



Job

Video Transcript

Introduction

00:00-00:57

The book of Job. It's a profound and very unique book in the Bible for lots of reasons. The story is set in a very obscure land that's far away from Israel, Uz. The main character, Job, he's not even an Israelite. And the author, who's anonymous, doesn't even set the story in any clear period of ancient history. This all seems intentional though. It's like the author doesn't want us to be distracted by historical questions but rather to focus simply on the story of Job and on the questions raised by his experience of suffering.

The book of Job has a very clear literary design. It opens and closes with a short narrative prologue and then an epilogue. And then the central body of the book is dense Hebrew poetry, representing conversations between Job and four dialogue partners called "the friends." These conversations are then concluded by a series of poetic speeches given by God to Job. Let's dive in, and we'll just see how it works together.

Chapters 1-2

00:57-02:43

The prologue introduces us to Job, and we're told that he's a blameless, upright man who honors God; he's a super good guy. And then all of a sudden, we're transported into the heavenly realms, and God is holding court with his staff team. It's a very common image in the Old Testament describing how God runs the world. And among the heavenly beings is a figure called "the Satan," which in Hebrew means "the accuser" or "the prosecutor."

And it's like we're watching a court scene. God presents Job as a truly righteous man, and then the accuser challenges God's policy of rewarding righteous people

like Job. He says the only reason Job obeys you is because you bless him with prosperity. Let Job suffer; then we'll see how righteous he actually is. And then God agrees to let the accuser inflict suffering on Job.

Now, it's at this point in the story that most of us go, "What? Why did God do that?" And then we assume that this book is going to answer that question—why God allows good people to suffer. But as you read on, the book doesn't answer that question. Nothing in the book ever answers that question.

The prologue is setting up the real questions this book is trying to get at, questions about God's justice and whether God operates the universe according to the strict principle of justice. And the response to those questions comes as you read through to the end of the book, not at the beginning. The ultimate reason for Job suffering is simply never revealed.

So the prologue concludes with a suffering and bewildered Job, who's rebuked by his wife. And he's approached by three friends who are going to try and provide wisdom and counsel. Their names are Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Na'amathite. They are all non-Israelites like Job, and they represent the best of ancient Near Eastern thinking about God and suffering and the human condition.

Chapters 3-28

02:44-04:35

And this moves us into the main part of the book. First, Job speaks. And this is how this section of the book works. First, Job is going to speak, and then there will follow a response from a friend. Then Job will respond to that friend, then another friend will respond to Job's response, and so on, back and forth for three cycles.

And this whole debate has focused on three questions: Is God truly just in character? And does God run the universe on the strict principle of justice? And if so, then how is Job's suffering to be explained?

As we're going to see, Job and the friends, they're working from a huge assumption about what God's justice ought to look like in the world. Namely, that every single thing that happens in the universe should operate according to the strict principle of justice. So if you're a wise, good person and you honor God, good things will happen to you; God will reward you. But if you're evil and stupid and do sinful things, bad things will happen to you; God will punish you.

Now, Job's constant argument throughout his speeches is this: First of all, that he's innocent, and so the implication of that is that his suffering is not a divine punishment. Now, we know from the prologue both of these things are true. Remember, God himself said Job is righteous and blameless, and so Job concludes

his argument by accusing God. God either doesn't run the world according to justice, or even worse, God himself is simply unjust.

The friends, on the other hand, they beg to differ. Their argument is that God is just, the implication being that God always runs the world according to justice in this way. And so they conclude by accusing not God, but Job. Job must have done something really, really bad for God to punish him like this. They even start making up possible sins that Job must have committed. Job protests all of this. In fact, he gets so fed up with the friends that he eventually just gives up on them. He takes up his case directly with God.

Chapters 29-31

04:35-05:10

Now, something to be aware of is that Job, he's on an emotional roller coaster in these poems. He used to think that God is just, but now he can't reconcile that with his suffering. And so in some outbursts, Job, he'll accuse God of being a bully. Once he even declares that God has orchestrated all the injustice in the world. But the moment he utters that thought, he's terrified of it because he wants to hope and believe that God is truly just.

Job is all over the place in this section. And so he makes one last statement of his innocence, and then he demands that God show up personally to explain himself.

Chapters 32-37

05:10-06:03

Now, it's at this point that a surprise friend shows up, Elihu the Buzite. Now, he's not an Israelite, but he does have a Hebrew name. And Elihu, he has the same assumption as Job and the friends. He argues that God is just and that that implies that God always operates the universe according to justice.

