

Job

Why do we follow God?

Notes and Comments by John Sullivan

*As you know, we consider blessed
those who have persevered.
You have heard of Job's perseverance and
have seen what the Lord finally brought about.
The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

James 5:11

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NOTE TO E-BOOK READERS:

The printed journal, unlike this e-book version, has pages for notes.

You might want to have your own journal, either physical or electronic, because there is a lot of writing recommended in this study.

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Introduction

Welcome to this 4-week study about God! The life of Job, his extraordinary trials, and the long-winded debate with his friends are covered in detail in this story. We even get some interesting insight into Satan and his behind-the-scenes work. We also get to explore the age old question of why we go through difficult tests, even when we are trying to do our best. But the real point of this study is to understand God better and be in awe of him.

There are many valuable results from studying this book. Here are three:

- We get to examine the way we react when we go through difficult trials. Job is a great example of someone who poured out his heart in all honesty and even boldly expressed his bitterness, while constantly trying to get God's perspective of what was going on. He had no idea of why it was all happening to him. While Job's responses were not always perfect, we can learn a lot from his example about why that is so difficult.
- We also get to examine the way we try to comfort and advise people when they go through trials. Job's friends do a great job of showing us some things to definitely **NOT** think or say. In the end, God sets them straight, and we can learn a lot from them as well.
- That being said, one of the main results of doing this study comes from focusing on God and examining our motivations for following Him. The common motivations of REWARDS and PUNISHMENTS are represented by Job and his friends. While these certainly play a role in our thought process, they are exposed in this study as being only a part of the story. The primary reason, as we see in God's conversation with Job at the end, is simply and profoundly the awesomeness of God. We follow God because we are in awe of him.

This brief journal is not meant to be a full commentary on every verse, but it is a guide to help you organize your thoughts as you continue your quest to know your Bible better and know your God better.

The 4 sections of this journal are set up as weeks, but you can go at any pace that meets your needs. In addition, each section can be spread out over that week at any pace that works for you.

The emphasis in this journal is on your personal reading and meditations, but it can also be enhanced if you do this with a group. The **Thought Questions** given in each section can be used as some of your discussion questions in the group.

At the end of this journal there are two Additional Studies inspired by topics in **Job** that will hopefully be beneficial as well. They're not short, but they are important topics. Those can be done anytime during or after the study.

Hopefully the notes and comments in this journal will help as a guide for you to discover the Bible for yourself, but reading this journal is the side dish at best. The main ingredient is the Word of God, so read the Scriptures before reading this journal, and read them again to make sure you are getting what God is revealing to you.

God bless you as you pour your heart into this study.

John Sullivan
February 2018

Job's Tests

The background of this story – Time and Place.

- The time is not specifically stated in the book. But a lack of references to the important features of the nation of Israel would suggest it was during the time well before Moses.
- The place is described as the land of Uz, which is elsewhere identified with Edom (**Lam. 4:21**). That would place it in the area east of Israel and in northern Arabia.

NOTE: Throughout this study, it would be a good idea to read other resources to get more insights into **Job**. For instance, consider the resources found on page 18.

Note the descriptions of Job's character (1:1; 1:8, and 2:3): blameless, upright, feared God, shunned evil. How do you think Job would have felt if he knew what God thought of him? See also what is said about Job in **James 5:11** (the verse quoted on the title page of this journal) and **Ezekiel 14:14, 20**. It is this character of Job that prompts one of the deep philosophical questions of all time:

Why do bad things happen to good people?

As we will see, the book of **Job** prompts us to think about other, even deeper, questions, but this is certainly one that has caused people to struggle for centuries. For now, meditate and pray about Job's character and how you want to apply that to your life.

The angels and the Accuser (Satan) came to present themselves before the LORD (1:6 and 2:1). Here is the backdrop to the story that explains to us why everything happened, yet Job was not aware of any of it. Makes you think that there might be more going on behind the scenes in situations in our lives than we can see.

Satan's response to God's affirmations of Job was to accuse him. His accusation of Job in 1:9 – 11 was that Job's motives for following God were based on God's blessings. His accusation of him in 2:4 – 5 was that Job would curse God if his body was in pain. Do you think that it might be possible that Satan accuses you also? Satan, the Devil, is referred to throughout Scripture as the ultimate enemy and accuser. As you have time and interest, look at the **Additional Study** on pages 11 – 14 for more information about Satan and his schemes. While our main emphasis is always knowing God better, it pays to study what the Bible says about Satan also, so we are aware of his ways.

