

## Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 32: Introduction to Books of Poetry and Book of Job, Part I

### INTRODUCTION TO BOOKS OF POETRY

The book of Esther brings down the curtain on the Biblical "Books of History." Looking back over that history, we have seen God's divine providence in the national affairs of His nation, Israel.

**GOD RULES AND HE WILL COMPLETE HIS PLAN WHETHER OR NOT MEN SEE HIM OR ACKNOWLEDGE HIM.**

It is against the backdrop of this history that we study the poetry and prophecy of the Old Testament. There is poetry of various forms throughout the Scriptures, but the next section is comprised of five complete books of poetry: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

The Bible is usually viewed as a book of religious teachings or a book of rules or, heaven forbid, a history book full of dull, boring facts, people, places, dates, and events. In reality, the Bible is the Word of God as it is brought to us through the styles, personalities, and experiences of men of God. It reads more like a great historical novel than a history text but its all true. It is emotional, realistic, exciting, sometimes puzzling, and deals with areas of our lives we consider secular as well as spiritual. This is especially evident in the books of poetry or, as many call them, the books of wisdom.

***Job and Ecclesiastes*** force us to look at the most profound questions asked by men: Where did I come from? Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Does anybody care? Why do good things happen to bad people?

***Psalms*** expresses every emotion that we can ever face: Love and anger toward God, frustration and anger with men, personal doubt and confusion, grief and joy, praise and worship.

***Proverbs*** examines the practical such as relationships, honesty, work ethic, money, as well as the profound, like moral absolutes and spiritual maturity.

***Song of Solomon*** celebrates the joy of love between man and woman as God intended it to be.

These books deal with the "stuff" real life is made of. We will only just scratch the surface, but I hope you will be inspired to go deeper into each of them. To affect you is, after all, the purpose of all good poetry.

Poetry comes in many forms:

**Dirge:** a poem or song of grief

**Drama:** verse or prose that portray a character or tells a story

**Elegy:** a pensive or melancholy poem or song

**Epic:** a long narrative poem often with a legendary or historic hero

**Idyll:** Simple descriptive poem or a narrative creating a mood of peace and contentment.

## *Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey*

**Lyric:** a popular song or poem reflecting deep feelings from the heart (taken from the instrument lyre)

**Ode:** an emotional poem with great feeling and style. Etc. . . .

For instance:

Lamentations is, by nature and definition, a dirge or song of despair and hopelessness. Psalm 22 is a lyric poem, baring David's heart and soul. Psalms 78, 106, and 136 are odes.

In the west, even now, many people expect poetry to rhyme and have a clearly defined rhythm. But that is not always so, such as in Shakespeare which has rhythm but doesn't always rhyme.

Hebrew is a pictorial language using word pictures as opposed to strict word definition. So it is, by nature, poetic. Much Hebrew poetry depends on parallelism of thought rather than phonic coupling of the words to make it poetic.

Perhaps this sheet will help you understand this concept and you will recognize these concepts as you read the next five books.

**REFER TO PAGE ON HEBREW POETRY**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JOB**

#### ***Background***

The Book of Job is believed by many to be the oldest book in the world, but we don't know for sure when or where Job lived. It tells us he lived in Uz, but we don't know where that is either.

There are some hints that he lived during the period of the patriarchs:

1. He lived to a very old age--"after this, he lived 140 years."
2. He and his detractors never refer to the Mosaic Law which would have been apropos to the arguments. That means pre Exodus.
3. Eliphaz was a decedent of Esau's oldest son (Gen. 36:10) which would make he and Job contemporaries with Jacob.

We don't know much about Job. He is mentioned only twice outside the book that bears his name. In Ezekiel 14:4 the Lord compares his righteousness to that of Noah and Daniel. (Not bad company to keep.)

James says, in effect, "when we look at those who endure joyfully, we think of the patience of Job (obviously patience doesn't preclude griping), and of the Lord who is full of pity and mercy."

