

4 Torn robe and shaved head



While there are different views on when and where Job's life was lived and how his story fits into the biblical timeline, most importantly the book of Job takes us up into the hidden world of the heavenlies as well as the very active world on earth. There are some interesting specifics in the story regarding Job's initial time of many losses:

Wonderfully, the book of Job first transports us into the life and thoughts of one very patient man who is living his very real life. Hopefully, as we travel with him, watching him deal with horrendous losses, we'll begin to see more of God and his workings in the context of deep and wide human suffering.



Picture Job enjoying a lovely morning, sipping his hot tea brew, having just returned from making a sacrifice for his children. He had been up since dawn to offer up some birds or animals in sacrifice. This was customary in families that followed Yahweh (see Genesis 22:3; Exodus 32:6). Job was acting as priest for his family as he prayed to Yahweh with his children. As he looked out toward the morning skies he anticipated a great new day full of challenges and responsibilities.

He went to work.

Job had no way of knowing that terrible and life-altering tragedies would soon strike him and his entire community. As noted in the summary, four individual survivors from four horrific events soon rushed in to tell him that some awful atrocities had occurred—panting, gasping,

trying to explain the evil experiences they just witnessed and escaped. The bizarre disasters collided one on top of another. A very bad day. Shocking news.

Job first discovers that his livestock and most of his servants were torn away from his life by Sabean and Chaldean marauders, and an unusual fire took most of the rest. Satan had been very busy.

Before he could take in those three losses, another servant rushed into his home, with terror on his face, “Job, your children are all dead! Your girls and sons were all together at your oldest son’s house, having a great time. I was there and all of a sudden a storm came up. The fierce winds knocked the house down on top of all of them. I’ve checked through the rubble. They’re all dead. I don’t know how but somehow I managed to escape.”

We can imagine Job screaming in grief and disbelief, “No. No. No. This can’t be! This can’t be!”

Let’s look again at Job’s initial response. As noted in Job 2:20, “Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. And then he fell to the ground in worship of God.”

Yes, Job spoke momentous words of faith, but let’s slow it down.

A Ripped Robe and a Shaved Head



We must not rush ahead to Job’s profound words and overlook his immediate emotional and physical reactions. Job demonstrated his personal sense of horror to the traumatic events of the day by making two culturally public acts to express his grief.

After hearing wave after wave after wave after wave of atrocities and tragedies, Job first grabbed the top of his robe and ripped it to the bottom. In Middle Eastern cultures the tearing of one’s outer garment is often used as a visible sign of great personal anguish. Job’s torn robe showed deep grief and utter dismay to those around him. As we read Job 15:16, Job eventually sewed onto himself his own sackcloth.

The second action of grief that Job did was to find a sharp cutting instrument, most likely a barber’s razor, and then he shaved his head.

This process would take some time. Men in the Middle East were expected to have their heads covered with hair, so Job was making a strong statement as he shaved off his hair, one slice after another. His head and face were fully laid bare.

This second act of grief declared to all in Job's family and community—"I feel so utterly distraught that I've removed all of the hair from my head. I am exposed. I don't care if I look disgraced and don't follow the cultural norms. I'm too overwhelmed with grief to take care of myself physically."

As he buckled under the weight of the horrors of his life, Job fell to the ground and worshiped God.

saving private ryan

Job's reaction reminds me of a scene in the Spielberg movie, *Saving Private Ryan*.

The context for the movie *Saving Private Ryan* is World War II. As the story unfolds, an army troop will be sent out to another part of the war front in order to find and save Private James Ryan, the youngest of four sons of Mrs. Ryan.

Why do they need to make a plan to save Private Ryan? The screenplay tells it all. Here's a summation:

A noisy military office

A-one armed Colonel works in a busy office. As he pours his coffee, a young Captain comes in to explain that three brothers have died just in the past week or so—from the same family. All three telegrams have been sent out that morning to the mother.

YOUNG CAPTAIN

We have now become aware that the mother has one more son left, who is also serving in the military.

As the office comes to a standstill, the Colonel asks about the fourth son. He is presumed to be still alive, although he has recently parachuted into enemy territory. The Colonel regains full composure and heads out of the office.

An Iowa farmhouse

Mrs. Ryan, the mother of the four sons, is shown looking through the front window of her Iowa farmhouse. She notices a vehicle coming down the long road. She looks to the car with growing

alarm as it turns toward her house. She steps out onto the front porch in her cotton print dress. Out of the dark sedan emerges an army officer and a chaplain, dressed in their uniforms. She collapses onto her front porch.