Job experienced two incredibly difficult tests.

1. He lost his children and his livestock (1:13 – 19). His reaction (1:20 – 22) through the grief and shock of that loss though was to not charge God with wrongdoing.
2. Then he experienced painful sores on his body (2:7 – 8). Again, his response (2:10) was faithful and patient.

If you're like most people, it's really hard to understand how God could allow Satan to test Job in this way. That, again, might be one of the reasons for us to study this story. Not that the end of this book makes it perfectly clear, but it does make us realize that God is sovereign and that we can trust him. Meanwhile, though, don't shy away from wrestling with this question.

As we will see, Job's attitude starts to change the more he thinks about it and talks about it with his friends. But what do you think about his initial reactions to these tests? Remember that he did not know about the conversation in heaven and why all of this was taking place. (Don't forget **James 5:10 – 11**).

The Scriptures actually have a great deal to say about tests of various kinds and how we can persevere through them. There is an **Additional Study** on pages 15 – 17 with more information about tests and their source and purpose.

Job's friends came to sympathize with him and comfort him. Remember that as you go through the readings of the next several chapters and see how they failed in their original intentions. In spite of their failings, however, they are Job's friends, and their desire was to help him. When they first saw Job, they were weeping and tearing their clothes. They spent the first 7 days in silence.

The reading in the next 35 chapters contains dialogues between Job and these three friends, followed by a long speech from a fourth man, Elihu. The discussion gets pretty heated at times, as the friends argue that Job must have done something wrong to cause this suffering, while Job argues that God is testing him for no known reason.

It is a test of their friendship and their understanding about God. What began with the intention to comfort Job turned into a stressful, and sometimes heated, argument. They would have done much better by sticking to their original strategy of silence. (*"Quick to listen, slow to speak . . ." James 1:19.*)

Their discussions will be a test for us too, as we spend time reading them. We will get an opportunity to examine what kind of comforters we are to people going through suffering.

Satan maliciously accused Job of following God for the wrong reasons. Job's friends had the over-simplified view that God always rewards the faithful and punishes the wicked. Job's experience caused him to question that viewpoint, but he didn't understand until the end what his deeper reason was for following God.

Thought Questions

Why do we follow God?

1. Is it because of the rewards that we get from believing in him?
2. Is it because of the fear we have about what happens if we don't follow him?
3. Or is there a deeper reason for following God?

The Dialogues Begin

Look at some of the ways Job described his misery.

- He cursed the day he was born (3:1 – 15)
- He seemed to identify with those who long for death. (3:21)
- He said he had no peace or rest, only turmoil. (3:26)

What do you think about Job's words here? Does his confusion seem surprising or unreasonable for someone going through what he was experiencing?

We can imagine that Job wanted to hold on to the faith of his initial responses that we saw in chapters 1 and 2, but he is obviously confused and conflicted. Remember that he doesn't know about the conversation in heaven about how much God admires him and trusts him, but how much he is willing to let him be tested so that Job can see what he is capable of doing.

NOTE: Leviathan (3:8) is a sea-monster that is referred to twice in **Job** and a few other times in Scripture. We do not know what actual animal it may represent, if it even refers to a real animal. Some think it may have been what we call a crocodile. But it often was thought of, as Job referred to it here, as a description of evil and a symbolic source of curses.

Eliphaz is the first of the friends to speak. His view was that bad things happen to bad people, not good people. (4:7 – 11); God opposes those with foolish ways (5:1 – 7); and that we should treat it a blessing that God does correct and discipline people (5:17).

Job's reply was that God was against him (6:1 – 13 "*The arrows of the Almighty are in me.*") and that his friends were no help (6:14 – 23). A common feature we see in Job's replies is that he begins with a reply to his friends and then turns his discussion directly to God, as he does here in 7:7 – 21. He wonders why God is testing him so much (a natural response, don't you think?). Job also wonders why God doesn't pardon his sins (7:20 – 21).

Bildad is the next friend to speak. He criticized Job for saying such things (8:1 – 2), and said that God punished Job's children for some sin (8:3 – 7). Then he gave a general description of the horrible destiny of the godless, while maintaining that God would not hurt blameless people (8:8 – 22).

Job agreed with Bildad in principle, but he thought that it is impossible to argue with God (9:1 – 35). To Job, his experience is different from the theoretical view that God rewards good and punishes evil. His observation is that God seems to destroy both the blameless and the wicked (9:22).

If only someone could arbitrate between us (9:33). He may have had no idea what a great thought that was and what a great blessing he was describing for us who have Jesus as our arbitrator.

