



The Message of Job



Prologue: Job Is Tested By God



Self-Confession: Job Curses the Day of His Birth



Scripture Reading:

Job 1 : 1 ; 42 : 5



Prelude

Whenever disasters happen in this world, we cannot help but ask why God allows disasters to happen. Is it because the power of God is not enough to protect the world? Or is it that God cannot judge people with justice? The book of Job tells us at the beginning that Job was a righteous man, but this righteous man suffered for no apparent reason. Many people who read about Job's life will feel sorry for him. In Station 1, we will uncover the mystery of Job's suffering from the written background and theological theme of this book, which is inseparable from God's will. As we continue on our journey, we will encounter God's purpose for those He loves.



Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,
Please grant me wisdom to understand the blessings you want to bestow on your beloved children through the sufferings Job experienced. I pray that you will open my heart so that I may come to know more of your goodness and justice in all circumstances you have ordained for me. May the meditation of my heart, words of my mouth, and

daily decisions I make all glorify you. I pray this in the holy name of Jesus Christ. Amen!



Station 1

For Mandarin, English, Arabic and Spanish versions of the videos, please go to www.sowim.org.





Scripture Illustration

1. Job's View on Wisdom
2. Book Name, Literary Genre, Author & Date
3. Theological Themes
4. Outlines

1. Job's View on Wisdom

If you look for the book of Job in the Hebrew Bible, you will find yourself in its third and final section—the *Ketuvim*, or “Writings” in English. The *Ketuvim*, known for its rich range of literary genres, opens with three poetic books: Psalms, Proverbs, and Job. Similarly, the Christian Bible places Job before the Psalms among the Poetic and Wisdom Books section.

When reading the book of Job, we can find ourselves in a bind. On the one hand, we fall in love with the lyrical beauty of the writing. On the other hand, we are troubled and ask: *How could God allow a righteous man like Job to suffer? How could Satan be allowed into God's presence and hurl out such arrogant taunts? How could God even accept Satan's challenge?* Though none of these questions has an easy answer, Job's place in the Canon of Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit has stood uncontested.

While being a standalone biblical narrative, the book of Job also dialogues with other books, notably Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Like a musical fugue where the same melody is echoed by different parts, the

three books combine to resound in praise — of God’s boundless and mighty power in the face of humanity’s finite wisdom. The placement of Job among the Poetic and Wisdom Books is justified in at least two ways. First, Job’s story — both in his posture to suffering and in its redemptive finale — serves to profoundly impact and make our lives in God more mature. Second, the book of Job expands our insight into God’s character, leading us to further scale the height and depth of his righteousness, truth, and power.



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On the surface, the extent of Job’s suffering seems to challenge any assertion of God’s being righteous and good. Yet, journeying through the chapters, we notice that God is giving space for Job to voice his doubts and his attempt to vindicate his righteous character. In fact, as we listen in and follow closely to how Job builds his defense, how his debate with his three friends develops, and how God ultimately responds, we arrive at a place of deeper awe before our true, righteous, and almighty God. Finally, the triumphant twist in Job’s story is revealed as we see through the surface story — of Satan’s outrageous attack on Job’s faith and God-fearing life — to realize (with relief) that Satan has absolutely no authority to do anything to Job beyond the terms that God, who sits sovereign over all, allows him.

The book of Job opens with a sobering scene of suffering. A blameless and upright man, Job first loses all of his children and all of his possessions (1:13-19), then also loses his health. With loathsome

sores all over his body, Job is left to sit among the ashes in agony. We are shocked to learn that Job's suffering can be traced to heaven, where God permits Satan to test Job, a man considered "blameless and upright, one who fears God and turns away from evil" (1:1, 8; 2:3). If Job is righteous, then he is to be blessed, for it is written in Proverbs that "whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor," that "the righteous are delivered from trouble, and the wicked get into it instead," and that "no harm happens to the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble" (Proverbs 21:21, 11:8, 12:21). Moreover, Psalm 1:3 plainly tells us that the righteous will be "like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper." If the Scripture is to be trusted, then it may be incomprehensible to us that Job — considered righteous in every way (1:1) — should suffer to such measure. We cannot help but question: *How could God subject Job to this kind of trial and suffering? Isn't God righteous? Isn't he good? Where is God's power to deliver his people out of suffering? Can we truly trust him?* Finally, we wonder: *Why is this story of Job's suffering even in the Bible? What is there to learn from the book of Job?*