As Mrs. Ryan slumps onto the wooden planks of the porch floor, she will be told by the army chaplain that three of her four sons have died in battle. Only her son James possibly remains alive. Heart-crushing news.

This poignant scene remains etched in my mind.

Remarkable Words in Extraordinary Loss

Surely, Job would relate to the losses of this woman who had lost her three beloved sons. Standing would feel impossible for him, too. He went to the ground.

In the midst of his extreme grief, collapsing with his whole body in the dirt, he did something utterly astounding to most of us—he worshiped God and spoke with pure and humble words to God—utterly remarkable words.

“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.” *Job 2:21*

His response still takes my breath away.

I’ve wondered, “If the same tragedies and travesties struck me or any one of us, would we even think of those words, and even speak them?” But for Job, who had worshiped God throughout his life, he had learned that God had given him everything. And he also knew God was the one who had watched him since he was born and would do so until the day he would die.

And Job also knew he had come into the world without anything and would leave with the same. As we think about it, Job surely must have similarly worshiped God when he experienced smaller losses. He had developed a habit of worshiping God and blessing God whether things went well or not.

All that God had given to Job, God had just taken away. Job would bless God on either side of the giving or the taking away. Unbelievable.

Job’s response was exactly the opposite of what Satan had proudly asserted to God in the heavenly realm. Satan had thrown these evils into Job’s life and destroyed his world in order to deliberately destroy his faith in God. Yet Job’s immediate heart response to all of the horrendous

news was not “I curse you, God,” but “I bless you, God.” Job, the most blameless and righteous man on earth, turned toward God to bless him in his darkest hour. On the ground he worshiped.

Later in the book we will read about Job standing in despair and feeling like God has turned away from his many sorrowful pleas. Later we will see him standing up in the assembly, crying out for help with no one coming to his defense. But that was not this day. On this horrific sorrowful day, Job would worship and bless God, kneeling in the dirt.



All along Job was quite aware that his God had provided all the wonderful things in his life. He knew that his great success and bounty in life wasn't due to his great business savvy, or due to his strategic planning, or even due to his being in the right place at the right time. That's what the world would conclude and say.

Instead, Job knew whatever he had, God had given him the place in life to have an opportunity for success. God had given him his leadership strengths, his business prowess. God had given him a life full of tremendous blessings and rich relationships. God had given him and his wife seven sons and three daughters—priceless gifts.

Job knew the truth. God was in charge. *He* wasn't. May his words not only inspire us, but may we learn from Job. Whatever he had and whatever we also have been provided, it comes from God. Wealth, personal peace, family, and broad influence—for Job all was a God-gift. Now that all was taken away, he publicly declared,

“You, Yahweh, gave it all to me. You took it away. I bless you Yahweh. You deserve my worship whether I can enjoy all the blessings you have given me, or I have lost them all.”

So instead of turning his back on God, this deeply wounded man worshiped God. And God was proven right. He knew the heart of Job would remain true.

The profound message to all who hear the story of Job is that this righteous man did not lose his faith in God when tested to the “nth degree.” He didn't sin with his lips. He didn't blame God. So remarkable. When we read Job's words do we not feel dumbfounded to witness a man with such extraordinary faith exhibited against such great evil and extraordinary loss?

What would our responses be to God after such news? Most of us would not rend our clothes or shave our heads as that isn't our cultural way of demonstrating how distraught we feel. How do we demonstrate how we feel when we experience incredible losses, and experience incredible pain? Would we immediately bless God?

Satan's fury unleashed on Job had not been rewarded. Quite the opposite. He'd been so devious and covered all the bases. Could he do more?

I will not Curse. No other place to Go.

When I think back to the long days of summer as my face remained a crusty mess, I felt and believed that there was nothing Satan would have liked better than for me to do than to "curse God," and turn my back on him in anger. Job would not. I could not.

Perhaps it was due to my walk with God through decades and my similar beliefs to Job's. I knew that God was in control of all that had come and would come into my life—the good, the bad, and in my case, the crusty. And I knew that if I left God, I would have nowhere else to go. God never promised that anyone who followed him that his or her life would avoid all adversity. I pictured the disciples responding to Christ when he questioned their allegiance to follow him as many others had recently turned away. His message had become hard. The disciples' natural response was the same as mine, "Where else would we go?"