Job turned to God and decided to speak out openly in the bitterness of his soul (10:1 – 22).

NOTE: "Rahab" (9:13) may refer to another monster of the deep, and not the woman by the same name immortalized years later in the time of Joshua. See **Psalms 89:10** for a similar use of this name.

When Zophar took his turn to speak, he accused Job of mocking God (11:1 – 12). He told Job that if he repents, he will be forgiven (11:13 – 19), but there is no escape for the wicked who do not repent (11:20).

Job responded with sarcasm (12:2 – 3). His opinion was that he had become a laughingstock, though righteous and blameless (12:4). He wanted to argue his case with God (13:3). He thought that his friends

were worthless physicians (13:4), quoting proverbs of ashes (13:12). Again, he turned directly to God and asks him to quit tormenting him (13:20 – 27). In chapter 14, he continued to plead with God for answers to the questions that are plaguing him, fueled by his observation that the days of humans are full of trouble (14:1).

So Eliphaz came back for another shot. His view this time involved his own sarcasm (15:1 – 9). He again appealed to the traditional views of the ancestors (15:10 – 16) which supports what the three friends have been saying about the fate of the wicked (15:20 – 35).

Job's reply was that they were miserable comforters (16:2). This is similar to what he said in 13:4. He told them that if he were in their place, he could also encourage (16:3 – 4). He said that he believed that he did have an advocate (16:19 – 21). Isn't that an amazing statement, especially when you consider that Job did not have the information we have today about Jesus?

In spite of that, though, chapter 17 shows his hopelessness and how close he was to giving up.

Hopefully we realize what a privilege we have hearing this man pour out his soul, not only to his friends, but especially to God. Hopefully we also realize that we would want to choose our words a lot more carefully than these three friends did when someone bares their soul to us. We don't want to be "*miserable comforters*."

Thought Questions

1. Have you ever had "*miserable comforters*" like these when you were struggling?
2. Have you ever been a "*miserable comforter*" to someone who was struggling?
3. What can you do to avoid being a "*miserable comforter*"?

Unfortunately, Job's friends do not give up their attempts to correct Job.

Bildad goes at it again. He challenged Job to end these speeches and be sensible (18:1 – 4). He continued his strategy of trying to frighten Job by describing the fate of the wicked (18:5 – 21). Have you ever thought that that was a good way to motivate people?

Job's replies of "how long will you torment me?" (19:1 – 3) and "if I have sinned, it is my concern alone" (19:1) show his frustration. He even said that God had wronged him (19:5 – 12). (**NOTE:** this is one of Job's strongest statements about God and most dangerously close to accusing God of wrongdoing.)

Not surprisingly, Job thought everyone was against him (19:13 – 22).

- My friends and family detest me. (19:13 – 19)
- My breath is offensive to my wife. (19:17) (Now, don't tell me you didn't at least get a little chuckle out of that one!)
- Even little boys ridicule me. (19:18)
- God has struck me. (19:21 – 22)

NOTE: In the replies in this section, Job does not address God directly as he did in the ones we read before. You can sense his feeling that there is more and more distance between him and God. The intense anger gives way to sadness, grieving what he thinks is a loss of his closeness to God.

But, in the midst of this despair he sees a glimmer of hope and makes an amazing statement of faith: *I know that my Redeemer lives* (19:25). What incredible insight!

Meanwhile, Zophar wanted one more chance to speak. He was offended by Job's remarks (20:1 – 3) and decided to continue the theme of reminding Job about the horrible fate of the wicked (20:4 – 29). He must have thought that Job just didn't understand that yet.

Job replied with the logical question about why the wicked prosper (chapter 21). That sounds similar to Asaph's question in **Psalms 73**. There are wicked people who prosper and are not immediately punished. Job doubts God's justice (reasoning) (21:19 – 21) but does not address God directly.

Do you get the feeling that Job and his friends are getting nowhere? They continue to focus, and for obvious reasons, on the question of why there is suffering sometimes for good people, while evil people seem to prosper. They're not seeing the point that God will help them see eventually: following God is not just motivated by the rewards you get from doing so or by avoiding the punishment you get from not following him.

So, let Eliphaz have his final speech. He wonders if anyone can be of benefit to God (22:1 – 3). Then he boldly accused Job of many sins and joining the ranks of the wicked (22:4 – 20). **NOTE:** they had been hinting about this for some time. Now, Eliphaz says it directly. He told Job that if he repented, he would find delight in the Almighty (22:21 – 30). There is obviously some truth in what he said, as there was in many of their other statements, but he clearly did not know that these were Job's sins.

