

The Books of Poetry: Job

The Bible was written over some 1,600 years by 40 authors, ranging from kings and princes, poets and philosophers, prophets and statesmen to unschooled fishermen.

The 39 books of the Old Testament were written, before the birth of Jesus Christ, mostly in Hebrew. The 27 books of the New Testament were written in Greek.

The focal point of the Old Testament is Mt. Sinai in the Arabian wilderness where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The focal point of the New Testament is a hill outside old Jerusalem called Golgotha where God's only Son, Jesus Christ, was crucified but came back to life three days when He was seen by some 500 witnesses.

One historian wrote, "Most people's knowledge of history is like a string of graduated pearls without the string." Thanks to books, movies, history courses and profanity, many are familiar with several of the Bible's principal personalities and events. But they're at a loss to figure out how to string all these pearls together. That's why we're having these lunches.

The Bible's Continental Divide is its documentable assertion that CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD! That central fact *is the string* which holds together -- and makes sense of -- all of the Bible characters, events and teachings.

The Old Testament is divided into four basic sections:

The first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), called the Books of the Law or the *Pentateuch*, were written by Moses. They start with Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, Abraham, the Jews' enslavement in Egypt, their escape through the Red Sea and their arrival at the Jordan River where they will enter and conquer the Promised Land of Canaan.

The twelve books of history (Joshua through Esther) take us from there to setting up the nation of Israel, ruled at first by judges, then by kings like Saul, David and Solomon.

Today we launch into the five Books of Poetry (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes). These five books do literature's best job of dealing with the problem of suffering, mankind's need to praise God, and the how-to's of living daily in a relationship with God.

Because it's such a relevant-for-all-time-to-everyone "read," we'll devote today exclusively to Job. This ancient record was actually written in prose -- except for its many speeches which are in verse. Alfred Lord Tennyson called it "the greatest poem ... of ancient (or) modern literature."

Scholars cannot identify its author. Some say it may be the Bible's first book written. Others say it could have been penned as recently as 600 B.C., 150 years after Rome was founded.

If you were stranded on a South Pacific atoll and could have only one book of the Bible, which would you choose? I'd beg for two! One would be Paul's letter to the Romans in the New Testament. The other would be Job or the book we'll tackle next month, Psalms.

What happens to Job will make some of you really furious with God. But some of you will find timeless answers to crushing problems and haunting questions that are dogging you right now.

Job is the classic treatment of the universal problem of human suffering -- and of the need to have faith in God's love and justice. It asks life's #1 question: WHY. Some say Job's theme is "Why do godly people suffer?" A popular book in recent years has been *Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People*. No literature in history has ever raised or probed that question more profoundly or accurately than the book of Job.

Many of us knew Jack Davies. He died December 20th, a victim of lung cancer. In his last week on earth at Swedish Hospital Jack pointed me to four books not far from his bedside Bible. He insisted I borrow one entitled *Portraits of Perseverance: 100 Meditations from the Book of Job*. Loaned to him by his wife Bev's Mom, it was his daily friend. Its jacket tells why:

"The trials of life come to us all ... When these unwelcome guests will not go away, we can quickly become physically, emotionally and spiritually handicapped. ... Job knew these feelings. ... though he questioned God's reasons, he trusted God's control. He persevered in faith."

Job is the true story of a good man living the "Old Milwaukee" life. In chapters 1 and 2 we eavesdrop on a conversation between God and Satan in which the Former allows the latter to test Job by making him suffer. Then -- shazam! -- Job's power, prestige, possessions and personal life suddenly go south, leaving him utterly devastated, destined to become the world's poster boy for unequaled misery. How could this happen to such a nice guy?

Let's read chapters 1 and 2.

Satan insisted the only reason Job loved and served God was because it paid off for him personally in riches and fame.

Finding him completely bereft of his wealth, family and health, four of Job's buddies come alongside to console him with unwelcome explanations for why all this misery has befallen him. Three of Job's pals blame his world of hurt on his own sins. They say only the unrighteous suffer on earth, that the righteous are rewarded with health and wealth. But this is baloney, according to God, history and our own observations.

