

JOB SIGHT—THE BOOK OF JOB

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

Getting Acquainted

The book of Job narrates the agony and faith of a great saint in order to teach us about the way in which the Lord governs his world, and how we can trust him when we suffer. Job was a deeply spiritual man who was greatly blessed for his faith (see Job 1:1–3), but when the motives for Job’s piety were questioned by the Accuser, the Lord allowed Job to lose every earthly blessing in order to prove the genuineness of his dependence upon God. Job’s friends visited him with good intentions (2:11; 33:32) but only caused him more pain (19:12) by insisting that he must have sinned in order to have provoked such brutal treatment from God. Job admits he has needed forgiveness many times but insists he has walked in integrity with God and has done nothing to deserve such suffering. As a result, Job finds himself forced to the terrifying but mistaken conclusion that God has treated him unjustly—that God is not fully just or good or trustworthy. Even while saying these dark things about God, however, Job will also express remarkable faith and a certainty that he will be reconciled to the Lord.

The debate between Job and his friends over the character of God and Job and, by extension, over the moral order of life only alienates and embitters Job. It is not until the Lord himself speaks to Job about the way in which he rules the universe—and what place he allows for evil—that Job is comforted. Having proved that he loves God for God’s sake, irrespective of any blessing God might grant, Job is restored to the full and blessed life that God desires for all of his children.

Placing Job in the Larger Story

The Old Testament has much to say about suffering and interprets it in various ways. In Deuteronomy, God warns that his destructive curse will fall on Israel if they break covenant with him and trust in other gods (Deuteronomy 28). Proverbs often states that sin brings about suffering as its natural consequence (e.g., Prov. 10:14). In the book of Job, on the other hand, the title character suffers *precisely because he is so devout*—and he suffers in a way that is unbearable and impossible for him to explain. The book of Job thus nuances and deepens how we are to think about suffering and about why God sometimes allows pain that seems to serve no purpose and have no explanation. The book shows us how to speak to extreme suffering and demonstrates the promises God makes to us in our suffering.

As we will see, Job prefigures Jesus in that both men suffer greatly because of their obedience to God in order to further God’s purposes, to defeat the accusations of the Accuser, and to glorify the Lord.

Key Verse

“Does Job fear God for no reason?” (Job 1:9)

Date and Historical Background

Job lived outside of Israel: the “land of Uz” (Job 1:1) is either close to Edom or is another name for that country (see Lam. 4:21; Jer. 25:20). There are a variety of indications in the book that Job lived in the earliest stages of Old Testament history. For example, Ezekiel refers to Job as a well-known figure of remarkable piety (Ezek. 14:14). Further, Job and his friends refer to God most often with the archaic name *Shaddai* (see Ex. 6:3). They know some truths about God but never refer to the covenants between the Lord and Israel. Job also lives to a very old age (140 years; 42:16) and sacrifices without a priest, as Abraham

did (Job 1:5). For these and other reasons, this story seems to take place around the time of the early chapters of Genesis.

The narrator of the story, however, refers in chapters 1–2 and in the Lord’s speeches in chapters 38–41 to the covenant name *Yahweh*—the name by which God revealed himself to Israel (Ex. 3:12–14). Although the narrator does not identify himself, the fact that he narrates events that transpire in heaven, of which the human characters of the book are not aware, suggests that an inspired Israelite has shaped a story about a famous man in order to teach us about God’s providence and loyalty to him in suffering. We do not know in which period of Israelite history this narrator lived.

Outline

- I. Job’s Tragedy (1:1–2:13)**
- II. Job’s Cosmic Lament over His Suffering (3:1–26)**
- III. The Debate between Job and His Friends over the Meaning of His Suffering (4:1–31:40)**
 - A. Round one (4:1–14:22)**
 1. Eliphaz (4:1–5:27)
 2. Job (6:1–7:21)
 3. Bildad (8:1–22)
 4. Job (9:1–10:22)
 5. Zophar (11:1–20)
 6. Job (12:1–14:22)
 - B. Round two (15:1–21:34)**
 1. Eliphaz (15:1–35)
 2. Job (16:1–17:16)
 3. Bildad (18:1–21)
 4. Job (19:1–29)
 5. Zophar (20:1–29)
 6. Job (21:1–34)
 - C. Round three (22:1–27:23)**
 1. Eliphaz (22:1–30)
 2. Job (23:1–24:25)
 3. Bildad (25:1–6)
 4. Job (26:1–27:23)
 - D. Interlude: Where can wisdom be found? (28:1–28)**
 - E. Job’s final defense (29:1–31:40)**
- IV. Elihu’s Speeches (32:1–37:24)**
- V. The Lord’s Speeches (38:1–41:34)**
 - A. First speech: Creation and its inhabitants (38:1–40:5)**
 1. The architecture of creation (38:1–38)
 2. Different animals in creation (38:39–39:30)
 3. Job’s first response (40:1–5)
 - B. Second speech: Behemoth and Leviathan (40:6–41:34)**
 1. The preparation of the divine warrior (40:6–14)
 2. Behemoth (40:15–24)
 3. Leviathan (41:1–34)
- VI. Job’s Restoration (42:1–17)**
 - A. Job’s second response and his spiritual restoration (42:1–6)**
 - B. Job’s social and physical restoration (42:7–17)**

As You Get Started

What is your understanding of how the book of Job contributes to the Bible? What do we learn of in this book that no other book teaches us?

What is your current understanding of what the book of Job contributes to Christian theology? What does this book teach us about God, his character and action, and how we are to respond to him?

Job is perhaps the most difficult Bible book to understand. What questions do you have about it? What confuses you? What would you like to have clarified by the end of this study?

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a few minutes to ask God to bless you with increased understanding and a transformed heart and life as you begin this study of Job.