

A BIBLICAL STUDY ON FEAR

LESSON TWENTY-THREE: GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

by Sandy Harber

"Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? " Job 1:9

God has many wonderful attributes. One of my favorites is His sovereignty. That means He can do anything He wants to: He's God. Nothing can stop Him or set boundaries around Him. His only limitations are His Own attributes. For example, He cannot be evil because of His righteousness. He cannot hate because He is love. He cannot be unforgiving, unmerciful, or ungracious. He must operate within the parameters of His Own character. It's that sterling character that guarantees that whatever He does is for the good of all creation, over which He has complete authority. Imagine if Satan were sovereign and could do whatever he chose to do. We'd all be living in hell. Look at the damage evil rulers have caused when there is no check or deterrent on their powers.

Pastor Greg gave us some good points when he taught a series on God's sovereignty. He said: 1) God has a plan; 2) God is always in control; and, 3) everybody works for God. The scene in heaven depicted in Job chapter one illustrates this last point. In Job, we learn that God periodically holds court, summoning the angels to report on their own activities (Job 1:6). Satan was among the attendees. He reported that he walked freely up and down the earth. Why? I Peter 5:8 answers that for us: he is "seeking whom he may devour." Interestingly, the root of the Hebrew word "Satan" means "to attack." "Satan," of course, means "adversary." He is the enemy of God and desires to attack everyone who stands with God. The Bible calls him "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10). Satan brings accusations against believers before God "day and night" (Rev. 12:10). The Greek word "diabolos" means "accuser" and is used 34 times in the New Testament as a title for Satan. The English word "devil" is derived from the Greek.

God preempted Satan on this occasion and presents His "servant" Job as an example of a faithful follower who fears (reverences) Him (v. 8). He cites four characteristics that prove Job's worthiness. He is: 1) perfect (complete; mature); 2) upright (straight; to be right); 3) fears God (reverential awe); and, 4) eschews evil (is turned off by bad, spoiled, or good for nothing things).

Satan ignores three of Job's qualities but brings his accusation against the fourth, the one that defines Job's relationship with God. "Of course Job worships you," Satan said. "You protect him and give him all kinds of material things. Take away his possessions and he'll curse You to Your face" (vv. 9-11). Satan implies that Job's motives are selfish. Then he challenges God to remove His hand of blessing and see what happens.

The theme of the book of Job is the sovereignty of God. Satan needed God's permission to do anything to Job. God allows suffering for His Own reasons. At times, He permits us a glimpse into His purposes; other times, He does not. Job eventually realized that He had no right to question God (Job 40:4, 5; 42:1-6). God vindicated Job and taught Job's friends a lesson: suffering is not always the result of sin (Job 42:7-10). And, by allowing Satan to test Job, God was able to silence Satan's false accusations against His servants. Satan was jealous of God. He wanted the worship that God deserved. Believers, like Job, proved that God was worthy of the praise and worship of His followers because of Who He is and not because of the blessings that He bestows.

Likewise, we may never know the reason for the suffering and tragedies we encounter in life. But we know that there is a higher purpose, and God is working behind the scenes for our good. He is in control. He is sovereign.

"And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." Job 28:28