

The Patience of Job

by Lynn Andrew

Job does not seem particularly patient as he answers the accusations of his advisers. At least he does answer them, and given the time and place of the debate, there may be more patience in his words than appears to the Western ear. But isn't Job's real patience with God?

Someone says if we want to point to patience, it's all on the side of God. He is the one who is patient with all of these clowns, especially the know-it-all friends of Job. I hear someone else saying, "Wait a minute! What about Satan?" Did we forget Satan's part?

Yes, God's patience with Satan is off the scale of our everyday theology. But the theological extension is right there in chapter one, verse eight, in the tone of the Lord's voice when he said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that none is like him on the earth, a perfectly upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

Evidently a debate is going on between God and Satan. We usually think of it as all-out war, not a placid debate. The condescension of God toward this rebellious angel is astounding. Considering the damage Satan has done to creation and the grief and pain that will come of it, especially what is to be borne by the Son of God, the patience of Job even under the silence of his God measures zero on the absolute scale.

This awesome patience of God toward Satan tells us some things: 1) God has everything under control; 2) there is an important issue to be settled between them; 3) Job is part of God's exhibit that supports his side of the argument; 4) God does not consider the suffering of

mankind to be the worst thing—winning the argument is more important at the moment; 5) because God is just, the Law is involved, and Satan's defeat will have to be the settling of a legal question; 6) evidently Satan does not believe that anyone can be perfect—hence his contention that the Law is unjust if it condemns any and all sin.

This is the purpose of the story of Job and why it is included in our Bibles: it tells us that calamities are not necessarily about punishing our sin; there is a larger picture, and in fact it may be the opposite of what we think.

But Job did not know this, so he does the best he can with what he knows although it makes no sense. The faith of Job is what shines, but in Job's circumstances faith works out as patience: patience with God for stripping him of everything and not telling him why.

The irony of the story is that unbeknownst to the human characters, they are separated from knowing the answer to their question by an impenetrable wall. So we have this advantage over Job, thanks to his story, and it gives us reason to be patient. Faith is made easier if we are given to understand this.

Job was God's exhibit in his judgment against Satan, but only as he prefigured the perfectly obedient Jesus Christ. Why did God wait so long—indeed why is he still waiting to finally condemn Satan? He waited for you and me. In Christ he has a great multitude of exhibits that will decisively settle the suit.

Job stands for Christ in his suffering for no fault of his, and as we are in Christ and endure our sufferings for his sake, Job's patience becomes our patience and our faith and salvation too.

†