

Thesis:

The Lord did not cause Job's suffering to primarily teach us how to suffer, although a godly response to human suffering may be learned from Job.

Proof:

The thesis "the Lord caused Job's suffering to teach us how to suffer" confuses the historical with the dialectical. Learning how to suffer is a valid answer to the question "why is Job in the biblical canon?" It does not answer the question "why did Job suffer?"

The prologue and epilogue inform the reader that the purpose of Job's suffering is found in the upper heavenly register – Job suffers as God's human instrument to demonstrate His infallible divine wisdom. Indeed, God initiated the test of Job. But the test was first for Satan's sake.

"Millions might learn from one man's experience" and "we each suffer the effects of original and personal sin" both imply that Job is guilty like us – something the prologue disallows. Job's "suffering is not a punishment for his sins."¹ Job is a fallen man, but he is suffering unjustly as a "blameless" servant of God. Job's general sinful condition is irrelevant to the plot, but his finite wisdom is crucial to understanding the Lord's response.

Many examples from Israel's redemptive history are provided (Abraham, Hosea, the desert wanderings) as records to save us the trouble of learning suffering all over again. But God's character and plan are the objects of the lessons; our response to Him is always a derivative of this truth. James 5:10-11 teaches that we may have perseverance and hope in the midst of trials *because* we know what the Lord intended for Job (unsurpassed compassion and mercy). God tested Job to reveal His compassion and mercy, and only then did Job respond with the proper attitude of humble submission. We must resist the temptation to place the human perspective of practicality before the divine perspective.

Refutation:

All proposed reasons for Job's suffering must flow from the mind of God above to us below. God is sovereign, but why does He choose a particular path to manifest His ruling power? The long duration of Job's sufferings "was serving heaven's own secret purposes, including the completion of the test and the exhausting of the human arguments."² The purpose lies in heaven and the cosmic struggle between God and the Satan for claim to glory. The Lord is glorified in his wisdom, and Job is the chosen instrument to bring Him glory.

Perhaps a better way to explain the Christological significance in Job's suffering is not in terms of the anthropomorphic Theology of Glory, but rather in the language of the Theology of the Cross. Job/Christ is not ultimately our great example to strive toward, but is more properly understood as our refuge and hope for deliverance in the midst of suffering.

Conclusion:

If the purpose of Job's suffering is to teach me how to suffer, I might hang on for the ride while secretly (wrongfully) pining for the double-restitution I am due.

References:

1. *Exploring the Old Testament*, Lucas, p. 118.
2. *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes*, Kidner, p. 62.