Job's reply showed the sad longing ("if only I knew where to find God" 23:1 – 9). He thought he had passed God's tests but was now terrified by him (23:10 – 17). He questioned God's judgment, thinking that horrible things happen but God doesn't seem to do anything about them (24:1 – 12). He then had some second thoughts and agreed in general with the principle that the wicked are eventually punished for wrongdoing (24:13 – 25).

Chapter 25 gives Bildad's final speech. Notice how short it is. He seems to be giving up, and his friend, Zophar, doesn't even give his third speech. They have definitely reached a stalemate. (They need to pray!)

Job again replied with sarcasm (“*how you have helped the powerless!*” 26:2 – 4) and closes with four discourses that seem to be directed to everyone, and not to anyone in particular.

- The search for wisdom (Ch. 28) sounds a lot like **Proverbs 2** and **Ecclesiastes 12:13**.
- Reminiscing about his old days (Ch. 29), he considered God as an intimate friend (29:4). Note the sadness of the past tense. He seems to think that he only had this in the past.
- He reflects also on the sadness of his present state (Ch. 30).
- He continues to assert his blamelessness and devotion. (Ch. 31) Note his admirable covenant of purity (31:1). This is an excellent covenant that we would do well to imitate today in our fight for purity. Note also that one of his motivations for righteousness was the fear of punishment (31:23).

The fourth friend, Elihu, speaks up in chapters 32 – 37. Being younger than the other ones, he had politely waited his turn, but he quickly showed his anger at Job for justifying himself and for the three friends for not doing a good job of condemning him. It is a very long speech. Like the speeches of Job and the other friends, there is at least some truth in what Elihu said.

This time there is no reply from Job. He is either out of words, or God is done listening to them. The next chapters reveal to us God’s speech. So get ready for that!

Thought Questions

1. What specific mistakes do you see in Job’s friends’ speeches that you want to avoid when you want to encourage someone who is struggling?
2. So we don’t get too critical of them: they did not have the advantage of Scriptures that we have today. What are some Scriptures that we now know that would have changed some of the things they said?
3. Can you understand the way Job was feeling after all he was going through?

Finally, it's time for God and Job to have a conversation. Not surprisingly, God's speeches are a lot shorter and a lot more awesome than the arguments found in the previous 35 chapters.

God asked: "*Who darkens my counsel without knowledge?*" (38:2) That could be referring to the wrong advice and responses when they were speaking of things they didn't understand. That makes you wonder: have we ever misrepresented God's counsel with our limited knowledge? Probably so.

How would you like to hear: *brace yourself to be questioned by God?* Job had been asking God a lot of questions. Now God asks him a series of questions. Here are the broad categories of those questions:

- Are you the Creator? (38:4 – 7)
- Are you in control? (38:8 – 41)
- Do you know and understand everything? (39:1 – 30)
- Will you correct me? (40:1 – 3)

How would you answer God if he asked you these questions?

Job replied "*I'm unworthy to speak.*" (40:4 – 5) That actually seems like a pretty worthy response.

Can you imagine the humility and brokenness that Job was feeling at that time? Yet, there must have been a great sense of relief to know that he was hearing from the Great Comforter, instead of the "*miserable comforters.*"

Standing in Awe of God (Job 40:6 – 42:6)

Job may have thought that he got the point already. But God had more questions for him. They fell into two categories:

- Will you condemn me to justify yourself? (40:8)
- How much power and wisdom do you have? (40:9 – 41:34)

NOTE: we can't be completely sure which animals God was referring to as the behemoth (40:15) and leviathan (41:1). It could be the hippopotamus or elephant for the first one and the crocodile for the second one. But, in any case, God is making the point of how powerful he is and how weak we are.

As we asked above, how would you respond if God asked you these questions?

Job's reply (42:1 – 6):

- I spoke of things that I didn't understand.
- My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you.

We have seen Job's rather long-winded responses to his friends and his lengthy lists of questions for God. What do you think is the explanation for his brevity now?

NOTE: in all of this, God does not actually answer Job's question of why bad things happen to good people. That important and difficult question is somewhat answered by the understanding of the test that was going on behind the scenes. What he does deal with is the also important and difficult question of why we follow God. It is not just because of the desire for rewards or the fear of punishment. It is also simply and profoundly because of the fact that God is the Almighty. We follow him because we are in awe of him. And the fact remains that this present world is a fallen world where suffering is an unpredictable and sometimes unexplained presence.

