

Old Testament Survey
Lesson 18 – Job
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
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Bible Poetry

The Bible is often viewed as a book of religious teachings, a book of rules, or a history book full of dull, boring facts, people, places, dates, and events. In reality, the Bible is the Word of God brought to us through the styles, personalities, and experiences people moved by God. It reads more like a great historical novel than a history text and it is all true. It is emotional, realistic, exciting, sometimes puzzling, and deals with areas of our lives we consider secular as well as spiritual. This is especially evident in the next group of OT books that we will cover which is poetry. These books are also often called "wisdom literature". There is poetry of various forms throughout Scripture, but the next section is comprised of five complete books of poetry: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

The reference to poetry has to do with the form of the content and does not imply imaginative or fanciful content. Neither does the term "poetical" mean that it is rhythmic. In the west, even now, many people expect poetry to rhyme and have a clearly defined rhythm. But that is not always so, such as in Shakespeare which has rhythm but does not always rhyme. Hebrew is a pictorial language using word pictures as opposed to strict word definition. So it is, by nature, poetic.

Much Hebrew poetry depends on parallelism of thought (repeating an idea) rather than phonic coupling of the words to make it poetic. Norman Geisler explains four out of several of the more important kinds of Hebrew parallelism.

1. Synonymous Parallelism: both lines say substantially the same thing.

⁷When the morning stars sang together
And all the sons of God shouted for joy? Job 38:7

2. Antithetical Parallelism: the second line provides a contrasting parallel to the truth of the first line.

³⁴Righteousness exalts a nation,
But sin is a disgrace to any people. Prov 14:34

3. Synthetical Parallelism: one line builds on the previous line.

³He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers. Psa 1:3

4. Exemplar Parallelism: one line metaphorically illustrates the literal truth of the other.

¹⁷Iron sharpens iron,
So one man sharpens another. Prov 27:17

Each of the poetical books answers a different question:

Job – Why do “good” people suffer? Or better – “Who is the Almighty that we should serve Him?” (21:15)

Psalms – What is worship? Psalms expresses every emotion that we can ever face: love and anger toward God, frustration and anger with men, personal doubt and confusion, grief and joy, praise and worship.

Proverbs – What is wisdom? Proverbs examines the practical such as relationships, honesty, work ethic, money, as well as the profound, like moral absolutes and spiritual maturity.

Ecclesiastes – What is the chief end of man?

Song of Solomon – What is romantic love? Song of Solomon celebrates the joy of love between man and woman as God intended it to be.

The Book of Job

The Book of Job has been acclaimed as a significant piece of literature, even in the secular world where schools often read it in their literature and philosophy classes. Lord Tennyson called it, "the greatest poem, whether of ancient or modern literature," and philosopher Thomas Carlyle said, "I call that one of the grandest [things] ever written with a pen." Martin Luther thought it was, "more magnificent and sublime than any other book of Scripture."

The Man Job

The Book of Job is believed by many to be the oldest book in the world. Uz was probably northeast of Palestine (1:8, 15, 17, 19). The time of Job's life was probably during the period of the patriarchs:

1. He lived to a very old age. "...after this, he lived 140 years." (Job 42:16)
2. He and his detractors never refer to the Mosaic Law which would have been apropos to the arguments. That means pre-Exodus.
3. He acted as a high priest in his family.
4. Eliphaz was a decedent of Esau's oldest son (Gen 36:10) which would make him and Job contemporaries with Jacob.

We do not know much about Job. He is mentioned only twice outside the book that bears his name. In Ezekiel 14:4 the Lord compares his righteousness to that of Noah and Daniel. And in James we read:

¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. James 5:10-11 (ESV)

In Job we find him to be rich physically (lots of stuff) and spiritually (leading his family in work and worship and worrying about his children's walk with the Lord), and, of course, he has God's personal endorsement, "...*there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.*"

Author

To identify the author of Job is highly speculative. Some scholars say Moses, others Ezra, Solomon, or even Job himself. Elihu is also thought of as a candidate based on 32:16-17.

