

Though He Slay Me, Yet Will I Trust Him (Job 13:15)
A Theological Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic: Part 3 of 3
© Nathan S. Kidder, Spring 2020

In the previous discussion, we developed some key worldview concepts by presenting the unchanging purposes of God in all things. We came to the realization that, as new creational people who await the renewal of the cosmos, our lives are defined by strange dualisms. Though we are freed from sin, we still struggle with sin. Though our inner person (the spiritual nucleus of our human ontology) is being renewed daily, we feel the aging of the outer man (the physical center of our being) acutely. As we have said, this is due to the “already/not yet” dimension of biblical eschatology. In the process of uncovering various worldview concepts, we also left the following question unanswered: what does a transcendent (biblical) worldview look like in action? If we had role models peeled open through omniscient interpretation of their thoughts and actions, we might stand a chance of imitating behaviors and integrating new matrices by which to interpret the world around us. And this is precisely what the biblical narrative provides us. Thus, our goal in the present discussion is to examine the lives of those who suffered biblically, who persevered despite profound challenges, and who model for us the transcendent worldview in action.

One word of clarification should be spoken before proceeding: and that is, we are surveying biblical examples of *righteous* sufferers. These are not people who fracture the law and suffer the consequences. A thief, apprehended and convicted, is surely someone who suffers, but not according to the biblical model we survey below. The following individuals suffer because sin is present in the world, but not because their particular (individual) sins demand a necessary and corresponding punishment. This is why, in our case, the process of self-examination is helpful. More than likely, we will find some rough edges that need refining. But other times, we may come to the conclusion that suffering is not a direct consequence of personal sin. Sometimes we suffer because we live in a broken world. In line with this perspective, we remember that hardship for the believer is never punishment, but only and always for spiritual refinement. God is treating his people as true children (Hebrews 12:7-13), purifying them until the day of their glorification. In the meantime, the believer, the creation, and the Holy Spirit collectively groan while awaiting final liberation (Romans 8:18-27). Enlightened with this understanding, we may now advance in the ongoing conversation.

The Book of Job

The first, and perhaps most obvious place to start, is with the man whose words we enshrined as the title of our discussions. The most famous Old Testament sufferer is the man Job. To be sure, there are many mysterious and provocative statements in the Book of Job. Our goal here is not to provide an exhaustive commentary; rather, we want to survey the book in search of its worldview indicators. Along the way, we seek to do justice to the larger narrative so that we are not injuriously extracting bits of information that violate the immediate context.

Most readers are immediately acquainted with the suffering of Job. We recall the prologue, a scene situated in the heavenly courtroom where celestial beings – both holy and

depraved – present themselves before the Sovereign LORD. The blessedness and faithfulness of Job come under immediate prosecution. Blessing is bribery. Of course the man is faithful to the hand that feeds him! Surely this represents an inconsistency in the divine program. God keeps his subjects in line by paying them off. But what if the blessing is removed? What would happen if hardship came to define the man’s life? As the scene shifts from heaven to earth, we see nothing short of sheer devastation.

Without recounting the entire narrative here, we simply observe various features within the text. Job has lost all that might have supported the prosecution’s case. His suffering will come to invalidate the idea of bribes and kickbacks, but only if he remains true to God. So, Job has suffered greatly and, to some degree, inexplicably. Will he blaspheme? Will he turn against the Lord? Through various relationships and the conversations they engender, we recognize the process of self-evaluation. Job is confronted with the question of suffering in light of his particular circumstances. The reader simultaneously wonders: “What is the purpose of Job’s suffering? How will the man of God respond?”