In Job we find him to be rich physically (lots of stuff) and spiritually (leading his family in work and worship and worrying about his children's walk with the Lord), and, of course, he has God's

## *Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey*

personal endorsement, ". . . *there is no one like him in all the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.*"

### ***Author***

To identify the author of Job is highly speculative. Some scholars say Moses, others Ezra, Solomon, or even Job himself.

There is one possible clue. In Job 32:16 and 17, Elihu said. "And I shall wait, because they (the other three men) do not speak, because they stop and answer no more? I too will answer my share, I also will tell my opinion," etc., etc.

This is not part of his monologue, but is a train of thought, an aside, so perhaps he is the author.

### ***Introduction***

*Man is not God but hath God's ends to serve,*

*A master to obey, a course to take,*

*Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become.*

*Grant this, that man must pass from old to new,*

*From vane to real, from mistake to fact,*

*From what once seemed good,*

*To what now proves best.*

--Robert Browning

When studying the book of Job, the first question usually asked is, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The answers to that question goes something like this.

**1. Judgment**--Some people suffer because of their own disobedience and rebellion against God. (Cain)

**2. Discipline**--Some need to be corrected and brought to repentance. (David)

**3. Training**--Some who have done nothing to merit suffering receive it to help them grow and mature. (James)

**4. Sin**--Some just bump into the result of sin in a fallen world.

(People killed by tower toppled by Romans)

**5. Persecution**--Some are harassed by Satan or others in an attempt to destroy their faith. (Mordecai)

**6. Purpose**--Some suffer as part of God's greater plan. (Joseph)

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7. *Natural Consequences*--Some suffer because of stupid mistakes or indecision. (Man built on sand)

8. *Catastrophe*--Some experience natural disasters. (Californians)

**But none of these apply to Job**--He didn't have any idea why.

In fact, attempts to explain just made things worse and worse.

*One of the problems with suffering is that sometimes, even often, there is no obvious reason or explanation.*

Even to quote James and say that Job was perfected or matured by his suffering doesn't wash because God said Job was, "*blameless and upright, fearing God and turning from evil.*" He sounds ultimately mature to me!

Job suffered according to the will of God and he never knew "THE REST OF THE STORY"

Some readers believe that the prologue resolves the "why" question. "*Suffering is a cosmic test of humanity between God and Satan. God will show Satan what true love is . . . loyalty without reward.*" But, if this is the total message of Job, why bother with the debates between Job and his friends? Why not just throw out 3/4 of the book? If that is the total answer, why didn't God tell that reason to Job in the end, and why was Job satisfied with God's answer that didn't explain? Throw out the other 1/4.

Job actually offers little explanation for the pain. If answers to the question, "Why do good people suffer?" is what we're after we will be sorely disappointed. Perhaps we are looking for the wrong thing.

Perhaps the question we should be asking is not, "Why do the righteous suffer?" but, "Why should anyone love and serve God?"

After all, isn't that Satan's leading question? "**DOES JOB FEAR GOD FOR NOTHING?**"

Job's friends' answer was simple: "*We fear God because it is safe and we don't want to make Him mad. If we are righteous we prosper, if not we lose everything.*" Job even believed that: **Read Job 1:5** It isn't until chapter 21 that he notices that the wicked often prosper and die happy (v13) while the righteous often suffer . . . so . . . he wonders in v 15, "*Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him?*"

What is the answer to Satan's question and Job's tortured cry? Tune in next week and we'll try to figure it out from the Book of Job itself.

### **Homework:**

Read: Or reread The Book of Job.

Think: What is the real reason I serve God?

Apply: Read a Psalm each day and let its poetry permeate your spirit.

## Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 33: The Book of Job, Part II

### OUTLINE FOR THE BOOK OF JOB

*A REAL LIFE DRAMA IN THREE ACTS*

#### Introduction

The Book of Job has been acclaimed as a significant piece of literature, even in the secular world where schools often read it in their literature and philosophy classes.