To begin, we must recognize that Satan never questions Job's reverence for God. Instead, Satan doubts Job's underlying motives. Whereas Job's friends are obsessed with the *cause* of his suffering (*What kind of evil has Job committed? What has Job done to displease God?*), Satan focuses on the *basis* of Job's righteousness. He reaches deeper by trying to shake Job's resolve to fear the Lord and turn away from evil. Indeed, Job's obedience to God, his insistence on making burnt offerings on behalf of his family (1:5), and his self-righteous words of defense can paint a picture of a person who hopes to avoid punishment by living a righteous life. After all, Job's dualistic pattern of reasoning

can be found throughout the Torah: Those who follow God's law will be blessed, and those who break God's law will be cursed. Further, these consequences will happen on earth and not in an afterlife. Based upon this logic, Job's reverence for God simply reflects a human's desire to enjoy a blessed life. In today's terms, Job can be likened to a successful man known for his good character — in his family, in the workplace, and in society — who brings blessings to the lives of many. Now, picture this same man losing his entire family and his wealth before being diagnosed with an incurable disease, and all of this unfolds overnight. How might we respond? We might want to know *why*: *What makes a good person deserve this kind of suffering?* Yet, what tortures the suffering child of God the most is the realization that there is no place to hide, nowhere to turn from one's innermost wrestling: *Can I keep believing in this God who strips away everything and everyone I treasure? Is God worth my effort to live righteously with kindness and integrity? In the times when I have feared the Lord and experienced blessing, what was my true motivation? Now that I have lost everything, can I still fear the Lord, trust in Him, and love Him? Can I continue trusting in God's faithfulness and goodness? Can I still testify to God's almighty power and all-encompassing grace?*

Up until the day that disaster strikes, Job stands out as the epitome of a "righteous" person as described in the book of Proverbs. This person's cup overflows with blessings from above, as God causes that individual to prosper and grants him or her wisdom in everything the person does. The righteous one lives a blameless life and shuns evil. Though it is impossible to foresee the future, who could have imagined the complete devastation to befall someone like Job? Then, as we reach the end of Job's story, we witness God blessing Job's concluding days even more than his beginning. Not only does Job's

wealth get multiplied, but his knowledge of God also reaches greater heights and depths, and his relationship with his Maker grows more dear, more intimate. This conclusion, too, is beyond anything Job



The Book of Job draws us into a more complete understanding of human suffering.

could have imagined. In all, the book of Job draws us into a more complete understanding of human suffering, as Ecclesiastes says: “All this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. . .” (Ecc. 9:1a).

If we return to God’s assessment of Job in chapter one, it becomes clear that God is the only one who fully knows our hearts. He is the one who has truly considered Job in all of Job’s ways and perceives him as blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. In contrast, Satan, with no way nor power to probe into the human heart, can only resort to lies and empty accusations. Likewise, Job’s three friends, lacking insight into the inner state of humanity and a full view of the bigger picture, are limited to using the fragmented pieces of what they have in hand to put together flawed, even groundless, conclusions. Therefore, let us be wise: As God brings us to walk with people who are suffering, instead of rushing to dissect the situation, instead of questioning the person’s motives for following God, let us come alongside those who are suffering and gently lift their gaze from their brokenness toward our Lord. In turn, the book of Job broadens our vision, helping us see differently. The same glory of God, shining since the creation of the earth, shines in our darkness, so that in the midst of our suffering, we will experience the comfort, strength, and courageous faith born in Christ Jesus.



Self Reflection/Group Discussion

- Have you ever experienced suffering for no reason? What doubts do you have in your mind?

2. Book Name, Literary Genre, Author & Date

There are three different meanings of the name Job in Hebrew:

1. Where is my father?
2. Enemy of Yahweh
3. One who repents

Each of these meanings unveils the protagonist's feelings and experiences as a person moves through the different seasons of life:

1. In his suffering, Job feels abandoned by his (Father) God.
2. Facing what appears to be God's harsh judgment, Job is stricken down like an enemy.
3. Coming to terms with his own limited wisdom, Job repents with all of his heart.

Whether Job actually existed historically remains a question that eludes many scholars. In Jewish Rabbinic tradition, Job is seen to be likely a legend. If so, what is the significance of Job's story in the Bible? It may be that, through using the literary form of the *parable*, the author hopes to use the legendary life of Job to shed light on

our own questions in the midst of suffering. Some scholars believe Job to be a heroic figure who lived before the age of the patriarchs. Regardless of the truth about the real existence of Job, the author offers little detail about Job's genealogy and geographical background. This decontextualization may be intentional. Presented as a prototype of suffering, Job is positioned to bring empathy and comfort to all generations of God's people who find themselves in a difficult season similar to what Job faced. In terms of literary genre, the epic poetry that is the book of Job is layered with rich material including drama, dialogue, lamentation, and polyphony. In particular, the book of Job has a lot of polyphonic sections, made up of many voices: Job, his three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar), Elihu, God, and the narrator. The different voices are woven into a single work of music, with God's voice being the main theme that conveys the core message to all of us who are listening.

