

Job

One of the people that the Qur'an deals with as a prophet is a man named Job, whom Muslims know as Ayoub. The Bible, which dedicates an entire book to his story, does not present him in the role of prophet. It clearly describes him as a man of integrity in the eyes of God. It is because of this integrity that the story of Job particularly interests us, for his life presents a dilemma.

Job was a good man but he suffered enormously. Such cases lead some people to wonder about the justice of God who allows innocents to suffer in this life. This question constitutes the theme of the biblical book which carries the name of Job.

The story appears to come from the time of those we sometimes call patriarchs, that is Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and other men who lived before the time of Moses. Indeed, Job's lifestyle resembles that of Abraham, and the book of Job does not refer to the Law of Moses or any Jewish institution. In addition, Job lived 140 years after the events described in this book, and that kind of longevity corresponds to the lifespans of people in the time of the patriarchs.

Let us allow the Bible to tell the story of this man:

"There was a man in the country of Uz named Job. He was a man of perfect integrity, who feared God and turned away from evil. He had seven sons and three daughters. His estate included 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and a very large number of servants. Job was the greatest man among all the people of the east." (Job 1:1-3).

"One day the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord asked Satan, 'Where have you come from?' 'From roaming through the earth,' Satan answered Him, 'and walking around on it.' Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? No one else on earth is like him, a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and turns away from evil.'

Satan answered the Lord, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Haven't You placed a hedge around him, his household, and everything he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But

stretch out Your hand and strike everything he owns, and he will surely curse You to Your face.' 'Very well,' the Lord told Satan, 'everything he owns is in your power. However, you must not lay a hand on Job himself.' So Satan left the Lord's presence.

One day when Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and reported: 'While the oxen were plowing and the donkeys grazing nearby, the Sabeans swooped down and took them away. They struck down the servants with the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you!'

He was still speaking when another messenger came and reported: 'A lightning storm struck from heaven. It burned up the sheep and the servants and devoured them, and I alone have escaped to tell you!'

That messenger was still speaking when yet another came and reported: 'The Chaldeans formed three bands, made a raid on the camels, and took them away. They struck down the servants with the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you!'

He was still speaking when another messenger came and reported: 'Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house. Suddenly a powerful wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on the young people so that they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you!'

Then Job stood up, tore his robe, and shaved his head. He fell to the ground and worshiped, saying, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will leave this life. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Praise the name of Yahweh.'

Throughout all this Job did not sin or blame God for anything." (Job 1:6-22)

In the second chapter of the book, Satan presents himself again before God, who makes him notice the subject of Job:

"Have you considered My servant Job? No one else on earth is like him, a man of perfect

integrity, who fears God and turns away from evil. He still retains his integrity, even though you incited Me against him, to destroy him without just cause.' ... Satan answered the Lord. 'A man will give up everything he owns in exchange for his life. But stretch out Your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse You to Your face.' 'Very well,' the Lord told Satan, 'he is in your power; only spare his life.'

So Satan left the Lord's presence and infected Job with terrible boils from the sole of his foot to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself while he sat among the ashes.

His wife said to him, 'Do you still retain your integrity? Curse God and die!' 'You speak as a foolish woman speaks,' he told her. 'Should we accept only good from God and not adversity?' Throughout all this Job did not sin in what he said.

Now when Job's three friends—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite—heard about all this adversity that had happened to him, each of them came from his home. They met together to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they looked from a distance, they could barely recognize him. They wept aloud, and each man tore his robe and threw dust into the air and on his head. Then they sat on the ground with him seven days and nights, but no one spoke a word to him because they saw that his suffering was very intense." (Job 2)

"After this, Job began to speak and cursed the day he was born. He said, 'May the day I was born perish, and the night when they said, "A boy is conceived." ... Why was I not stillborn; why didn't I die as I came from the womb? Now I would certainly be lying down in peace; I would be asleep.'" (Job 3:1-3, 11, 13)

"You have turned against me with cruelty; You harass me with Your strong hand. You lift me up on the wind and make me ride it; You scatter me in the storm." (Job 30:21,22)

Then Job's friends began to reason with him and counsel him. They put forward several ideas about suffering but they agreed that Job was suffering because God was punishing him for his sins. This is

the principal idea in all their speeches. If Job were really innocent, he would not be so miserable. Instead of consoling him, their false accusations hurt him more. Nevertheless, Job held onto his integrity. He did not know why God had sent him all these troubles, and he could not keep from wondering about the injustice of which he was a victim. He was seriously tested because he was still convinced of the power and sovereignty of God, who governs the affairs of men, and of his own innocence. He had always tried to practice righteousness.

At one point, he seems to accuse God of acting badly, of being unjust and cruel. Later he expresses confidence that even if he died, he would see God one day and God would deal with him favorably, but he continues to say very harsh things about how God has treated him.

Finally, toward the end of the book of Job, God himself begins to speak and asks Job:

"Who is this who obscures My counsel with ignorant words? Get ready to answer Me like a man; when I question you, you will inform Me. Where were you when I established the earth?... Have you ever in your life commanded the morning or assigned the dawn its place... Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Have you seen the gates of deep darkness?... Where is the road to the home of light? Do you know where darkness lives, so you can lead it back to its border?... Do you give strength to the horse? Do you adorn his neck with a mane?... Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? Let him who argues with God give an answer." (Job 38-40:2)

"Then Job answered the Lord: 'I am so insignificant. How can I answer You? I place my hand over my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not reply... Surely I spoke about things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.... Therefore I take back my words and repent in dust and ashes.'" (Job 40:3-5, 42:3-6)

Then God severely reprimanded Job's friends who had declared falsehoods about him. Despite God's criticism of Job for his words, He recognizes that his servant has maintained his integrity and He shows him His favor.

"The Lord restored his prosperity and doubled his previous possessions... So the Lord blessed the

last part of Job's life more than the first... He also had seven sons and three daughters... Job lived 140 years after this and saw his children and their children to the fourth generation." (Job 42).

It is important to notice in this story that God never told Job why he had suffered. He did not answer all the questions that Job had posed during his extreme suffering. He only reminds him that Job does not know everything, but God has perfect knowledge of all things. So the creature must have confidence in the Creator, who holds the answers. We must walk by faith and not by sight.

Job dared to believe that there would be a resurrection where he would see justice. We Christians have assurance of this as 2 Timothy 1:10 tells us that God "has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel". This is how, whatever the misery we endure in this life, we can say with the apostle Paul in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us."