Dealing with the Three Friends

They were rebuked by God for not speaking what was right. As we have seen, there were elements of truth in some of the things they said. You have probably also noted some of their many flaws in their counselling of Job.

God told them to offer a sacrifice, and he told Job to pray for them.

Remember that they were friends. Friends sometimes have some heated arguments. Do you see any way this experience could have brought them closer?

Job's Life Restored

God restored his family and fortune. Note that his brothers and sisters came to comfort and console him for “*all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him.*” (42:11) Restoring his life did not totally take away the grief of his loss. Do you see why?

The story closes by telling us that Job lived to be 140 and “*died at a good old age.*”

- Can you imagine how Job and all those close to him would react to future trials after going through this experience?
- Imagine also what kind of comforter Job and all those close to him would have been after going through this experience.
- And most of all, imagine what they all learned about the majesty of God and the real reasons they wanted to follow Him.

Thought Questions

1. What have you learned from Job's life about tests in your own life?
2. What have you learned from this study about how you want to help others going through trials?
3. What have you learned from this study about God himself?
4. What is your answer to the all-important question: *why do I follow God?*
5. **Agree or Disagree:** *Even if bad things sometimes happen in this life to followers of God, and even if good things happen in this life to those who don't follow God, I will follow Him!*

Job

Why do we follow God?

Conclusion

The study of **Job** is not for those who want short, simple answers to complicated questions. That's our human tendency – to put God in our box and keep him there. But somewhere along our journey to know the Bible better, and therefore to know God better, we come to a conclusion and keep getting reminders of that conclusion: we are not God. We're made in His image, making our highest attributes contributable to Him, but we're not God.

Hopefully your study has produced some of the results mentioned in the introduction to this journal:

- A time to examine how you go through trials.
- A time to examine how you try to comfort people going through trials.
- A time to examine why you follow God.

If that's true, then you realized quickly that those kinds of results were not going to be accomplished by a quick investigation on your part and would not result in a simple answer from God's part.

While you may not ever, until we get to heaven anyway, have the direct conversation with God that Job had, you can learn from their conversation. (You may have even wondered, after reading their conversation, whether you would even want to have that conversation!) While that conversation didn't answer every question we have about this world, God did reveal there enough for us to know that being our God is much more complex than we may have ever thought. We also realize that we do not follow God just because of our desire for rewards or our fear of punishment. We can't deny that those motives have any role in our choice, but, after getting to know God better, our reasons also simply and profoundly center around the fact that God is the Almighty. We follow him because we are in awe of him. Not the kind of awe that leaves us terrified, but the awe that produces a love, admiration, and loyalty that can't be broken by any tests or trials. *Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:39)!*

Meanwhile, the fact remains that this present world is a fallen world where suffering is an unpredictable and sometimes unexplained presence.

May God bless you in your continued quest to know His Word and know Him better.

John Sullivan

Additional Studies

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Knowing his schemes and how to resist them

Our goal is to grow in our knowledge of the Bible so that we can grow in our knowledge of God. However, it also pays to know the devil, Satan, our enemy. This is the goal of the Scriptures on these pages. The five main points in this study could be used as personal devotionals for five different days, or you could use any other pace that fits you.

1. RESIST THE DEVIL – DON'T HELP HIM OUT.

- a. Read and think about **Ephesians 6:11**. This passage makes it clear that God wants us to be prepared to fight off the devil's schemes.
 - Do you believe that this is possible for you?
 - Are you fully devoted to make that happen?
- b. Read also **2 Corinthians 2:11**. At the end of this passage, Paul confidently states that we are not unaware of Satan's schemes. This, he says, is what keeps Satan from outwitting us. The more we know about him and his schemes, the better prepared we are to resist them.
 - Is that true of you? Are you fully aware of Satan's schemes?
 - Does it seem that Satan's schemes frequently surprise you?
- c. Read **James 4:7**. Let us never think that we are strong enough on our own to fight Satan. He is a powerful enemy who does not fight fair. But, according to Scripture, he can be resisted.
 - As asked above, do you believe that this is possible for you?
 - Are you fully devoted to make that happen?
- d. Read **Ephesians 4:27**. Don't give the devil a foothold. In other words, don't help him hurt you. Read the context of this verse and you will see some of the sins that give Satan an advantage – such as anger, lying, etc. When we allow these traits to go unchecked in our lives, we are actually helping Satan.
 - When you lie or allow your anger to go unchecked, do you realize that you are giving the devil a foothold?
 - Is that what you want?