Regarding the question of authorship, no consensus has been reached among scholars, who have only limited evidence to consider. The traditional Jewish Talmud ascribes the authorship of the book of Job to Moses. This view is echoed by the Peshitta, the Syriac version of the Bible, in which the book of Job follows the Pentateuch. Regardless of the author's identity, we can deduce certain characteristics of the author from the write's style. First, the author shows reverence for God in the use of the tetragrammaton (YHWH), the divine and personal name of God. Next, the author demonstrates sophisticated skills in using specialized language, such as the language of law and the courtroom, the literary forms of idioms and irony, and a variety of rhetorical devices. All these together reveal the author to be a sage of his time. Furthermore, not only does the author show an understanding of nature and cultures beside his own, he showcases

his insight into the history of ancient Israel by setting Job's story in the patriarchal period and invoking the earliest names attributed to God. These characteristics combine to suggest that the author of the book of Job must have received a level of education higher than most others of his time. Critically, this person fears the Lord and has likely accumulated his vast knowledge by serving in a top-ranked royal position. Considering all of the above, it is reasonable for some traditions to attribute the book of Job to Moses.

As for the date of completion, scholars differ in their analyses so much that proposed dates have ranged from times as early as the patriarchal era, to times as late as the time of Babylonian captivity. Still, clues abound. First, Job's wealth is described not in terms of money, but in terms of the number of livestock and servants. This observation implies that money had not yet gained popularity (or may not even have been available) as a form of currency at the time of writing. Second, Job makes burnt offerings to God on behalf of his children, in person rather than through priests. Third, Job's impressive lifespan is only observed in the patriarchal era and earlier. Finally, the mention of Chaldeans (ref: Gen 11:28) and Assyrians (ref: Gen 25:3) — who existed long ago in the history of Israel — offers yet more evidence that the book of Job is set in the patriarchal era.



Self Reflection/Group Discussion

- The story of Job may have taken place during the time of the patriarchs of Israel in ancient times. What impact do you think this will have on later generations coming to know God?

3. Theological Themes

Three theological themes — suffering, wisdom, and justice — are examined in the book of Job and discussed as intersecting in different manners:

- ***Speaking wisdom in the midst of suffering***

Suffering is the first theme in the book of Job. On the surface, the book examines the reasons for human suffering, in particular, the kinds of suffering that befall the devout. On closer inspection, we learn to examine the motives for our devotion to God and to mature in our understanding of God through suffering. We see that suffering does not cause Job to forsake or curse God. Instead, Job never lets go of God and persists in his appeal for God's justice, crushing Satan's accusations regarding the motives behind Job's God-fearing appearance. Even in his deep frustration, Job perseveres in his trust and insistence for God to judge between him and his accusers.

As we witness Job's response to suffering, let us reflect on our

own understanding of God. When we encounter pain or inexplicable times of suffering, do we stand firm in our trust in God? When tragedy strikes and troubles afflict us on every side, do we, like Job, rest in the truth that God holds us in his hand?



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When cycling through debates and discussions with his friends, Job keeps his tongue from sin. The author points out twice, in 1:22 and 2:10, that “In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” In 42:7-8, God deems Job’s words to be superior to those of his three friends. The book of Proverbs contains many verses that caution us to control our tongues: “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life” (10:11a); “Rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (12:18); and “Those who guard their mouths preserve their lives; those who open wide their lips come to ruin” (13:3), to cite but a few. In contrast, Job’s friends, staunchly convinced that Job *must* have sinned to deserve this kind of suffering, look down on Job and exalt themselves as being wiser and more righteous than he. Yet, their words only serve to expose their folly, for not even Satan goes so far as to question Job’s righteousness. As we compare Job and his friends in the way they approach and perceive God, one clear lesson is the importance of speaking truth and wisdom at all times, whether when we encounter suffering or when we journey with those who are suffering.

- ***The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom***

Wisdom, as defined in the Bible, is embodied in those who approach life circumstances in the right way. But how do we discern

what is “right”? The key is to understand the principles of God, who alone is the source of true wisdom. As Proverbs 3:5-7 asserts: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.” Likewise, Job 28 reminds us that God’s wisdom is far higher than human wisdom. Only God knows the place of wisdom and understands the way to it; only God sees it and declares it, establishes and searches it out. The contrast is made clear when life presents challenges that defy reasoning and solution, when we realize that human counsel and philosophy can bring us only so far. Based on our limited experience, we attempt to reason and assess the situation, only to concede that the shreds of evidence in our grasp amount to just a fraction of the whole truth. In their dialogue with Job, the three friends are so overcome by the arrogant haste to exhibit their superior wisdom that they lose their ability to pay attention to what Job has to say, let alone fathom the parts that God and Satan might play in Job’s suffering. Clinging staunchly to their own beliefs, the three friends are a living display of why human wisdom, sooner or later, comes to a dead end.