Skin for Skin—now you will break for sure

As noted earlier, Satan wasn't ready to give up. No way. As if his initial evil onslaughts weren't enough, he would now go for the jugular—"Skin for skin." Satan knows no end to evil. He delights in winning through bringing evil upon others. "All right, so I cannot kill Job. I can make him feel so much pain that he will surely turn his back on God. Boils should do it. He will reject God for sure."

Soon the vibrant and influential Job was reduced to a broken heap, sitting in ashes and using a piece of pottery to scrape the pus from his boil-covered body. Satan had successfully destroyed Job's healthy skin with a torturous affliction. Horrific pain screamed from every place of his body.

And to add to his misery, his wife came and taunted him, "Job, do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" Job flinched in his body, but remained utterly devoted to God in his faith. Instead of cursing God as "Mrs. Job" told him to do, he reprimanded her.

"You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" *Job 2:10a.*

Job insisted that we all should accept both good from God and adversity from the same God. I have read these lines hundreds of times, and his profound response is still difficult to fully grasp.

Job's view of God was far bigger and deeper than Satan had assumed. Job could and would willingly accept monumental adversity because he had a very large view of God. His God was in ultimate control, including his adversities.

Yet we will soon discover that Job's view of God's control and his own need to accept adversity did not mean Job would not argue, banter, plead, weep, and talk with God about his raw feelings and desires. We will also watch God reach out to Job and explode his limited human understanding like no man had experienced before.

A Little English Family



Dennis Rainey, Christian leader, speaker, and author describes an afternoon while traveling in the southern tip of Cornwall, England with his lovely wife, Barbara.

“Together we walked to a small village church. Tombstones filled the churchyard. Many provided the telling story of an epidemic that had swept through this little village, decimating family after family in the 1700's. One tombstone was etched with the birth and death dates of three members of the same family. Joseph John Wallace, the father, lived from 1750-1775. The mother, Sophia, lived from 1752-1775. Their son John, born on April 16, 1775 died on September 19th (of the same year that his parents died). So, the father died at age 25, the mother at age 23, their son lived just 6 months.

Under the dates of this little family were etched these words:

**WE CANNOT LORD THY PURPOSE SEE,
BUT ALL IS WELL THAT'S DONE BY THEE.**

Rainey adds, “Storms, floods, winds. Will your loss define you or will it become a wound that will be transformed into a holy scar? How we process loss will determine the trajectory of our lives.”

Job could not see God's purpose, but he would accept all from God's hand. Wounded deeply and shattered emotionally, he acknowledged God as his God.

And because of his view of God, Job would also be able to say, "All is well that's done by Thee."



Thought questions:

~After reading Job 1-2, imagine that you experienced the following through a series of frightening phone calls:

—“The place you own was wiped out by an explosion. We must also inform you that the insurance policy on the property had expired.”

—“Greedy trustees just stole everything designated in your retirement/pension fund. You will receive nothing, although you've worked for the company for decades.”

—“Most of your co-workers were murdered today by a

crazed gunman who raided their gathering.”

—“Your closest family members were killed in a bizarre tornado this afternoon.”

As you re-read Job chapter 2, and focus on verses 20-21, how would you respond to God if the events above happened to you? What would your first actions and words be?

~Try to recall your feelings during 9/11 or when you have watched the frightening atrocities of that horrific day seen on TV. How were your feelings, thoughts and words on that day? Or how do you think you would have felt if you had been in one of the Twin Tower buildings and had narrowly escaped while the rest of your office staff did not? How did you respond physically while watching the planes crash into the towers and then watch each of them fall? How did you respond emotionally? How did you express your grief? Dismay? Fear? Anger?

~Have you known someone whose life has been deeply wounded through pain and suffering, similar to the life of Job? What are some of their emotional, physical, and relational responses? What did they do and say as they processed what they endured? How did those around them support them?

~As you reflect upon the little English family who died during an epidemic, how would you describe the suffering coming to this family and to their community? Dennis Rainey encourages us to not let tragic losses and experiences take us down a dark path, but to see the deep importance of our lives that God holds. May we not let evil overtake us. Describe a time when you saw some of the storms, winds, floods you or others have seen or experienced being “transformed into a holy scar.”