Do you have any interest in giving the devil some assistance in destroying your life and the lives of the people you love? Of course not! So, resist the devil – don't help him out. Meditate and pray about your determination in that area.

2. KNOW THAT SATAN IS THE FATHER OF LIES.

- a. Read what Jesus said about Satan in **John 8:44**.

He is the father of lies. Lying is his native language. He has no conscience or hesitation about trying to deceive people by:

- distorting the truth,
- bending the truth,
- covering up the truth, or
- just out-and-out contradicting the truth.

b. Read also **2 Corinthians 11:13 – 15**.

Satan has the ability to masquerade as an angel of light. So, part of our ability to resist Satan comes from being aware of his schemes. Not only will he lie to us, he often tempts us to actually imitate his lying nature. When he does, ask yourself:

- Why do I want to distort the truth in my own life, or cover it up, or spin it to make it look better than it is? (Call all of that what it really is: why do I want to lie?)

c. Lying is one of the attributes mentioned in **Ephesians 4** which can give the devil a foothold in our lives.

- Which do you want more: to lie and give the devil a foothold or to resist him by admitting the truth, no matter what the cost?

d. How do we resist this scheme of the devil?

These tendencies of lying often tempt us. When we recognize that they are all schemes from the father of lies, the alarm can go off that leads us to Christ and ask him for help to resist.

- Jesus is Light. (**John 8:12**)
- He is Truth. (**John 14:6**)

Only by turning to him can we fight the liar.

Meditate and pray about how much more you love Jesus, the Light and the Truth, than you admire Satan, the father of lies. Ask God sincerely for help to be aware of this scheme of the devil and to resist it firmly.

3. KNOW THAT SATAN IS THE GREAT ACCUSER.

a. Satan was obviously trying to turn God against Job (**Job 1 – 2**). When you look at the accusations he brought against Job, do you see how he could be doing similar accusations against you?

b. Read also **Revelation 12:7 – 12** about Satan the accuser.

c. Satan seems to take great pleasure in accusing. It could be connected to the fact that lying is his native language. As is true with lying, Satan will not only accuse us, he will also tempt us to imitate his accusatory nature. Those temptations can take many forms:

- He could tempt us to accuse God of wrongdoing.
- He can work in other people's minds to falsely accuse us, or to constantly bring up our true faults but without any forgiveness or mercy.
- He can tempt us to relentlessly and mercilessly accuse ourselves. (He even tried that one on Jesus, when he kept saying "*If you are the Son of God, . . .*")
- He can tempt us to falsely accuse others.

d. Again, being aware of the source of these accusations is the first step in resisting them. Ask yourself: Why am I accusing God, myself and others so relentlessly? Is Satan trying to separate me from God and from God's people?

e. Recall the warning in **Ephesians 4:11** to not give the devil a foothold. It's interesting to note that many of the attributes listed in the verses surrounding that warning deal with our relationships with others. Of course, some of Satan's accusations are actually true. However, when there are truthful reasons to question our own or others' actions, God's Word has a practical and efficient way to deal with that, but it does **not** involve harboring or spreading accusations. Recognize that for what it is and realize that its source is Satan, the great accuser and adversary, who would love to separate us from our brothers and sisters. That isolation definitely helps him to hurt us.

- f. Jesus, on the other hand, is on your side. Obviously, he knows the truth about valid accusations, but he also knows the truth about forgiveness and atonement. Read, study, and take notes on **Romans 8:31 – 34**. That is truth to believe – not the lies from Satan.

Meditate and pray about how much more you believe Jesus, the Advocate, than you believe Satan, the accuser. Ask God sincerely for help to be aware of this scheme of the devil and to resist it firmly.

4. KNOW THAT SATAN IS THE VICIOUS OPPONENT OF GOD'S WORD.

- a. Satan will even use Scripture (usually incorrectly or slightly twisted, of course) as a part of his scheme. We see that in his deceit in Eden (**Genesis 3:4 – 5**) and in his temptation of Jesus (**Matthew 4:6**).

**NOTE
THIS:**

Satan knows the Word of God, possibly even more than we do,
and how powerful it is as the agent of truth.

Because he knows that, he tries to take the Word away immediately so that it does not have a chance to grow in the hearer's heart. (See the parable of the sower in **Mark 4:14 – 15**.)

But be clear: Satan is not confused or mislead. He deliberately opposes God's Word with all his might. People who listen to him should be viewed as mistaken and should be patiently led to the truth. But understand Satan for what he is – the vicious enemy of God's Word.