Job's fourth friend says his tragedy is God's way of disciplining him.

Through all of his agonizing suffering, at the heart of Job's personal faith lies his hope of a bodily resurrection (19:25-27).

Finally, God meets with Job to ask him a series of impenetrable questions, withering Job's assault on God for allowing such hell to smash his life.

Let's read 31:1-8 and 35-37.

Read Elihu's response to Job's questions (36:22-25).

Ron Dunn, who speaks at our Pro Athletes Outreach conferences, says the real theme of Job is -- "Will a person serve God for nothing?" Why commit your life to God unless you profit from it?

Ron poses the three sub-questions raised by this book:

1. Will a person serve God when his life abruptly turns tragic?
2. Will a person serve God when he must stand alone -- when it seems that all, even God, have abandoned him?
3. Will a person serve God when God is silent -- when He doesn't give you any answers or explanations?

In the last five chapters of the book (38-42), God gives Job three typically God-like answers to all his questions -- guaranteed to freak out the politically correct, "fair-minded."

God says:

1. "I have a right to do what I do."
2. "I have a reason for what I do."
3. "I reward people in different ways."

God's challenges to Job confront all who think they have a right to lecture God. **Let's read 38:1-13, 21 and 33 -- followed by 40:1-9.**

God kept dealing with Job until he came to the end of himself, seeing himself as he is -- and seeing God as He is. Job realizes that his best course of action is to trust God no matter what life throws at him. In the end God vindicates Job and chides his accusers, then concludes this epic by blessing Job with twice as much as he'd had before his afflictions.

Finally, let's read 42:1-16.

What is God's purpose in allowing human suffering? It includes:

1. He wants us to know that there is a God -- and that it's *not* us.
2. He knows we need to learn to be patient.
3. He knows pure gold in our lives will survive the fires of trials.
4. He knows true character is revealed in adversity.
5. He knows people are watching to see how people who believe in God respond to hardship.

Job is a book to be read, studied and, to some degree, lived by each of us sooner or later. But this classic is not about suffering. It's about commitment to God. Job's life was sustained through horrendous calamities by his faith in God. Job was real. God is real. Satan is real and seeks to destroy each of us -- and, above all, to destroy or prevent our faith in God. We need to take him seriously.

Job's not a lot of laughs, but it's where to go when the going gets tough.

He is able, more than able, to accomplish what concerns me today.

He is able, more than able, to handle anything that comes my way.

He is able, more than able, to do much more than I could ever dream.

He is able, more than able, to make me what He wants me to be.

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QUESTIONS

1. God is the Sovereign of the entire universe, over nature (Job 38), over the nations (Psalms 2). Who is sovereign in your life? Who's the boss in your life? Who calls the shots? Whom we obey is our master.
2. This mighty God cares about the world. He demonstrated His love to us by sending His only Son to die on a cross to pay the just penalty so that you and I could receive God's forever forgiveness. Paul says (Philippians 2:10-11) there's a day coming when everyone who ever lived will acknowledge this. Why not beat the crowd and make the decision now to let God be sovereign in your life?
3. It's important to God how you use your mind. The book of Job is not about suffering; its about the battle for Job's mind. Satan attacked him physically in order to get to his mind. The question was whether Job would continue to believe in God even if what happened to him made no intellectual sense at all. Would he curse God just as his wife did, or would he persist to trust him?
4. The disadvantage Job had was that the first chapter of his book was concealed from him. He didn't know God was willing to put His whole reputation on the line based on how Job would respond. He was not aware that he was participating in the cosmic battle. Rate Job's performance.
5. Loving God with your mind means sometimes asking Him tough questions, but also being willing to wait for His answers if He decides to reveal them to you. Do you know that God is more interested in your honest disagreements than blind submission? You can tell Him anything.
6. Do you love God less because things are not turning out as you planned? Loving God with your mind means submitting to God's guidance even if this seems to disagree with your mental faculties. It also means exercising our minds, taking time to search the greatness of our God and His revelation as recorded in the Bible. Reading "The One Minute Bible" will neither satisfy us nor cause us to grow.

His Deal

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