Notes:

1. An Introduction to the Book of Job and dating periods with reasons, (accessed 3 /7/2017).
2. Twenty-four times in the book of Job the covenant name for God (Yahweh, meaning the LORD) is used in the prologue, divine discourses by God in the end, and in the epilogue. Only once the chapters of 3-37 (where Elohim is used) which contain the discourses between Job’s friends and Job does it appear. Louis Rushmore. “Notes on the Book of Job.” file:///Users/kristimiller/Downloads/job%20(4).pdf Job is mentioned 59 times in 53 Bible verses. Only one of those ...<https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:xQhG0X3MessJ:https://www.cedarville.edu/~Media/Files/PowerPoint/Alumni/OT-lecture-slides/19-20-job.pptx+&cd=13&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>, (accessed 5/8/2017).
3. “Then Job arose” - The phrase to arise, in the Scriptures is often used in the sense of beginning to do anything. It does not necessarily imply that the person had been previously sitting; see 2 Samuel 13:13. “Job rose.” <http://www.godvine.com/bible/job/1-20> see <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job+1&version=NASB> Commentary on Job 1:22 Job 1:21), (accessed 3/7/2017).
4. “To rend one’s clothes.” Barnes' Notes on Job 1:20: And rent his mantle - The word here rendered "mantle" מעיל me'îyl means an upper or outer garment. The dress consists principally of an under garment or tunic - not materially differing from the "shirt" with us - except that the sleeves are wider, and under this large and loose pantaloons. Niebuhr, Reisebeschreib. 1. 157. Over these garments they often throw a full and flowing mantle or robe. This is made without sleeves; it reaches down to the ankles; and when they walk or exercise it is bound around the middle with a girdle or sash. When they labor it is usually laid aside. The robe here referred to was worn sometimes also worn by women, 2 Samuel 13:18; by men of birth and rank, and by kings, 1 Samuel 15:27; 1 Samuel 18:4; 1 Samuel 24:5, 1 Samuel 24:11; by

priests, 1 Samuel 28:14, and especially by the high priest under the ephod, Exodus 28:31. See Braun de vest Sacerd. ii. 5. Schroeder de vest. muller. Rending clothes is mentioned several times in the biblical writings. Often the outer garment, cloak, or robe was torn. Sometimes sack cloth, homely and uncomfortable, was put on. <http://www.godvine.com/bible/job/1-20>, (accessed 3/8/2017).

See also Lisa Alcalay Klug. "Jewish Funeral Customs: Saying Goodbye to a Loved One" <https://jewishfederations.org/jewish-funeral-customs-saying-goodbye-to-a-loved-one>, (accessed 3/7/2017).

5. "Shaved heads." then he shaved his head - another less usual but still not uncommon sign of grief, forbidden under the Law of the Jews (Leviticus 21:5; Deuteronomy 14:1), but widely practiced by the Gentiles (Isaiah 15:2; Jeremiah 47:5; Jeremiah 48:37; Herod., 2:36; 9:24; Plut., 'Vit. Pelop.,' § 34; Q. Gurt., 'Vit. Alex.,' 10:5, § 17). Priests were forbidden to make their heads bald (Lev.21:5). Ezra plucked hair from his hair and beard in grief (Ezra 9:3). Ezekiel's shaved his head and beard to show the judgement of God against his people (Ezekiel 5:1-4) <http://biblehub.com/job/1-20.htm> Pulpit commentary on Job 1:20, (accessed 3/7/2017).

6. Note that in Job 2:8-10, Job's wife is reflecting the theological views of her culture, that if much goes wrong for people they are cursed by God, and if good things happen, they are viewed as blessed by God. She is telling Job to curse God and quit on God because apparently Job has been cursed by him evidenced by all the evil that has happened.

7. Dennis Rainey talk, "Interruptions, Detours and Valleys in Your Journey." Dennis Rainey speaks on maintaining integrity in marriage and personal relationships for DTS chapel Jan. 22, 2014 while telling about the tombstone he saw in England. <https://voice.dts.edu/chapel/interruptions-detours-and-valleys-in-your-journey-rainey-dennis/>(accessed 11/4/2016).

Images:

1. Image of dead sheep English: Photograph of dead sheep near Willow Creek, Oregon which first appeared in The Oregonian on December 13, 1904. Caption read: "Scene showing slaughtered sheep near Willow Creek, central Oregon." (This media file is in the public domain in the United States, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dead_sheep_Willow_Creek_Oregon_1904.jpg, (accessed 5/20/2018).

2. Image of man kneeling in tones Salvator Rosa. Date 1615–73. Medium Pen and brown ink, brown and gray wash, traces- This file was donated to Wikimedia Commons as part of a project led by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Public Domain, <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/340652>, (accessed 5/21, 2018).

3. Image of tombstones, from stock photo <http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/pictures/200000/velka/old-cemetery-14744432502dC.jpg>, (accessed 11/4/2016).