

## Summer Bible Study Schedule

Job 1-5 on July 5

Job 6-10 on July 12

Job 11-14 on July 19

Job 15-19 on July 26

Job 20-21 on August 2

Job 22-26 on August 9

Job 27-28 on August 16

Job 29-31 on August 23

Job 32-34 on August 30

Job 35-37 on September 6

Job 38-39 on September 13

Job 40-41 on September 20

Job 42 and final Discussion on September 27

## Job Introduction

Job's biblical genre is wisdom literature. Job is most appropriately read and interpreted as an ancient STORY, the complete narrative of which shares ancient wisdom. Rather than working on "answers" from each chapter, the most important take home points will come to light only as our time in Job draws to a close. Job's author is unknown, and the timing is unknown (though it's believed to have been written between the 7<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE). This ambiguity makes Job relatable through all time and contexts. The genre is similar to other Ancient Near Eastern literary works about **theodicy** (the question of why bad things happen to good people/if God is good, why do evil things happen?), but it introduces new complexities to theodicy in its Judaic assertion that God is good and created everything, and is responsible for everything that happens in the world. This is a mystery that people of faith still wrestle with, and in reading Job we wrestle along with Job.

The great irony of the story is that Job endures so much suffering not because he is evil (as his "frenemies" suggest), but rather he is tested because of his supreme righteousness and integrity. Throughout the course of the narrative, the irony is that God is not Job's enemy, but actually agrees with Job in his self-assessment of righteousness and integrity!

## **Chapters 1-2 Prologue (Learn, Read, Discuss)**

The first two chapters unfold as alternating scenes between heaven and earth. Each earthly scene ends with an example of Job's righteousness. The heavenly scenes are presented like a royal court, with heavenly courtiers presenting themselves to the Lord. Satan is a heavenly courtier, and at the end of each scene takes his leave of the Lord to take action on earth.

Job is an Edomite (from Uz), therefore, a Gentile.

Job is a wealthy sheik, with many adult children whom he dearly loves and cares for both physically, financially, and even spiritually.

Most importantly, Job is "blameless and upright, one who fears God and turns away from evil."

During the first heavenly scene, we are introduced to Satan. Satan is not God's adversary in Job (as in later books and theological understanding), but rather a member of the heavenly court whose job it is to observe human beings and report their behavior to God. Satan literally means "the accuser." God is proud of Job and his righteousness and boasts to the heavenly courts of this most righteous man on earth. Satan is more cynical about human beings, and he suggests that Job is only so upright because of all the blessings he has received. He suggests that Job knows how to play God's game to maximize the blessings available for good behavior—this idea that being good will give you more blessings, which is the primary motivation for worshipping God, is the prosperity heresy. God agrees to test Satan's theory. Why God agrees to this testing is a mystery. But, the reader now knows two things that Job's friends who come later do not know: *1. That Job truly is righteous, and 2. That God is testing Job.*

In four swift and decisive actions all of Job's livestock, servants, and children are wiped out (two instances of attack by foreign raiding parties, and two natural disasters). And yet, Job does not curse, but blesses and worships God.

When Satan returns to give report in heaven, God is pleased by the expected outcome, that Job would continue in his righteousness and had shown himself to be a man of integrity. God accuses the accuser of inciting God's violence against Job, as if God had no power to stop it. This is where it's important to read this as a wisdom story and not literally. God agrees to Satan's increased torment of Job to see if his righteousness would persist if

his body were afflicted. There is tension between this part of the story and our theological understanding of God, which is revealed to us through the rest of the Bible. God will not speak again until chapter 38. Job is covered with loathesome sores, which meant that he was extremely ill and unable to participate in normal social relationships. Job's three friends travelled from the far reaches of Edom to "comfort and console him." They start out good –mourning for him and just sitting with him in silence for 7 days and 7 nights. It's SO much better to just say nothing and be present, than to try to say something for the sake of saying something and saying the wrong, theologically inaccurate thing. Job's story is a testament to how not to care for someone who is suffering.

### **Chapter 3-5, Job's Lament & Eliphaz' response** (Learn, Read, Discuss)

Job's wife suggests that he should just curse God and die, but instead of cursing God, when Job is finally ready to speak, he curses the day of his conception and the day of his birth, and he wishes for death, more specifically he wishes that he had died long ago so that he would have been spared his present suffering. Job's lament gives voice to his righteous grief.

Job's first friend, Eliphaz speaks in response to his lament. First, he reminds Job that he once was a sage who instructed and strengthened many, then he rebukes Job's lament for if Job is truly a sage he should know that those who are experiencing trouble are those who have reaped it for themselves –Job must not be so innocent after all if he is experiencing such suffering!

Eliphaz shares with Job a vision he received in the night from the Lord. The content of the vision is traditional and faithfully in line with the wisdom tradition ("do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he binds up; he strikes, but his hands heal." The problem with his words is that Job truly IS righteous and upright and has done nothing to provoke God's discipline. Eliphaz cannot entertain the notion that there is a human being alive who has not sinned or brought trouble upon themselves. But in Job's case, this conventional wisdom does not apply. Eliphaz urges Job rather than to lament and cry out for death, to return to God and let God redeem his fortunes.