by faith* (**Romans 7:24-25**)
“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”
 1. this best explains the speeches section: a “wrestling” with the flesh ... **until God speaks!**

I. Job Laments His Conception (Job 3:1-10)

Content

a. an introduction to the first speech of the book

1. **question:** so, what is Job *thinking about* for those seven days ... while his friends sat beside him?
 - a. “[Job’s friends] sat with him ... and no one spoke ...” (2:13) = they waited for him to speak first
 - b. **sometimes the best response to evil is to pause and consider everything, particularly from a Scriptural perspective, before offering advice or “platitudes” – maybe the best approach is just to sit with those who suffer and consider things for a while**
 - c. **question:** so, what is Job *thinking about* for these seven days ... ?
2. **answer:** maybe it would have been better if I had never been born – after all, those who do not live do not suffer ...
3. the first speech of this book is Job opening his mouth after seven days to reveal *his first thoughts*
 - a. it is easily divided into three (3) parts: Job **laments** 1) his conception, 2) his birth, 3) his life (or, more specifically, living with the *knowledge of misery*)

b. Job laments his conception

1. **read 3:3-6:** “the day” (v. 3) or “that night” (v. 6) = the moment of the conception of Job in his “mother’s womb” (v. 10) from which would come his birth
 - a. **remember:** for ancient peoples, conception through birth is considered “a single act” – however, the idea of conception is separated out as the point at the end of v. 3 (i.e. “a man is conceived”)
2. Job laments that he was ever conceived, and suggests that “day” (or “night”) be “forgotten”
 - a. e.g. v. 4 – let it “be darkness” = have no existence; v. 5 – let “gloom” claim it = may it be swallowed up in that which *hides* its existence; v. 6 – “let it not come into the number of the months” = may it not be a part of the calendar of time; v. 7 = “let that night be barren” = may it produce nothing
3. Job wishes that he had never been *conceived*, for that would imply that he would never be born, thus it would “hide trouble from my eyes” (v. 10)

II. Job Laments His Birth (Job 3:11-19)

Content

a. Job laments his birth

1. **read 3:11-13:** “die at birth” (v. 11) or “knees receive me” (v. 12) or “breasts [receive me]” (v. 13) = the moment of Job being born, received by his mother, and nursed at her breasts
 - a. **note:** Job is *actually* lamenting that he *survived* his birth – he suggests that it would have been better for him to “come out from the womb and expire” (v. 11)
 - b. **LOW:** since I was conceived, it would have been better to die in childbirth
2. Job laments that he *survived* his birth in order to become a living human being – **he suggests:**
 - a. v. 13 – if he had died, he would have simply “slept” and “been at rest” (i.e. instead of pain and suffering, he would have simply gone to the grave, where there is peace)
 - b. vv. 14-15 – if he had died, he would have been like those “kings who rebuilt ruins” but never have to worry about them because they (too!) have died (i.e. because they have left this life)
 - c. v. 16 – if he had died, he would be like “the stillborn child”, who never sees the light of this world, having gone to “another” world (i.e. to the place where the “innocent” go)
 - d. vv. 17-19 – if he had died, he would go to the place “beyond this life”, where the “weary are at rest”, “the prisoner is at ease” (i.e. away from his “taskmaster”), and “slave is free from his master”
3. Job wishes that he had not survived childbirth, for that would imply that he would have gone to a place where “suffering” (or even the knowledge thereof) is not a reality
 - a. **note:** this is an *early hint* that human beings have long assumed that those who die *in utero* or *early in childhood* go to a place of safety
 - b. Catholics [used to?] call it *Limbo of the Infants*; in synergist circles, it’s the place of salvation for those who die before “the age of accountability”; in reformed circles, it’s a highly debated subject, but *most* would agree the ultimate choice of salvation or destruction lies in the grace of God to do with *every man* according to his decree of election
 - c. so, Job *assumes* that if he *had died* in childbirth, his “existence” would then be in a “plane” where suffering could not touch him – the exact *nature* of his beliefs, however, are *unknowable*

III. Job Laments His Life (Job 3:20-26)

Content

a. Job laments his life

1. **read 3:20-23:** “*light*” and “*life to the bitter in soul*” = the *knowledge* of “existence”, having the “human” experience of actually *being able* to *consider* (rationally) things like suffering, pain, “*death*”, etc.
 - a. **note:** for Job, life is about *understanding things* (in *experience* and *meditation*) that those who are never conceived or survive childbirth ever have to worry about
 - b. **LOW:** since I was born and survived, the natural question of “why” now arises
2. Job laments that he is *forced* to consider issues like suffering, pain, and death
 - a. **vv. 20-22** – “*why is light*” given to those who live = why are we *forced* to consider things like these, rather than just go into death and “*are glad when they find the grave?*” (**v. 22**)
 - b. **v. 23** – “*why is light*” given to those “*whom God has hedged in?*” = why has God *forced me to live* and to consider the deeper realities of life?
 - c. **vv. 24-26** – “*for my sighing comes instead of my bread*” = I am experiencing *what I most dreaded*: as a *rational being*, I know that human life comes with the **consideration of existential realities**
 1. **i.e.** as a *human*, made in the Image of God, I am *force* to both experience and consider deep subjects like pain, suffering, loss, and death
 2. **i.e.** human beings *cannot escape* considering such subjects – animals are *blissfully unaware* of such realities; humans *cannot escape them*, for **even death does not end their reality**

b. Job laments his existence

1. Job gives an *opening* speech filled with **nihilism**
 - a. nihilism = the belief that life is *meaningless* because there are no *foundational moral principles* within the human “experience” – suffering has no “meaning” or purpose because there is nothing that “establishes” them around us, *except personal experience*
 1. *true* nihilism is based on *atheism*: because there is no God, there is no *inherent* moral reality
 - b. but, Job’s “form” of nihilism is more *specific*: there certainly *are* existential realities that flow from a Creator into our nature as human, but (maybe!) it would have been better if I had simply *never been born*, in order that I would not have to *experience* these realities *for myself*
 - c. **LOW:** Job suggests “non-existence” may be preferable to *experiencing* the realities of existence
 1. but his suggestion comes with **an inherent flaw**: how can anyone “know” what suffering or death are *if they do not exist in order to “consider” them?*
 2. **again:** a *proposition* that is “unprovable” – **e.g.** try to imagine **you do not exist ...**
 3. **philosophical conundrum:** existence (by definition) is *necessary* in order for the concepts of good and evil, happiness and suffering, knowledge and understanding *to even exist ...*
 - d. **LOW:** Job’s proposition (assertion) is *fundamentally foolish*, since the only way that he can know suffering (or, the goodness of living) is *through actually living*, which is what God purposes in giving us life – we **are given life** in order to *understand* the concepts of good and evil
2. **follow-up:** is Job’s thinking sinful? **IMO: no!** Job laments *his suffering*, but not (in the end) his *life*
 - a. **true:** none of this suffering would have come upon him if he had not lived ... but, none of the *good* would have either, and I think he knows this, deep down ...
 - b. **so (IMO):** his question flows out of concupiscence, and he is *force* to wrestle with it, and it “borders” on sinful thinking, but it does not culminate in Job *taking his life* in order to “escape” his suffering
 1. even though that was suggested by his wife ...
 2. the righteous man may certainly *question* his realities, but such questions are not *inherently* sinful – **God has made us rational beings, and a part of this rationality is to ask such questions, but our proper response is to consider these things through the lens of faith**