Then, in Job 32-37, we meet young Elihu, who, burning with anger, has been anxious to finally speak. His words prepare the way for God, who answers Job out of the whirlwind. Elihu speaks of God Almighty: If not for God’s mercy, all flesh would perish and all mortals would return to dust, let alone stand around ignorantly talking about God! If God is omnipotent and omniscient, who can be His counselor? Pointing to the natural world, Elihu demonstrates the mystery of God’s creative power. With a series of rhetorical questions, Elihu alludes to the wisdom and might of God who created the

universe. Who can be like God? Clearly, no living being can surpass the wisdom of God. At this point, Job despises himself in his obtuseness, proclaiming: “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you” (42:5), and he repents in dust and ashes. The fact that Job repents is a decisive demonstration that human wisdom is finite. It is futile for us, when faced with senseless suffering, to offer theories and justifications on God’s behalf. Rather, acknowledging God’s vast and infinite wisdom, we trust in his righteousness and his will and rest knowing that our Father keeps steadfast love and grace for all of his children.



I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.

- ***Understanding God's justice in suffering***

Woven throughout Job’s debate with his friends is the third and final theme: God’s justice. Job’s suffering itself cannot explain whether God is just. After all, throughout the book, God does not provide either Job and his friends, or us as readers, a final answer to explain why he allows Satan to attack Job. Yet, all of us can testify to Job’s transformation. He is transformed not because God restores his fortunes and turns his fate around (42:10), but due to a seismic shift in his posture and perspectives toward life itself. Thus, the crux of suffering rests in revealing what it means to be wise in the midst of brokenness, and in particular, guiding us to move a step further to understand who God is.

Emerging from his suffering, Job not only knows of God but has seen God with his eyes (42:5). Further, Job is no longer just a man

of good external conduct but one who seeks after God's heart. For example, the reference to Job's children in the first chapter does not contain a single name, yet Chapter 42 highlights his three daughters by name, honoring them as heiresses along with their brothers. This action comes at odds with the patriarchal customs of Job's time, for it is not until Numbers 27 when the daughters of Zelophehad present their case before Moses that God outlines the statutes regarding the rules and rights for women to receive an inheritance. As Job seeks after God's heart, he is able to transcend the customs of his time and provide an inheritance for his daughters in a way that aligns with God's will.

Losing one's children causes irreparable pain. Toward the end of the story, however, God brings comfort to Job by blessing him with ten more children. Job is now the father of twenty children — a twofold blessing from God — since Job's first ten children live on in the presence of our eternal God. As Job walks with God in and through his suffering, he not only sees his fortunes multiplied over time, he experiences the deep comfort of God and grows in intimacy with his Maker. Job himself is transformed into a person who truly fears God and lives at the center of God's will and heart. May we, too, consider Job as we endure our own seasons of suffering, and may his experience bring us the encouragement, the strength, and the hope we need to lean on God completely.



Self Reflection/Group Discussion

- Job says, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you” (Job 42:5). How can we go from “hearing of God” to “seeing God with our own eyes”?

4. Outlines

The book of Job contains 42 chapters that are organized in a sandwich structure (A-A'; B-B'; C-C'), with echoes of the introduction in the ending.

- A. Part One — Introduction: Job is tested by God (1-2)
- B. Part Two — Job’s monologue (3)
- C. Part Three — Three conversation cycles
 - i) Conversation: First cycle (4-14)
 - ii) Conversation: Second cycle (15-21)
 - iii) Conversation: Third cycle (22-31)
- C'. Part Four — Elihu’s words (32-37)
- B'. Part Five — God’s oracle: Sovereignty of the Creator God (38-41)
- A'. Part Six — Ending: Job’s repentance (42)



Self Reflection/Group Discussion

- What is the core message of the book Job based on its “sandwich” structure?



Conclusion

The book of Job helps us see that human suffering is not something that can be simplistically analyzed on the principles of causal effect of punishment and reward.



QUICK TIPS

The book of Job helps us see that human suffering is not something that can be simplistically analyzed on the principles of causal effect of punishment and reward.

As we walk through the chapters, we gradually realize that what is being challenged is not God and His fairness but, rather, humanity and our limited wisdom. In seasons of suffering, the moment we confess how limited we are and choose to trust in God’s full righteousness and goodness, we will have hope. This hope comes from knowing that God is the ultimate judge of the righteous and the wicked. Although Job never learns the specific reason for his suffering, his suffering bears the fruit of wisdom, and this wisdom leaves Job completely transformed. No longer driven by fear and trembling, Job chooses to put his trust in God and seeks the wisdom of God. Like Job, may we choose to kneel in light of God’s wisdom and make good decisions to please him each and every day.