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Job

a narrative condensed from scripture.

**Note: The same material in dialogue form is in the file “Job-dialogue.”
by Ralph Milton**

Here’s a radically condensed and somewhat popularized version of Job, presented in the hope it may be useful to help folks hear the whole story all the way through, an opportunity the Lectionary doesn’t provide. It takes me eight minutes to read out-loud. I’d like to have made it shorter, but that would have done even more violence to the richness of the original text.

Note that I have used the word “Accuser” which the NRSV gives as an alternative to “the satan.” I’ve done that because “satan” tends to conjure images of a guy with horns in red underwear, and that’s not anywhere close to the figure implied in Job. You are welcome to change it, or for that matter adapt this version any way you wish.

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. Job lived a good and upright life. He feared God and always did what was right. Job had seven sons and three daughters, and thousands of sheep and camels and hundreds of oxen and donkeys and many servants. He was the richest and most powerful man in the region.

Jobs sons were fine people too, and they regularly held feasts and invited their three sisters to join them. But Job made extra sacrifices to God in case his sons might do something wrong without knowing it.

One day, God called a gathering of heavenly beings, among them the Accuser. God asked the Accuser, "Did you notice my servant Job? There is no one like him. He is a fine man who lives a clean and blameless life and never does anything evil.

“Really!” the Accuser sneered. “You’ve protected Job and favored him. Everything he does turns out well. Listen; take all that wealth – all that richness – from him, and Job will spit in your face.”

“Go ahead,” challenged God. “Test him. You can take anything away from him, just don’t touch Job personally.” So the Accuser went off to test Job.

And so, a messenger came to Job. “We were out in the field plowing, when some bad guys came along and stole all the oxen and killed the workers, and I’m the only one who escaped to tell you.”

He hadn’t finished talking when another messenger came and said, “Lightning struck all your sheep and the people looking after them, and I’m the only one who escaped to tell you.”

He hadn’t finished talking when yet another messenger came and said, “A bunch of foreigners came and killed all your camels and the people looking after them and I’m the only one who escaped to tell you.”

He hadn’t finished talking when yet another messenger came and said, “All your children were having dinner together when a huge wind came and blew down the house and killed all of them, and I’m the only one who escaped to tell you.”

Job was distraught. He grieved deeply, but in the middle of his grief, he worshipped God. “I came out of my mother’s womb naked, with nothing. I’ll die naked, with nothing. God gives and God takes away. Blessed be the name of God.”

Job never blamed anything on God.

Then God called another gathering of heavenly beings. “Did you notice my servant Job?” God asked the Accuser “There is no one like him. He lives a clean and blameless life and never does anything evil. You provoked him mercilessly, but he didn’t turn against me.”

“Everyone has their price,” mocked the Accuser. “He’ll give away anything to save his own neck. But get him where it hurts – where he feels the pain tearing his own bones and his own muscles – then Job will spit in your face.”

“Go ahead,” challenged God. “Put him to the test. You can do anything to him, just spare his life.”

So the Accuser inflicted ugly sores all over Job’s body. Then Job’s wife said to him, “It’s all over, Job. Don’t keep suffering. Curse God and die.”

Job snapped at her. “You can’t expect to receive all the good things from God and not any of the bad.”

So in spite of all that the Accuser laid on him, Job did not sin. He didn’t bad-mouth God.

Now Job had three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar who came to help him. For seven days they sat and said nothing.

Then one day, Job cried out, “I wish I had never been born! Why was I given life if I have to endure all this pain?”

Then Eliphaz spoke. “Job, you’ve been a real help to many people who were in pain. Now it’s your turn. Think, Job. Of those people you helped, did any of them ever suffer for nothing? Give your heart to God, Job. Admit your sinfulness. Then God will be good to you.”

“I wish God would kill me and get it over with,” replied Job. “I can’t handle any more pain. All I want is death and peace. What have I done to deserve this?”

Then Bildad spoke up. “How can you keep saying those things? You are accusing God of doing wrong. If you’ll pray and ask forgiveness, God will give you your health back. God doesn’t reject a blameless person.”

“Of course,” said Job. “I know that. But who can be blameless before God? Do you think I could win a debate with God? I don’t understand God, except that I know God destroys good people along with the bad. So, all I ask is that I be allowed to die.”

Now it was Zophar’s turn. “Job, you are babbling nonsense. If you would be quiet for awhile and let God speak, then you’d understand God’s many-sided wisdom. Don’t make God too small. You don’t understand God, so don’t go putting your words in God’s mouth. All you have to do is acknowledge that you are guilty, then God can forgive you and you can get on with your life.”

“Why do you keep on tormenting me?” pleaded Job. “Even if it is true that I have done something wrong, it is God who has turned against me. I cry out to God and ask for simple justice and God just breaks me down even further. Nevertheless, I still have faith. I know that my redeemer lives – that God is still there – and that before I die, I will again see the face of my God.”

“Listen, Job, listen!” said Zophar. “You are being punished, and it is for a reason. You are wicked. Accept that.”

“I’ve listened, and you make no sense,” said Job. “You and I both know that wicked people do well in life. They live in big houses and eat rich food and God doesn’t touch them.”

“Job, you are human,” said Bildad. “You are a worm. A maggot. Who do you think you are that you’d get to argue with Almighty God?”

“What wonderful friends you are,” Job sneered. “Look! You are not going to make a liar out of me. I won’t confess sins I haven’t committed. I may have lost everything, but I have not lost my integrity. I just want to be faced by my accuser – to know what sins I am being punished for – to know why I am being put through all this misery. All I want to know is why!”

And so the conversation came to an end. But then another person came on the scene, a young man named Elihu.

“Listen, Job did a good job of justifying himself,” said Elihu, “but he didn’t justify God. And you, his comforters, had nothing to say that was helpful. Job has said he’s being punished for nothing. Well, God is greater than any mortal. God is more powerful than you are, Job. It just is not possible for God to do something wrong, Job, so if there is a fault, it must be yours. God is great and mighty, and rules the heavens and the earth.”

At that point, God spoke directly to Job out of a whirlwind. “Job, you have a lot of high-sounding words, but you have very little knowledge. Stand up straight and pay attention.

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Who ordained the morning stars that sang together – all the heavenly beings who shout for joy? You seem to find many faults with me, Job. Would you like to argue about it with me?”

“No. Oh no!” said Job. “I have nothing to say to you. Nothing at all.”

“Will you put me in the wrong?” God asked. “Will you condemn **me** that **you** may be justified? Can you create the world in all its terror and beauty as I have created it?”

“I know you can do everything,” Job quivered. “Whatever you decide will happen. I realize I was saying things I didn’t understand – things too wonderful for me – things I knew nothing about. I heard about you, God, but now I experience you directly. I’m sorry – so terribly sorry for my arrogance.”

Then God restored the fortunes of Job. In fact, God gave Job twice as much as he had before, and all his family came back and they sat down and ate together again.

God blessed the last days of Job more than his first days, and gave him thousands of camels and oxen and donkeys. Job also had seven sons and three daughters, and the daughters were named Jemimah, Keziah, and Keren-happuch. They were the most beautiful women in the country. Job gave them an inheritance, along with their brothers.

Job lived 140 years, long enough to see his children and grandchildren – four generations in fact – and then died, old and full of days.

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,
all of them available through Wood Lake Publishing.**

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