The first response upholds the sovereignty and the blamelessness of God. See Job 1:21, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” (NIV). Because we stand with the omniscient narrator in the story, we can see more than Job sees. We know that Satan had actually perpetrated the devastation against Job, through the Sabeans, Chaldeans, and natural disasters. The enemy had wielded power within physical and political spheres for his own devious purposes. But, in the passage cited above, Job recognizes another level of control, another set of purposes, and an almighty, irresistible sovereignty over everything. At first glance, we would not expect Job to see the transcendent realm and arrive at such a conclusion. This recognition is a first indication of worldview in action. Worldview sees and believes that God is in ultimate and unrivalled control of all things – often mysteriously, yes... but never haphazardly and always with praiseworthy intent. Worldview also maintains that the Lord is *right* and *good* in achieving His purposes. His methods may be contentious, but his motives remain morally pure. As a result, the Lord is worshipped. The transcendent worldview creates perpetual and incessant worshippers. They worship in wartime and in peace. They worship in tragedy and triumph. They worship under sunny skies, undaunted by ominous horizons. But, you may ask, “Why is my first instinct to murmur and complain? Why am I not an ideal worshipper in every circumstance?” My advice here is to remember the “already” and the “not yet.” Examine *patterns* in your life to find a submissive spirit or reverent humility. Do not evaluate isolated incidents, but instead look for progress in the big picture. We should expect worldview transformation to happen gradually and over time because we are “already” transformed and – at the same time – “not yet” fully transformed.

So the first response recognizes the sovereignty of God (Job 1:21; cf. 2:10; 9:2-15; 12:13-25). The second response strives to see through lenses of hope. Consider Job 19:25-27, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” These verses show an eschatological perspective, a way of perceiving worldly events that rises above and beyond the quagmire of present suffering. They verbalize great hope. The transcendent worldview commands the eyes

to look *upward* (to God) and *forward* (in time, to God's final day of redemption). Seeing the concept of bodily resurrection in the Old Testament is amazing (cf. Isaiah 26:19). Job speaks of a time, after his skin rots, in which his body would be renewed; he would, at that point in time, see the living God! He announces the Jewish expectation of future deliverance from her enemies. As believers in Christ, we also embrace a future hope of bodily resurrection at the last day. However, our hope also involves elements of realized eschatology. We are saved... today, now; and so we celebrate spiritual resurrection, union with Christ, and new worldview commitments that redefine our lives.¹

In the Book of Job – as in everyday life – there is a mixture of joy and sorrow. We must readily admit that Job's laments are not always consistently and doctrinally biblical. In the process of pouring out his soul, we see his raw and unfiltered emotions. This process is also evident in Psalms of lament, particularly those of David, though of others as well. However, in most cases, in Psalms and presently in Job, the one lamenting is eventually brought back to the proper perspective. This truth is instructive. Like an angry spouse, some people attempt to throw their emotions at God and then leave the room. They gripe. They complain. They level accusations against the Almighty and lay blame at his feet. This first part of the lament is perhaps all-too-human, but only acceptable if the one logging complaints stays humbly engaged in the conversation. Offload your emotional baggage, but do not cut off all communication. Pour out your hearts, but do not close your Bibles. Be ready for God to restore you to the proper perspective. In the written Word and by the divine Spirit, the Lord will speak truth into dire circumstances. He will instruct the downtrodden and inspire the short-sighted. In biblical laments, we must exercise discernment when presented with raw emotions (e.g.: "In my affliction, I said..."). We must be on the lookout for the corrective theology that follows (e.g.: "Yet, in my heart, I know..."—or—"Then, the Lord God said to me..."). Raw emotions often uncover suspect theology; but God superintends the maturation process to ensure that the prevailing perspective accords with biblical truth. See Job 37:22-24; see also Psalm 37.

In pouring out our emotions, we should be attentive to the Lord's reply. It may not always affirm our feelings; it may instead confront them and call for correction. Certainly God's reply to Job is seasoned with savory grace, but it also bites with spicy indignation. Where was Job's wisdom when the earth was formed? What could the man say in response to divine interrogation? Our attention, for the current discussion, must be drawn to Job 42:1-6. Here we find a striking worldview commitment that summarizes the entire book. God is eternal; man is finite. God is sovereign; man is contingent. As such, the wisdom of man is severely limited whereas the wisdom of God is perfect. In our text, Job readily admits his weakness and limitations. He has had a transformative encounter with the King; he repents. His worldview, despite attacks from his wife and "friends," has come full circle: (a) the Lord is sovereign (42:2); (b) the Lord is blameless (42:3). The payoff is a greater vision of God. Thus, the confession, where once "my ears had heard of you," now "my eyes have seen you."

