

SESSION #23

JOB (part 1)

The book of Job is, I believe, a very important and highly relevant book for Christians in our day. So we will take three sessions to deal with this one.

1. Context and Name

These events as we noted in the Introduction took place back in the time of Genesis. Many scholars believe that the lifetime of Job was around the time of Abraham, perhaps even earlier. This book, therefore, may very well be the oldest book in the world. It goes way back prior to the writing of the books of Moses.

Job's name in Arabic means "the one who repents". In Hebrew it means "*the hated one*" or "*the persecuted one*". So, there's a two-sided picture in the meaning of his own name. Yes, he does repent as we see at the end of his story. And yes, he is the hated one, the persecuted one – persecuted, as we will see, by his friends not his enemies. So both meanings of his name are true.

2. Theme and Purpose

Of course, he's famous because his story deals with the problem of pain. Not just pain in general, but the problem of pain in a specific situation – that is, the problem of pain in the life of a godly person. How do you wrestle with that kind of problem? If it's in the life of a wicked person you can write it off as "*that person deserved it*". But when it's in the life of a godly person that raises a lot more problems and questions. And not just the problem of pain but the importance of faith in responding to those situations, as Job himself responds.

There are many different titles possible for the book of Job. It certainly has to do with suffering, and blessing, and pain and faith. 1 Peter 1:7 is probably the best NT commentary on the book of Job: "*these have come (these trials he mentions in verse 6) so that your faith, being of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined*

by fire, may be proved genuine and result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” That’s what Job experiences. His faith is put through the test of fire and it comes out like gold.

This book helps us to understand the ways of God, or to in a sense justify the ways of God to man and to show that God’s purposes are good and benevolent towards us, even in times of suffering. And it especially reveals this wonderful and very significant truth: who God is determines what God what does. And therefore we must trust Him. We trust Him without reservation, not because of what He does but because of who He is. It’s going to be the theme that comes up over and over again in the book of Job.

Job will learn increasingly to trust God not by what he sees happening around him or what God allows to happen, but he trusts God increasingly simply because of who God is – the character of God alone. And when we know God better and better we find we can trust Him more and more without reservation even when we don’t understand what He does.

The key verse is probably best found in 23:10 – a kind of OT linkage to the verse in 1 Peter. Job said, *“when He (that is God) has tested me I will come forth as – what? – gold.”* It is a magnificent statement of faith. It describes a high point in his spiritual journey through the valleys and the ups and downs of life.

3. Structure

The book of Job is counted among the books of poetry, but it’s dramatic poetry expressed in dialogue, as we saw in the previous session. Many chapters of dramatic dialogue. But those dialogues are framed in an epic story: what happens to Job has epic proportions.

So, let’s begin by taking a look at the first part of the book. There are 3 main parts, beginning with a prologue. Chapters 1 and 2 provide an introduction to the rest of the book, rather like we saw with the book of Judges. It had an introduction, then the main section of stories, and then an epilogue. Job has the same kind of structure.

The first two chapters of prologue provide the frame, that epic story. Without that frame we can't really get our minds around what's going on inside the picture. So, God provides the frame in chapters 1 and 2.

Where does the book begin? Well, it begins with verse 1 of course, with a real man who lived in the land of Uz. He's not a legend; he's a true man who lived just like you and me. *"There lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil."* It goes on to tell us in that chapter that Job was extremely wealthy, probably the wealthiest man in the Middle East of his day. He was certainly an unusual character.

God said there is nobody on earth during his lifetime who could compare to Job in terms of being righteous, in terms of living uprightly. He was a phenomenal person, a good father, a wonderful husband, a generous benefactor to many poor people. Job was very wealthy and very good. After setting that backdrop, the book then shows us how Job is tested.

And we see a very unusual scene painted for us in Scripture, a dialogue between Satan and God in heaven. God points back to earth and asks Satan, *"Have you noticed, by the way, my good friend, that righteous man, Job?"* And Satan says, *"I certainly have noticed him."* And they go on with a dialogue and come to a sort of agreement. Out of that agreement comes Satan's attacks on Job.