- b. As already noted, being aware of this scheme of Satan goes a long way towards helping us resist him. Ask yourself:

- Why do I easily get distracted from reading my Bible and praying?
- Why is it so hard to get my friends to study the Bible with me?

Don't over-complicate that. This is simply one of Satan's common and frequently applied schemes. He is not powerful enough to stop the Almighty God from working through his Word. So his only hope is to keep everyone from the Word.

- c. How do we resist this scheme of Satan? Resist it by turning to Jesus – the Word (**John 1:1**). Jesus and Satan are the exact opposites. Satan is the liar; Jesus is the truth. Satan is the accuser; Jesus is the advocate. And Satan is the opponent of God's Word, while Jesus is the Word.

So we can look to Jesus' example for help to resist Satan in every area. For instance, look at what Jesus said when Satan was trying to get Peter off track: *Get behind me, Satan!* (**Matthew 16:23**)

- Do you see how you can use these simple but powerful words?
- Try it when you see Satan distracting you from Bible reading.
- Try it when you see friends making excuses studying God's Word. (Don't say it to them, of course. 😊 But say it to Satan.)

Agree or Disagree: We can't fight Satan by our own power, but we are determined to not let him keep us from the Word or from our relentless desire to spread the Word to others.

5. FEAR THE DEVIL, BUT TRUST GOD MORE.

- a. Read **I Peter 5:8 – 9**. This Scripture compares our enemy, the devil, to a roaring lion, whose stated goal is to devour us. What do you think happens to sheep (us) if they have no fear of the lion?
- What are some things sheep (we) might do that actually make it easier for the lion to succeed (i.e. gives him “footholds”)?
 - What can sheep (we) do to resist the lion?

So, a healthy fear of the devil seems to be in order. Just like a sheep is no match for a lion, we are no match on our own for Satan.

- b. Read **I John 4:4**. Satan is the enemy who prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. But he can be resisted. He is a powerful enemy who should not be taken lightly, nor should we attempt to fight him on our own strength. But God, who is in us, is much greater than Satan!

One of the key points in this Scripture is not just that God is more powerful than Satan, but that God is in us. Don’t let your fear of Satan be stronger than your faith in God, who is in you. On the other hand, your faith in God should help you be more aware of how much you need him to resist this powerful enemy. How can you balance your fear of Satan with your faith in God, who is in you?

- c. Finally, here’s a familiar verse that we would do well to memorize:

*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.
And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.
But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out
so that you can stand up under it.*

I Corinthians 10:13

- Do you believe with assurance that God is faithful to do what he promises here?
- Will this be your “go-to-first” thought when tempted?
- Do you see why you need God’s faithfulness to resist Satan?
- Are you committed to do your part by looking for that “way out” that is promised in this Scripture?

As you close out this study, meditate about how much you appreciate God showing us in his Word so much about Satan and his schemes. Pray, in faith, that you are even more appreciative of the power and faithfulness of God, who is in you.

Tests

Their Source and Their Purpose

*The crucible for silver
and the furnace for gold,
but the LORD tests the heart.*

Proverbs 17:3

EVERYBODY LOVES TESTS. RIGHT?

Our goal is to know the Bible better and, from that knowledge of Scripture, to know God better. The more we know God, the more our faith and love for him grows. There are some traits of God, however, that we sometimes wonder about. This is one of them. The proverb stated above points out what many examples in the Bible illustrate: God is the Tester.

So, we may not love tests while we are going through them, but we don't want to be so hateful of them that we actually are saying that we don't like this trait of God. God is the Tester. Let's learn to appreciate that. Read **James 1:2 – 4**.

THE SOURCE OF TESTS

The statement from James referred to above mentions trials of many kinds and what these variety of tests can produce in our lives. (See **I Peter 1:6** which also talks about "*all kinds of trials*." Like James, Peter also goes on to talk about the good results of having this variety of tests in our lives.) We want to be able to do what James said and actually consider these tests as pure joy. To do that, we will first look at what he and Peter might have meant by the variety of tests. Here are some ideas about tests and their varieties:

1. Some tests are directly from, or allowed by, God.

- We see that in **Genesis 22**, where Abraham went through that terribly difficult test about offering Isaac. Read verse 1 of that chapter. It clearly says that God was the one that was testing Abraham.
- In the tests that Job went through (**Job 1 – 2**), we see that God did not directly cause them, but he allowed them.
- Read **John 6:5 – 6**. Jesus already knew how he was going to feed that multitude, but he tested Phillip to let him express what he would say during that test of opportunity by asking him how he would feed them.