¹ See John 5:25 for confirmation that spiritually dead people have heard the voice of Christ and live (now). Then, see John 5:28-29 for confirmation that physically dead people will hear the voice of Christ and be raised from their graves (on the "last day" of judgment, in the future). The former speaks of spiritual resurrection as present; the latter speaks of bodily resurrection as future.

Remember this pattern, we will see it again: believers are given a vision of future glory (*hope*); this hope stimulates – while the Spirit sustains – the believer’s faithfulness despite pain and hardship (*perseverance*); perseverance, by God’s grace, propels the believer across the finish line; he obtains the promised glory (the *fulfillment* of hope). Thus, the pattern:

Hope (divinely given)—Perseverance (divinely enabled)—Fulfillment (divinely secured)

Job believes that, in his flesh, he will see God. He receives from on high a glimpse of promised glory. Energized by hope, Job pursues his glorious destiny, relying on God’s power to remain faithful in the midst of hardship. He worships in spite of profound affliction. In the end, Job (partially) receives that which was promised: namely, a greater and clearer vision of the living God. His hope is fulfilled. Only now, the present vision of God undergirds and substantiates the hope of paramount glory; it is a kind of down-payment to guarantee the final, future, and eternal inheritance – one that is assured because it is divinely secured. And so, Job can unflinchingly declare, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him” (13:15).

The Cross of Christ

The example of Job pales in comparison to that of Jesus. So, while Job might have been an expositional base camp, the summit of our textual expedition is Jesus Christ himself. In our previous discussion, we outlined the main tenets of Spirit Christology: that Jesus, in his earthly life and ministry, was (1) completely submitted to the will of God and (2) totally dependent upon the power of the Spirit. In his march toward Jerusalem, as the focus shifts from early Galilean ministry to the events of Passion Week, Jesus triumphantly embodies the principles of Spirit Christology.

A brief survey of John’s Gospel demonstrates Jesus’ complete knowledge of the cross, its significance, and its implications. First, Jesus recognizes the unparalleled importance of the cross as the singular “hour” of his glorification. It is in this “hour” that the disciples will witness – and later testify about – the glory of the “One and Only,” the “Word” whose manifest glory had revealed the Father (John 1:14-18). In the “hour” of Jesus’ death, the Temple will be destroyed (the spiritual temple to which he refers in John 2:19); on Easter morning, the true Temple – the place where heaven meets earth, where God meets humanity, and where the entire cosmos finds its center – would be resurrected. The cross redefines the Temple.

Therefore, at the Cana wedding, Jesus asserts total devotion to the Father’s will and, consequently, complete liberty from human manipulation. He says, “My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4; cf. John 7:1-9). Nevertheless, the miracle unveils the glory of Christ and the disciples put their faith in him; that which would happen supremely in the cross is previewed in Cana of Galilee. As the narrative shifts focus in John 3, we find Jesus in Jerusalem. He is speaking with one of the Pharisees – a man named Nicodemus – about the kingdom of God. Here Jesus unpacks the significance of the cross a step further, saying that it will redefine the way in which spiritual healing takes place. In Numbers 21:8-9, we find the people of Israel under the judgment of God. Fiery serpents had entered the camp and were biting people, killing them by poisonous injection. Moses intercedes for the people; God relents. He instructs Moses to fashion a bronze serpent, to set it on a pole, and to call the Israelites to look upon it

and live. Physical healing was effected by looking at a picture of the curse. In John 3:14-15, Jesus indicates that *spiritual* healing would take place as those who look – in faith – upon him receive forgiveness of sins. The cross redefines the Temple; it also redefines forgiveness.

