

WOMEN IN THE WORD
OF
FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH

“Job: A 12-Week Study” by Eric Ortlund

Week One: Overview

January 18, 2022

Why study Job?

Does such an ancient book have anything to say to 21st century American Christians? Jesus never quotes from nor mentions the book. The only New Testament writer to mention Job by name is James, who does so to present him as an example of perseverance in suffering:

“Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand...As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, 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 5:7-8, 10-11, ESV

So, is learning to persevere in suffering the only thing that Job can teach us?

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17, ESV

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4, ESV

When was it written?

Although there is a great deal of speculation, we simply don’t know. Many scholars believe Job to be the oldest book in the Bible. Some experts think it went through several revisions; others hold that one person wrote it over several decades. The suggested dates of its composition vary from the time of the patriarchs to after the Babylonian exile.

The time period of the book itself, when Job was living, is considered by most scholars to be about the time of the patriarchs, probably around 2000 BC. We can draw this conclusion from several clues in the book:

- Job lives more than 140 years, as many of the patriarchs did
- Job's wealth was measured in livestock
- No national history of Israel mentioned, nor Mosaic law
- Job is serving as priest for his family
- Sabeans and Chaldeans are portrayed as nomadic marauders, not yet established in specific territories

Who wrote it?

The author of Job is unknown. Some suggest Job himself, or Elihu, the fourth friend who speaks just before the Lord appears. Others believe it was composed by an Israelite who compiled the account based on oral and/or written sources.

Where does it take place?

No one knows exactly where the "land of Uz" was located. It is believed by many to be south and east of the Jordan, possibly in the northwestern reaches of the Arabian desert. There are other references to Uz in Lamentations and Jeremiah.

Summary of the story

Job is an upright man who suddenly experiences tremendous losses and does not understand why. The reader knows that Satan has accused Job of only loving God for the blessings he receives, but Job is unaware of what has transpired in the heavenly realm. Three friends come to comfort Job, but they only leave Job exasperated and angry with their accusations that he must be suffering because of some great sin in his life. A young man named Elihu then attempts to counsel Job where the others have failed. At last, God Himself appears, challenging Job to instruct Him, and confronting Job with a long series of questions regarding His power in creating and maintaining the universe. Job has a change of heart and repents. Finally, God rebukes Job's comforters, praises Job, and restores his prosperity, doubling his former possessions.

Themes and message

The primary theme of the book is the struggle to understand God as good and just when going through great suffering and loss, particularly undeserved suffering. There are several other secondary themes as well. As you read through it, consider the following questions:

1. Why do people suffer? Do the innocent suffer, or is suffering always a result of sin?

2. Is God really good? Is He fair? Is He truly sovereign over all the affairs of man?
3. Can a person doubt and question God and still have faith? What is the essence of faith?
4. How do I go on trusting in God when I am suffering great loss? And when He seems silent?
5. Do people love/obey God only for the benefits they receive?
6. How does God view man? What does God expect of him?
7. How do I help someone who is going through a time of great suffering?

Literary form and structure

The book of Job is a literary masterpiece. Alfred Lord Tennyson called it “the greatest poem, whether of ancient or modern literature.” Martin Luther declared it “more magnificent and sublime than any other book of scripture.”

There is deliberate planning and symmetry in the author’s design of Job. Its basic structure consists of a prologue and epilogue written in prose, with a large section of poetry, the speeches, in between. Then there are patterns of elements in twos, threes, and fours throughout the work. For example, there are two confrontations between God and Satan, as well as two speeches by God to Job. Job’s losses are reported by 4 speakers. The debate with the three “comforters” is in three cycles. And many commentators see Elihu as making 4 distinct speeches, even though they all come at once.

Since the bulk of the book of Job is poetry, it helps to know something of the structure of Hebrew poetry. One of the major features is parallelism of ideas, often expressed in units known as *colons*. One or more colons is referred to as a *period*. Job 5:2, for example, is a *bicolon*, a period made of two colons:

Resentment kills a fool,
And envy slays the simple.

Periods may also consist of three or more colons. A group of periods is called a *strophe*, and these may be arranged in a variety of patterns. The main ideas may be expressed in unexpected orders, with repetition and/or contrast for emphasis.

Language and difficulties

The original language of Job is very different from standard Hebrew, and has presented challenges for scholars and translators. It contains over 100 words not found anywhere else in the Old Testament. You will therefore notice some significant differences among translations. Some scholars have even proposed rearranging certain passages because of their perceived difficulties with the text as it is, as it has come to us.

The Gospel in Job

Beginning with week 2, every chapter in the study book contains a section called “Gospel Glimpses” to help us understand how the gospel message can be seen in the book of Job. We will dig deeper into this subject as we go through our study. If you have time to read *The Gospel According to Job*, by Mike Mason, as a companion book to our study, it will enhance your understanding of this subject as well.

From our study book, p. 8:

“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.”

Some suggestions for getting the most out of your study

1. **Pray** for the Holy Spirit to guide and teach you as you study, for the others in your group, for the leaders, and for all of us involved in this study. We don’t want just to acquire new knowledge; we want our relationships with the Lord and with each other to grow.
2. Make use of multiple translations to aid in your understanding. Because of the linguistic difficulties of Job, you will encounter some very different words and phrases in the same passages as you do this.
3. As we begin the study and as often as time permits, read Job from beginning to end in one sitting. Remembering the context and the big picture helps when analyzing shorter passages.
4. As you do your reading in preparation for the lesson, try to visualize the setting and the characters. Try to imagine the intonation in their voices, what they might look like, their facial expressions and gestures, etc.
5. The “Personal Implications” section at the end of each chapter in your study book allows a fair amount of space for your reflections. Please do not neglect to write out your thoughts in these sections. You may even want to expand on this by using a small notebook or journal to record what God through His Holy Spirit is revealing to you in this study of Job.

Next week, Week Two: Job’s Tragedy, pp. 11-18 in study book
Job 1:1-2:13