

# JOB



Mimi Forsyth

This lesson looks at the story of Job, whose capacity for articulate complaint excels his reputation for patience. As we flip through the Book of Job in the New Revised Standard Version, a major difference in the style of the book becomes immediately apparent. The first two chapters, 32:1-5, and the final eleven verses are in story or narrative form. The rest of the book, Chapter 3 through the first six verses of Chapter 42, is poetry.

The narrative portions at the beginning and the end of the book make up the prologue and the epilogue. The poetry forms the main body of the book. First of all let us quickly survey the book's content. Verses 1 through 5 begin the prologue by telling us of Job's piety. Read Job 1:1-5.

A conversation follows between God and Satan. Satan questions the motivation of Job's piety. He argues that Job is pious only because God protects and rewards him. To prove that this is not the case, God allows Satan to bring misfortune upon Job and his family. This misfortune occurs without Job's knowing the source of his troubles. Three concerned friends then arrive to offer condolence to the suffering Job. Job and his friends speak about the reason for his suffering. In these speeches, Job claims that he is innocent of wrongdoing and wishes that God would state the charges against him and explain the reason for his suffering. Finally, Job personally confronts God who points out that only God has the power to do mighty works and

reminds Job that there is much in life that Job cannot understand.

The epilogue in Job 42:7-17 resolves Job's problems. God restores his possessions and his sons and daughters. Job's intercession on behalf of his friends who have displeased God appears to motivate these rewards.

Many scholars believe that the story of Job originally circulated in an oral form. Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures had stories similar to that of Job. All these stories deal with the problem of a righteous person who suffers without apparent reason. The prologue and epilogue probably once existed as a complete short story without the speeches. Later storytellers enhanced the story by adding the conversations between Job and his friends and God's speeches in poetry form. In expanding the narrative, the poets were attempting to explore the problem of suffering in greater depth.

The original narrative form of Job pictures him as a man of patience and long-suffering. The later poetic speeches present an impatient Job who bitterly complains of his condition.

## **JOB 1-2**

The prologue in Chapters 1 and 2 introduces Job, a family man who is righteous, wealthy, and highly respected. He lives in the land of Uz. Verses 4 and 5 tell about his sons and daughters who celebrate together on special days. Job expresses his parental concern through sacrifices for the possible sins of his sons. The picture is one of a very happy family.

We meet Satan for the first time in Job 1:6. He presents himself before God. Here Satan appears as a servant of God. Satan devises a plan to test Job. By testing Job, Satan hopes to show that Job is faithful only because of what he gets from God.

Job 1:13-19 tell of the dramatic destruction of Job's servants, livestock, and children. In verses 20 to 22 we read about Job's reaction in the face of trouble. Job

remains sinless and does not accuse God of acting in an unacceptable manner. In verse 21 he confesses, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

In Chapter 2 Satan comes to make another deal with God. God vouches for Job's integrity, but Satan is sure he can break down Job. This time God grants Satan power to afflict Job further, stating only that Satan must spare Job's life.

Satan immediately afflicts Job with "loathsome sores" from head to foot. Job's affliction makes him unclean. He leaves his house for an ash heap where he sits scraping himself with a potsherd. Job's wife tries to talk him into ending it all. "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die," she says. Job reproves his wife for her foolish ways and expresses his acceptance of both good and evil from the hand of God.

1. In the prologue, God and Satan meet twice to discuss Job. Read Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6, then answer these questions.

a. In the first meeting, how did Satan desire to test Job's loyalty to God?

b. When Job passed the first test, what did Satan suggest as an additional test?

c. What limit did God place on the first test of Job?

d. What limit did God place on the second test of Job?

2. The Bible reports on how Job performed in the second test. Read Job 2:9-10, then explain what you think the statement, “Job did not sin with his lips,” means.

### **JOB 3-8**

At the end of Chapter 2 the narrator reports the visit of Job’s three friends who come to console and comfort him. Job’s deplorable condition shocks Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar; and at first they do not recognize him. After wailing, tearing their robes, and sprinkling dust on their heads, they sit with Job in silence—day and night—for a week.

With this setting the writer of the poetic section of Job presents the speeches of Job and his friends. Job begins with a complaint and a denunciation of life. In turn the friends and Job answer one another. A friend speaks, Job responds; another friend speaks, Job responds, and so on. In three sets of speeches, Job and his friends take turns stating their cases and their understanding of the situation. The first two sets of speeches are well preserved in Chapters 4 through 21. The third round of speeches in Chapters 22 through 27 is in fragmentary form. No one knows why this third cycle was not preserved intact. Now that we know the writer’s pattern, let us go back and examine some of the arguments of the various speeches.

In Chapter 3 Job curses the day of his birth. He reasons that to never see life might be better than suffering the miseries of his tormented state. Read Job 3:2-5.