Understanding the New Testament in light of its Jewish context highlights another significant transition occurring at the cross. In John 12:20-36, we find several significant points. There is a mysterious appearance of “Greeks” in Jerusalem for the Passover (v. 20-21); they wish to see Jesus. But what narrative purpose do they serve? The answer comes in 12:32, that when Jesus is “lifted up” from the earth, he would draw “all men” to himself. Here we should resist the notion of “universalism,” that dangerous doctrine that suggests everyone – regardless of faith, repentance, or conversion – will be saved eternally. Universalism is false teaching. No, the term “all men” refers to people from every tribe, language, people (group), and nation, as Revelation 5:10 describes. The Greeks are in Jerusalem for the Passover as a sign to the readers of John’s Gospel. Jesus’ impending death will initiate God’s new creational movement whereby Jews *and Gentiles* will be saved through faith in Christ. Remember that the Old Testament presented an ethnic, Torah-based salvation for Israel (almost exclusively). Now, in the New Covenant age of redemptive history, a Christocentric salvation will transcend ethnicity. The Father will call sons and daughters to himself – through Christ and by the Spirit – from all tongues and tribes. The cross redefines salvation by redefining the family of God.

The cross confronts the power structures of the world, both ancient and modern. This is clear when we consider the Roman world of the New Testament. On one hand, the most significant confrontation of power deals with the dark forces of evil, sin, and death. On the other hand, a lesser confrontation of power deals with the Roman Empire. Again in John 12, we see that Jesus understands his death to mean judgment upon the world. In 12:31, he says, “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out” (NIV). This refers primarily to Satan, and secondarily to the Caesar in Rome. The coming Kingdom of God would destroy the power of evil while simultaneously confronting worldly structures of power. In regard to the former, we find textual support in the immediate context (John 12:44-50). In regard to the latter, we turn to John 18:28-40 (where Jesus and Pilate discuss kingdoms and truth) and also to John 20:24-29 (the post-resurrection scene in which Thomas emphatically declares Jesus to be “my Lord and my God”). Jesus is the ruler of the world, which means Caesar is not. Jesus is the Lord, Caesar is not. God’s kingdom is supreme, the Roman Empire is not. The cross redefines salvation; it also redefines power.

But what are the worldview commitments Jesus exhibits that we might imitate? How does he endure his cross-carrying, sin-bearing mission? Three passages converge to supply an answer. The first passage is Luke 22:41-42, which tells us that Jesus “knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (ESV). This supreme act of self-submission mirrors the Lord’s Prayer, in which Jesus instructs his followers to pray for God’s will to be done “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10, ESV). It is, at the same time, a recognition of the sovereignty of God and the desire to see its transformative power renew the earth. So first, we find a poignant articulation of – and powerful submission to – the sovereignty of God; his servants are totally committed to accomplishing his will. The second passage merges with the first; it is Isaiah 53:10-12, a

thoroughly Messianic text clearly referring to Jesus. Here the Messianic Servant of Yahweh is subjected to unthinkable agony. He would be “despised and rejected,” “pierced and crushed,” “oppressed and afflicted,” with no descendants to extend the family name (53:3, 5, 7-8). Yet, in the midst of remarkable suffering, he would hold to a vision of hope. He would “see his offspring [seed]” and “after the suffering of his soul” he would “see the light of life and be satisfied” (53:10-11). What does this mean? If the Servant had no descendants, from where do the “offspring” of 53:10 come? The answer is fairly straightforward: these are the spiritual sons and daughters he would redeem to be part of God’s family. This is you, dear reader; it is me. In his suffering for the saints, Jesus saw us; he rejoiced at the inheritance he would receive, and was satisfied. The same pattern from the Book of Job emerges in the life of Christ:

Hope (divinely given)—Perseverance (divinely enabled)—Fulfillment (divinely secured)

The Messianic Servant envisions his spiritual offspring and the glory of eternal life (hope, divinely given). He endures the suffering of body and soul (perseverance, divinely enabled). And he is satisfied, thereafter receiving a “portion among the great” (53:12). He would inherit, as the New Testament boldly proclaims, the very throne of God (fulfillment, divinely secured).