Introduction

When studying the book of Job, the first question usually asked is, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The answers to that question include:

1. Judgment – Some people suffer because of their own disobedience and rebellion against God. (Cain)
2. Discipline – Some need to be corrected and brought to repentance. (David)
3. Training – Some who have done nothing to merit suffering receive it to help them grow and mature. (James)
4. Sin – Some just bump into the result of sin in a fallen world. (People killed other's)
5. Persecution – Some are harassed by Satan or others in an attempt to destroy their faith. (Mordecai)
6. Purpose – Some suffer as part of God's greater plan. (Joseph)
7. Natural Consequences – Some suffer because of stupid mistakes or indecision. (Man built on sand)
8. Catastrophe – Some experience natural disasters. (Californians)

The book of Job actually offers little explanation for Job's suffering. If answers to the question, "Why do good people suffer?" is what we are after, we will be sorely disappointed. Perhaps we are looking for the wrong thing. Perhaps the question we should be asking is not, "Why do the righteous suffer?" but, "Why should anyone love and serve God?" After all, that is Satan's leading question, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (1:9) Job's friends' answer was simple: *"We fear God because it is safe and we don't want to make Him mad. If we are righteous we prosper, if not we lose everything."* Job's question is even, *"Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him?"* (21:15)

I. Act I: Prologue in Prose – Narrative Introduction (Chapters 1-2)

It is interesting to see that the Book of Job begins by showing us how foolish the arguments against Job are. The first act opens by introducing our hero, Job, at home in Uz, and quickly paints his character for us with a broad brush.

A. Scene One: Land of Uz in the Natural World (1:1-5)

1. The Man of God (1:1 and 1:5)

Job is among an elite group of which virtually no negative information is given. Noah, Enoch, Daniel, Ruth, ... very few were in his class. He was righteous himself and he showed a great concern for the righteousness of his kids. He was the head priest of his family leading his family in worship. It is clear that Job is not suffering because of some great sin in his life.

2. Man of Means (2-4)

He had seven sons, three daughters, many servants, and owned great herds of live stock. In fact, he was "one of the greatest of men in the east" (v3), meaning he was both rich and powerful.

B. Scene Two: Heaven (1:6-12)

Satan comes from cruising around the world, looking for trouble. He is here to accuse God and God's followers. After all he is, "the accuser of the brethren" and his name means adversary.

1. God's Nomination (6-8)

God said, "Did you check out my servant Job? He's special, he's holy, he's loyal, and he's righteous." (v8)

2. Satan's Proposal (9-11)

Satan replied, "Does Job serve you for nothing?" Doesn't he serve you for the perks. Don't you protect him from all the bad stuff and give him lots of good stuff. Just take the stuff away and he'll curse you to your face.

3. God's Permission (12)

God trusts Job and so He allows Satan to have control over this stuff, but not his person. Note here that Satan could do nothing to Job without God's permission.

C. Scene Three: Meanwhile back in Uz (1:13-22)

1. Job Losses His Possessions (13-17)

Job is at home while his family parties at his oldest son's house. Three servants come, one by one, with the bad news: the Sabeans, a nomadic tribe, killed all his farm hands and stole his oxen and donkeys; fire from heaven fell killing all his sheep and shepherds; and the Chaldeans raided the ranch, rustling all his livestock and killing all his hands. So far, so bad. He has lost everything but his family and three servants.

2. Job Losses His Family (18-22)

Lastly, a great wind came leveled his son's house and killed all his children (and grandchildren?). Did Job pass this unbelievable, torturous test? With flying colors!

²⁰Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. ²¹He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."

²²Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God. Job 1:20-22

D. Scene four: Meanwhile Back in Heaven (2:1-6)

Satan is back and he is losing. Will he yield to God? Never!

1. God's Nomination Restated (1-3)

Do I dare say that God rubbed it in? "Have you checked out Job lately? If I'm right, I think he still loves me and lives righteously even though he lost everything."

2. Satan's Proposal Renewed (4-5)

Satan answers with an old Jewish proverb, "Skin for skin," which means that man values nothing as much as his own skin. "Touch his bone and flesh and he will curse you to your face." (v5)

3. God's Permission reissued (6)

God's answer is, "Do your worst, but don't kill him." Note again, Satan could do nothing without God's permission.

E. Scene Five: One More Time in Uz (2:7-10)

1. Job Lost His Health (7-8)

Satan "smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head." (v7) He was so sick. He was desperate and tormented.

2. Job Lost His Wife (9-10)

She may not have died, but she was dead to him emotionally and spiritually. "Why don't you just curse God and die." (v9) Our mate's words can crush us, but still Job remained righteous.

3. Job Lost His Friends (11-13)

Elphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, Job's three friends came to the rescue, "to sympathize with him and comfort him." (v11) After all, what are buddies for? He certainly did not lose them physically, but he lost their trust and support. Sometimes silence is golden, but perhaps they could have said something to him about God's faithfulness and tender mercy. Did Job pass this test?

⁹Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" ¹⁰But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. Job 2:9-10

¹⁵"Though He slay me, I will hope in Him..." Job 13:15a

II. Act Two: Dialogue in Poetry (Chapter 3-42:6)

Job now had to face, perhaps his hardest test – advise from his friends.