The speeches of Job and his friends are actually individual monologues. The speakers frequently do not address one another or take seriously what the other has said. The writer obviously has a reason for this technique. This approach allows the writer to speculate on practically every conceivable approach to the problem of evil and suffering without declaring any one of these as the right understanding.

Job’s friends propose any number of possible interpretations of Job’s trouble: he is guilty of some sin he needs to confess, God is chastening him for his ultimate good, Job is guilty of arrogance before God, and Job is suffering the misery that befalls all persons to lesser and greater degrees.

Read the verses listed below, and write in your own words the reasons that Job’s friends suggest for his suffering.

a. (4:8)

b. (8:4)

c. (8:13)

d. (15:31)

### **JOB 9-31**

None of the traditional answers to the problem of human misery satisfy Job. He argues that no cause-and-effect relationship exists in his experience. Nothing in his life warrants the misery Job encounters.

Job does not content himself to respond only to his friends. He takes on God. Job directs many of his speeches to the divine rather than to his friends. For Job, God is more the enemy than the friends.

Job complains that God will not leave him alone. Even when he lies upon his bed, God scares him with dreams and terrifies him with visions. Job cannot get God to respond to his complaint. Read Job 9:32-33.

Job pleads with God to clearly state the case against him. In spite of his misery Job refuses to admit guilt or at least any guilt sufficient to produce his torment. In Job 19:23-29 Job wants to record his words in a book or chisel them into stone. He believes that ultimately his Redeemer will vindicate him. Job hopes to find God and argue his case directly and hear God's response.

In Chapter 31 Job ends his arguments with a confession where he lists numerous sins of which he claims innocence. He places himself under a curse if he is guilty.

1. Despite his desperate physical condition, Job yet looked to God for vindication. Read Job 19:23-27. Describe in your own words Job's hope.

2. In Chapter 31 Job denies that he has committed a number of sins. Identify these sins.

a. (31:5)

b. (31:9)

c. (31:13)

d. (31:16)

e. (31:24-25)

f. (31:29)

g. (31:33)

## **JOB 32-42**

In Chapters 32 through 37 a young man named Elihu puts in his first appearance. He offers his understanding of Job's condition. Elihu really offers no new perspective on the issue, but summarizes many of the arguments already put forth.

Finally God responds to Job twice—first in Chapters 38 and 39, and again in Chapters 40 and 41. God does not refute Job's arguments directly. Instead God points out the futility of human wisdom and affirms a divine, if mysterious, purpose in creation. Against the marvelous world of creation and the power of the Creator, humankind is weak and without answers. Read Job 40:6-9.

Job responds to God twice but can no longer defend himself. He confesses that

over against the mysteries of creation, he is of little account and will argue his case no more. Job receives no explanation for his sufferings. God transcends his sufferings. God directs Job and the reader away from the issues of suffering and justice and toward God. The impatient and persistent Job willingly confesses that to see and hear God is in itself sufficient. Read Job's confession in Job 42:1-6.

Re-read Job's confession in Job 42:1-6 to find the answers to these questions.

a. What does Job say to God in verse 2? Write it in your own words.

b. What is Job saying to God in verse 3?

c. What does Job do at the end of his confession?

### SUMMARY

With the Book of Job we enter a new phase of our book-by-book study of the Bible. Until this lesson we have studied historical books. With Job we begin a group of books that are poetic in nature.

Five important parts of this book are listed below.

- (1) Satan's testing of Job (Job 1-2)
- (2) The visit from Job's friends and the dialogue that takes place among the four men (Job 2)

- (3) Job's conclusion that he is innocent (Job 31)
- (4) The speeches of God to Job (Job 38-41)
- (5) The confession of Job and the restoration of his fortunes (Job 42)

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. We noted in question 2 on page 56 that Job had not sinned *with his lips*. Discuss why this idea was stressed in the prologue. How are speech and deeds related? How might Christians today be guilty of sinning with the lips? When have you committed this kind of sin?

2. Try to put yourself in Job's place. Then think about the advice that Job's friends give him. Do you think Job's friends are a positive or negative influence on him? Do they help him or make matters worse? How can we use this biblical example to become better friends to other people?

3. The question of why the innocent must suffer is found not only in the Book of Job, but elsewhere in the Bible and in literature. Humankind has always looked in vain for a sure answer to this question. It is all right to disagree with the answer Job gives. According to this book Job, the innocent man is suffering because God has willed it. Job spends forty chapters trying to discover why God has willed his suffering. What answer does the Book of Job give to this question? Why do you agree or disagree with its answer?

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### DAILY READINGS FOR PSALMS

- Day 1: Psalm 1  
Day 2: Psalm 8  
Day 3: Psalm 23  
Day 4: Psalm 46  
Day 5: Psalm 67  
Day 6: Psalm 100  
Day 7: Psalm 150