A third, and final, passage intersects Luke and Isaiah. It is found in Hebrews 12:1-3. Because we have already discussed this passage, only a brief reminder is offered here. The verbs of 12:2 provide us with the previously observed pattern. Note that a specific joy was set before the Lord; in fact, the author of Hebrews may be commenting on Isaiah 53 here. The joy set before Jesus refers to hope. In anticipation of glorious joy, then, Jesus *endures* the cross. His perseverance was directly related to the promise of joy. Then, after the shame of the cross, Jesus is *exalted* to the throne of God. Here we recall the Christological poem in Philippians 2, where Jesus experiences corresponding extremes: first of humiliation, then of highest exaltation. In Hebrews 12:2, we once again find “hope—perseverance—fulfillment.”

The context of Hebrews 12 speaks about the endurance of believers, the followers of Jesus who imitate his suffering, who offer a visible demonstration of his afflictions (Colossians 1:24), and who, against all odds, persevere to the end. All disciples of Christ are called to carry their cross, to walk the Calvary road in submission to the Father’s will and in dependence upon the Spirit’s power. Renowned New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright, says, “Christianity demanded, and was known from quite early on to demand, an allegiance that might very well involve not only a previously unimagined self-denial, but also social ostracism, imprisonment, torture and death.”² Among the biblical apostles, these various dimensions of visceral hardship are most evident in the life of the Apostle Paul.

The Afflictions of Apostle Paul

At the outset, take a moment to read 2 Corinthians 6:3-13; 11:16-33. In light of these startling passages, we turn now to an examination of Paul’s worldview in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, a passage that ultimately reveals the same pattern of “hope—perseverance—fulfillment.” But let us not assume it; rather, let us see it rising from within the text itself. The larger context

² N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992. eBook), 469.

presents a defense of Paul's apostolic credentials and ministry. Beginning in 1:12, Paul elaborates on the nature of New Covenant ministry and the confidence he has when considering the God-given nature of his missionary calling. Then, in the context of chapters 3 & 4, Paul demonstrates that his confidence is not self-derived, because his competence comes by the power of the Spirit. This is the hallmark of New Covenant redemption: the Holy Spirit has a glorious ministry (3:8) whereby he gives life (3:6), imparts righteousness by imputation (3:9), writes the Law of God on the hearts of men (3:3; cf. Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:25-27), and unveils the transcendent glory of God in the face of Christ (3:12—4:6). Paul asserts that transformed lives are due to the fulfillment of the New Covenant.

Glorious ministry comes with divine calling; and divine calling comes with profound suffering. This was the experience of Jesus; thus, for those who traverse the same path, suffering and hardship are not surprising. Paul continues in 4:7ff to say that the external world may be full of trouble; but the spiritual inner existence – now the very life of Christ, the comfort of God, and the power of the Spirit – is defined by shalom, life, light, delight and fulfillment. This is how a believer may be assaulted by doubt and yet be controlled by peace. He may be flogged and whipped, but never abandoned. He may feel the immediacy of death in his very body while his soul is renewed daily. This is how the believer may persevere (4:16-18): he holds an eternal perspective, a vision of glorious renewal, ever before him. He does not lose heart. Therefore, in this passage we see hope (we fix our eyes on what is unseen); we find perseverance (we do not lose heart). And, in chapter 5, we encounter Paul's trust in God: that promise would come to fulfillment (5:1-10). Note the language of assurance below.³ The Apostle Paul has not yet received what was promised (the fulfillment), but has received assurance through the indwelling Spirit. His hope is in God, because of the provision of Christ, and the inner testimony of the Spirit; he does not lose heart! *Hope—Perseverance—Fulfillment*