One difficulty about tests coming directly from God is that we don't always know that they are coming from him. Job certainly didn't. But the more we study the Scriptures, the more we know that God is interested in testing the heart. We will see later what the tests produce that come from God.

2. Some tests are temptations directly from Satan.

One huge difference between Satan's tests and God's tests is that Satan is hoping that we will fail, whereas God is wanting us to learn and grow from the test. Even if we do fail at first (like Phillip did in his answer to Jesus), God allows us to learn from that mistake. We can imagine that the next time Phillip faced a test of opportunity, he would have responded with more faith.

Satan, of course, has no such interest in seeing us getting stronger through the tests in our lives. However, **I Corinthians 10:13** faithfully states that God will not allow Satan to tempt us more than we can bear and that God will always provide a way out for every temptation.

3. Some tests come from other people in our lives.

Co-workers, class mates, friends, family, neighbors, and sometimes even church members may test us in many ways. They may openly abuse us or simply get on our nerves. Their habitual sins may cause us grief of many kinds. It's important to recognize three things about this kind of tests:

- (1) They are **NOT** directly from God. He doesn't cause people to do what they do just to test us.
- (2) These tests aren't directly from Satan either. He tempts people to do what they do, but he can't cause them to do it.
- (3) These situations are not your fault. The person chooses to do what he/she does.

4. Some tests are from your own bad choices.

These are the ones that we may hate the most. Some of our past sins have consequences in the present and future. These consequences are not caused by God; they are not caused by Satan; and they are not caused by others. We are the cause. They test us to see what we will do now.

5. Some tests come from hardships and disasters.

God did not cause the tornado or the disease. Satan did not even have direct cause in it. It's not your fault nor the result of someone else in your life. It is just what happens naturally and randomly, and usually without an identifiable reason. While they do not necessarily happen just as a test for us personally, they do provide a test to see how we will react.

6. Some tests come from ordinary life changes.

People grow older, and life changes. Tests that come from that are not from God, Satan, others, or self. They are the natural result of ordinary changes in everyone's life. But they certainly are tests.

Read **Hebrews 12:11**. God knows that no trial (no matter what the kind) seems pleasant at the time. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace. That's what we want to look at next.

THE PURPOSE OF TESTS

As we have seen there are many kinds of tests, but there seems to be two frequently asked questions, no matter what type of test:

1. How do you view God?

Do you see him as loving and powerful? **Psalms 62:11-12**. Is this your go-to-first thought when tested?

When you go through a test of opportunity, do you focus on God at work in you?

2. What's in your character?

Are you prone to anger, discouragement, or panic when tested?

Do you spend more time figuring out what you need to do than you do going to God about it?

This is actually what is so valuable about tests in this life. We all really want to know now how we view God and what is in our character. There will be a final exam on the Day of Judgment, and we don't want to wait until then to find out where we stand. That actually wouldn't be fair. God is a tough Tester, but he is a fair Tester. He wants us to know now where we stand, so we can make any necessary changes to improve.

Things to remember about God, the Tester:

- **The Tester (God), like a teacher, already knows the answers. He's not asking you for information. He wants you to see what's in your heart.**
- **The Tester (God), like a teacher, may be silent during the test. But He has provided what you need to pass the test.**

CONCLUSION

What tests do for us (and why we can be thankful for them): ➤ We can find out what we really think about God. ➤ We can discover what our character is really like.	THIS IS A TEST
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We may not enjoy any kind of life-tests while they happen, but we can be very thankful for what they produce.

Resources

Alexander, David and Pat *Erdmans' Handbook of the Bible*. Lion Publishing, 1973.

Halley, Henry *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Zondervan, 2000.

Hamilton, Mark (editor) *The Transforming Word*, Abilene Christian University Press, 2009.

Taliaferro, Mike *The Lion Never Sleeps – Preparing those you love for Satan's attacks*, Illumination Publishers

Websites and Apps

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| www.biblegateway.com | A free online, searchable tool with the Bible in multitudes of translations and languages, along with many other Bible-study aids. |
| www.bibleproject.com | A huge resource of Bible videos on the books of the Bible. See the one about Job, for instance. |
| www.gotquestions.org | A searchable tool designed to try to give reasonable answers to Bible questions. Just type in the question and see what you think about their answer. |
| YouVersion Bible App | A free download of the Bible in many versions to make the Word of God available on your phone or other devices. The audio reading of the Bible is especially helpful. |

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