God allows Satan to go back to earth and test Job's faith. And so in chapter one, we see a series of incredible messages that come to Job, not by email or texting, but by breathless messengers who show up on his doorstep in person, one after the other.

One guy comes and says that the Sabean raiders have come and stolen all of Job's cattle and all of his donkeys. That guy just finished his message of doom and another guy showed up and said that a tremendous fire from heaven came down and burned up all his sheep. A third messenger came and told Job that the Chaldeans have raided and taken away all his 3000 camels.

One after the other. Tremendous economic blows. By the time the third messenger has delivered his message Job is bankrupt. But that's not the end of the bad news. The

stories only get worse because a fourth messenger comes and tells him the terrible news that a tragedy has happened to the family. A whirlwind has struck the house where all ten of his children were having a birthday party and they were all killed. At one blow, suddenly Job loses not just all of his economic power, he loses all of his family except his wife. And if you know the rest of the story, I think you might wonder if Job sometimes was tempted to wish that his wife wasn't around either.

We think this is bad enough by the time we get to the end of chapter one. But it isn't the end of his troubles because you move into the second chapter, which is still part of the prologue.

The epic story continues and we see God and Satan having another conversation in heaven because it didn't work the first time. Satan says, *"I did all these bad things, and it didn't work!"* The last verse of chapter 1 tells us: *"In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong."* His attitude is expressed in the previous verse: *"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."* And Satan goes back to the presence of God, says it didn't work and wants to take another shot at him. *"Let me touch his body. Let me touch his health. I'm sure he will curse you then."*

And God said, *"Okay you can touch him but you can't kill him."* God is still in control and determines how far Satan can go. And so Satan goes back and attacks Job now with boils from head to toe. Tremendous pain and lots of infection and other things that surely went along with them. So poor Job has now been faced with disaster, economic disaster especially, with death of his beloved children, and then with disease in his own body. No wonder he is a man feeling like he is under tremendous attack. That's the prologue.

Chapter 3 into chapter 42 all deal with dramatic dialogue, beginning with conversations between Job and his so-called friends. It's become a term in English – *"Job's comforters"* – an ironic, sarcastic term meaning they are not comforters whatsoever because these guys were not. Job is counselled in the main body of this dramatic poem.

Three friends hear the news and they come on camels or whatever to visit Job and to help him through this terrible time. The only thing they did right in the whole period of

time they're with him is that during the first seven days they just sat with him and didn't say a word. After that, it just went downhill.

As you'll know, if you are familiar with the story, there is then a main dialogue between these three friends and Job. Three cycles. They each take a turn in every cycle except a little bit of variation in cycles two and three. These dramatic dialogues are debates between them as these three friends try to help their friend Job come to grips with what has happened in his personal life.

Here are a couple of excerpts from the Living Bible of what the friends said to Job, just to give you a glimpse of the kind of language used in these dialogues.

Chapter 15 – Eliphaz says to Job, *“You're supposed to be a wise man and yet you give us all this foolish talk. You are nothing but a windbag.”*

Chapter 16 – Job replies, *“I've heard all this before. What miserable comforters all of you are! Won't you ever stop your flow of foolish words? What have I said that makes you speak so endlessly?”* You can see the tension between these former friends.

Chapter 18 – Bildad puts in his two-bits worth: *“Who are you trying to fool? Speak some sense if you want us to answer. Have we become like animals to you, stupid and dumb? Just because you tear your clothes in anger is this going to cause an earthquake? Shall we all go and hide?”* And you can hear the biting sarcasm and the pins they're jabbing into poor Job. Supposedly counselling and helping him, but actually making his situation much worse. Three big cycles of debates and dialogue.

Then a fourth young man shows up. His name is Elihu. He has four very long speeches that ramble all over the map. He doesn't say a whole lot of good stuff and God doesn't even mention him when God shows up on the scene so you kind of wonder if it was mostly hot air.

In the next session we will focus in on Job himself and also take another look at the friends.