The Exemplars of Faith

At this point in the discussion, we advance through digression. Above, we referenced the climactic example of Jesus and pointed to Hebrews 12. We move forward now by moving backward, into the text of Hebrews 11. We notice our pattern immediately in the lives of Israel's Patriarchs. In the life of Abraham, we receive insight as to his thoughts and attitudes – his worldview commitments – by way of divine inspiration. His heart is observable; his motivations discernable. He moves out from his homeland, away from his culture, beyond the reach of extended family into a land that was to become his inheritance. Only one small problem: he never receives the inheritance; he and his sons live in Canaan as strangers in foreign territory. By all accounts, this is a form of suffering, perhaps not as violent as torture and death, but nevertheless painful. Social alienation can be particularly difficult, as we who live under enforced isolation/lockdown have come to discover. Abraham endures hardship because, 11:10 tells us, he was "looking forward." He had been given a promise, a mental

³ See **2 Corinthians 5:1**, "We know... we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven"; **5:5**, "God... has made us for [an eternal] purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come [namely, the eternal inheritance and resurrection bodies]"; **5:6-7**, "Therefore, we are always confident and know [that God's promises will be fulfilled, because] we live by faith, not by sight"; **5:8**, "We are confident [in God's promises of the eternal inheritance being fulfilled]..." and, thus **5:17** "If anyone is in Christ, he is the new creation!"

awareness or spiritual vision of Zion. It was undoubtedly this vision that propelled him forward during difficult times. He is not alone. His predecessors in the biblical narrative had been similar. Hebrews 11:13-16 tells us that all the preceding characters had lived by faith. They had not seen with physical eyes the tangible, substantial reward they had been promised. Instead, they had endured as outcasts in the world because of the same spiritual vision of Abraham; they looked with the eyes of faith to a better country, a lasting possession, an enduring city.

The same divine insight sheds light on the story of Moses. We can see his thoughts and perceive his attitudes. We become aware of what beckoned him forward in his walk of faith. The Prince of Egypt rejected earthly pleasures and endured “disgrace for the sake of Christ” because it was (and still is) a greater inheritance, a more valuable possession, and a superlative reward. In short, he persevered by looking ahead. He persevered because of hope. He did not fear punishment from earthly powers, despising the oppression of Pharaoh’s government, because he saw the invisible God. He saw God in the giving of the Law (Exodus 24) and in the vision of Exodus 33. In addition, we are told in Hebrews that Moses celebrated the Passover, the sign of promised deliverance, before the deliverance came to pass. This is important because, many centuries later, we celebrate the Eucharist (now the convergence of Passover and the New Covenant) in the same manner. It is a sign of deliverance already/partially – though not yet fully – realized. We receive grace unto greater faithfulness (already) and, at the same time, proclaim the Lord’s death *until he comes again* (future).

Thus, we conclude that the examples in Hebrews 11 did not receive the fulfillment of what was promised in a literal, physical, or tangible sense. But, through the eyes of faith, they saw it was guaranteed. This is why we said, above, that the fulfillment is divinely secured. It has been promised by the unfailing God; it has been accomplished by the unchanging Son; it has been revealed and applied by the unshakeable Spirit. We know that the kingdom will come to pass, just as Paul – with Abraham, Moses, and many others before him – had known.

Conclusion

The singular strand woven through these narratives is that of transcendence. We have witnessed “*Hope—Perseverance—Fulfillment*” in each story. All those who endured hardship possessed, as empowered by the divine Spirit, an ability to see the collapsed space between the spiritual and physical, between the eternal and temporal, between the heavenly and earthly. They were endowed with a prophetic sense of perception that saw with both physical and spiritual eyes. Earthly events were interpreted according to their real spiritual significance. For these prophetic figures, membership in God’s family necessarily involved the transformation of worldview. Because of what they witnessed and experienced, they were forever changed. They perceived the ways in which ultimate reality either strengthened or subverted previous worldview commitments. They received authoritative interpretation for all that happened in the lives of God’s people. Their hardship was not a stumbling block, but a launching pad. They did not trip over it and fall; rather, they embraced God’s will and walked forward in provocative, counter-cultural demonstrations of faith. May we, likewise empowered by the Spirit of God, move boldly into the broken world with words of comfort and challenge, as we await the blessed hope and glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.