But then Elihu draws a more sophisticated conclusion about why good people suffer. It may not be punishment for sin in the past. God might inflict suffering as a warning to help people avoid sin in the future. Or God might use pain and suffering to build character or to teach people valuable lessons. Elihu doesn't claim to know why Job is suffering, but one thing he is certain of: Job is wrong to accuse God of being unjust.

Job doesn't even respond to Elihu, and the dialogues come to a close. It's like the wisdom of the ancients has been spent and the mystery remains.

Chapters 38-41

06:03-09:28

And then all of a sudden, God shows up in a whirlwind, and he responds to Job personally. He first responds to Job's accusation that he's unjust and incompetent at running the universe. So God takes Job on a virtual tour of the universe, and he starts asking him all these questions about the order and origins of the cosmos.

Was Job ever around when God architected the earth or organized the constellations? Has Job ever commanded the sunrise or controlled the weather? God has his eyes on all of these cosmic details that Job has never even conceived of. Then, God starts going into detail describing the grazing habits of mountain goats and how deer give birth, or the feeding patterns of lions and wild donkeys.

What's the point of all this? Remember the assumption of Job and his friends about what it looks like for God to run the world according to justice. Underneath that assumption is a deeper one that Job and his friends have a wide enough perspective on life to make such a claim about how God ought to run the world. And God's response with this virtual tour, it deconstructs all of these assumptions.

It first of all shows that the universe is a vast, complex place and that God has his eyes on all of it—every detail. Job, on the other hand, has only the small horizon of his life experience to draw from. His view of the world is very limited. And so what looks like divine injustice from Job's point of view needs to be seen in an infinitely larger context. Job is simply not in a position to make such a huge accusation about God.

After the virtual tour, God asks Job if he would like to micromanage the world for a day according to the strict principle of justice that Job and his friends assume, punishing every evil deed of every person at every moment with precise retribution. The fact is that carrying out justice in a world like ours, it's extremely complex. It's never black and white like Job and the friends seem to think.

Which leads to God's last point. He starts describing these two fantastic creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan, which some people think are poetic depictions of a hippo and crocodile. But more likely, they refer to well-known creatures from ancient Near Eastern mythology that are used elsewhere in the Bible as symbols of the disorder and danger that exists in God's good world. These creatures, they're not evil—God's actually quite proud of them—but they're not safe either. The point is that God's world is amazing and very good, but it's not perfect or always safe. God's world has order and beauty, but it's also wild and sometimes dangerous, just like these two fantastic creatures.

And so we come back to the big question of Job's suffering: Why is there suffering in God's world? Whether it's from earthquakes or wild animals or from other humans, God doesn't explain why. What he says is that we live in an extremely complex, amazing world that, at this stage at least, is not designed to prevent suffering. And that's God's response.

Job challenged God's justice. God responds that Job doesn't have sufficient knowledge about our universe to make such a claim. Job demanded a full explanation from God, and what God asked Job for is trust in his wisdom and character. And so Job responds with humility and repentance. He apologizes for accusing God, and he acknowledges that he's overstepped his bounds.

Chapter 42

09:29-10:18

Then, all of a sudden, the book concludes with a short epilogue. First, God says that the friends were wrong, that their ideas about God's justice were just too simple—not true to the complexity of the world or God's wisdom. And then God says that Job has spoken rightly about him.

Now, this is surprising because it can't apply to everything Job said. I mean, we know Job drew hasty and wrong conclusions. But God still approves of Job's wrestling, how Job came honestly before God with all of his emotion and pain and simply wanted to talk to God himself. And God says that's the right way to process through all of this, through the struggle of prayer.

The book concludes with Job having his health, his family, his wealth all restored, not as a reward for good behavior but simply as a generous gift from God. And that's the end of the book.

Conclusion

10:18-10:52

So the book of Job, it doesn't unlock the puzzle of why bad things happen to good people. Rather, it does invite us to trust God's wisdom when we do encounter suffering rather than try and figure out the reasons for it. When we search for reasons, we tend to either simplify God like the friends or, like Job, accuse God, but based on limited evidence.

And so the book is inviting us to honestly bring our pain and our grief to God, and to trust that God actually cares and that he knows what he's doing. And that's what the book of Job is all about.