A. Scene One: In Ashes in Uz (3-37)

1. Monologue (3)

Did Job suffer silently? Hardly! He did a very thorough job of cursing: he cursed the day he was born; he cursed the sun and the moon ("blot them out"); he cursed the world (calling on the monsters tear it up and wipe it out); he cursed life and extolled death (get me out of here).

2. Dialogue with Three Friends (4-31)

We do not have time to study the complex interaction between Job and his three friends, but it happened in three cycles of argument and rebuttal. His friends presented arguments based on errant theology – many of which are held in the church today. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar's argument is based on a belief that the innocent do not suffer, sinners do. God is perfectly righteous and man brings trouble on himself, God never twists justice, and God knows iniquity. Job's friends continue to urge that he repent of some grievous, secret sin. Job did not argue with their basic creeds, only with their belief that he was suffering for those reasons. His primary argument is always the same: "I didn't do anything wrong. If I did, show me what it was."

First Cycle	Second Cycle	Third Cycle	Elihu
Eliphaz (4-5)	Eliphaz (15)	Eliphaz (22)	Elihu Intervenes (32)
Job (6-7)	Job (16-17)	Job (23-24)	Elihu's First Rebuttal (33)
Bildad (8)	Bildad (18)	Bildad (25)	Elihu's Second Rebuttal (34)
Job (9-10)	Job (19)	Job (26)	Elihu's Third Rebuttal (35)
Zophar (11)	Zophar (20)	Job (27-28)	Elihu's Conclusion (36-37)
Job (12-14)	Job (21)	Job (29-31)	

3. Dialog with Elihu (32-37)

Elihu, a younger man enters the dialogue. He comes closer to the truth and urges Job to humble himself, have patience, and submit to his suffering as God's will. He believed that there must be some great purpose for Job's suffering and rebuked him for unjustly accusing God.

J. Sidlow Baxter summarized Elihu's position: *"He accepts Job's protestation of innocence, and his point is that although Job's protestation of innocence may be genuine enough, his present attitude and spirit are wrong. Job's suffering may not be for past sin at all. His suffering is more probably a chastening with some ultimately good purpose, but Job is thwarting his own good by his impossible attitude."* (Explore the Book)

Only God knew the truth about Job, and He wasn't telling... yet!

B. Scene Two: In a Whirlwind in Uz (38-42:6)

Everybody got it wrong: Satan was wrong to think Job loved God for the stuff. His wife was wrong to think loss of wealth, health, and family meant loss of everything. His friends were wrong when they thought Job had sinned. Even Job was wrong when he thought God might be unjust. It is time for all men to shut up and listen to God.

1. **God Speaks (38-40:2)**

God does not choose to answer any questions, especially not why do bad things happen to good people? He chooses instead to ask him, Who do you think you are second- guessing me? (38:4) "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth! Tell me if you have the answer." Then He focuses, not on what is happening, but on who He is:

He is the creator of the universe.

He is the controller of everything and everybody.

His providence is evident in all of history.

His character is one of holiness and justice.

2. **Job Responds (40:2-5)**

Job wakes up, he understands, he becomes wise and humble: he has nothing left to say ... the mouth is speechless.

3. **God Speaks Again (40:6-41)**

If this were a football game, we would say God piled on. He has one more major point to make. HE IS POWERFUL! More powerful than Job or any other man. In fact, think of the most fearsome creatures you can imagine, behemoth and leviathan, and they are nothing next to God.

4. **Job Repents (42:1-6)**

Job yielded completely to a new vision of God. "I know now how great you are (v2), I know I can't understand what you do (v4), I know you are the teacher and I'm the student (v4). Then the capstone statement of understanding, (v5-6) ""I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes." J. Vernon McGee believes this is the primary purpose of the Book of Job, to teach repentance. He feels that we admit that bad people need to repent. People like Ahab need to repent. Saul needed to repent. Hitler needed to repent. That is an easy concept but what he feels we need to learn, and he is right of course, is that good people also need to repent. David, Job, Paul--"there is none righteous"--needed to repent. And, we need to repent. The bigger question though is, "Who is the Almighty that we should serve Him?" He is God, He is wonderful, He is majestic, He made us, He loves us, He wants us to be His children!

III. Act Three: Epilogue in Prose (Chapter 42)

It's only fair to find out what happens to our hero.

A. Scene One: Land of Uz (42)

1. Reconciliation (1-9)

God was upset because Job's friends had presented a false picture of Him. But, in His mercy and for Job's sake he has Job pray for them and offer sacrifice for their sins.

2. Restoration (10-17)

God restored Job's fortune, his extended family, and more stuff than he had before. He also allowed he and his wife to have exactly seven sons and three daughters. Job lived another 140 years and died prosperous, happy, and probably, very wise.

Homework

- Read your five favorite Psalms