Lord Tennyson called it, "the greatest poem, whether of ancient or modern literature," and philosopher Thomas Carlyle said, "I call that one of the grandest [things] ever written with a pen." Martin Luther thought it was, "more magnificent and sublime than any other book of Scripture." (Even Romans?)

That raises it up to lofty heights height indeed, but, is it a very practical book? Let me read from the introduction of a very old book on Job (copyright 1908), *The Strange Ways of God*, by Charles Reynolds Brown. *"The book of Job has stood for generations as one of the great dramas of doubt. The quality and source of the doubt give the book special interest to practical minds in that it takes up, not those speculative inquiries which are spun out by cloistered school men sitting comfortably apart from the strain and stress of actual experience, but rather the vital problems of ordinary people.*

*"The prevailing faith of the day is challenged by the hard lot that fell to a flesh-and-blood man. We find a certain man of unblemished integrity in the full enjoyment of health, property, family joy, and a life of usefulness, brought to the point where he feels the foundations are slipping from under him because of terrible misfortunes which the God of righteousness allows to fall upon his home of peace. It is therefore not a clever contest between hair-splitting theologians but a battle of warm faith with hard facts that we find portrayed in the book of Job.*

*"It is at this very point that the busy people of the world today most commonly find themselves puzzled. In their minds the real debate is not over the fine points of this particular dogma or that; it deals with something more fundamental and vital. They listen on Sunday to the warm assurances of faith put forth from the pulpits of the land,-a God who knows that we have need of all things that are demanded for joyous and useful existence; a Friend who does not suffer a sparrow to fall to the ground without His notice; a Father who is more ready to hear and answer the prayer appeals of His people than earthly fathers are to give bread to their children; an All-embracing Providence whose affectionate interest in our well-being counts the very hairs on our heads!*

*"Then on Monday morning they go out into the world-not some imaginary world as men have agreed together to picture it, but the real world as it is. They rub against the unplanned side of it and find it rough, full of knots and splinters. They are torn and bruised by the contact; or, if happily they themselves escape for a time, they painfully witness the discomfiture of their less fortunate fellows. . . . All such serious, observant, puzzled, and frankly rational men will be interested in those pages of Hebrew literature, where the same old battle of belief was fought out in the land of Uz."*

## Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

### I. ACT ONE: Prologue in Prose (Chapters 1 and 2)

It is interesting to see that the Book of Job begins by showing us how foolish the arguments against Job are. We observe as the first act opens by introducing our hero, Job, at home in Uz, and quickly paints his character for us with a broad brush.

#### A. Scene One: Land of Uz in the Natural World (1:1-5)

##### 1. Man of God (1 and 5) Read Job, Chapter 1:1 and 5

Job is among an elite group of which virtually no negative information is given. Noah, Enoch, Daniel, Ruth, . . . very few were in his class. He was righteous himself and he showed a great concern for the righteousness of his kids.

##### 2. Man of Means (2-4)

He had seven sons, three daughters, many servants, and owned great herds of live stock. In fact, he was. *"one of the greatest of men in the east"* (v. 3), meaning he was both rich and powerful.

#### B. Scene Two: Heaven in the Supernatural World (1:6-12)

Satan comes from cruising around the world, looking for trouble. He's here to rag on God and God's followers. After all he is, *"the accuser of the brethren"* and his name means adversary.

##### 1. God's Pride (6-8)

God said, "Did you check out my servant Job? He's special, he's holy, he's loyal, and he's righteous." (v. 8)

##### 2. Satan's Proposal (9-11)

Satan replied, and I **believe this is the key to the entire book.**, *"Does Job serve you for nothing? Doesn't he serve you for the perks. Don't you protect him from all the bad stuff and give him lots of good stuff. Just take the stuff away and he'll curse you to your face."*

##### 3. God's Permission (12)

*God trusts Job and so He allows Satan to have control over this stuff, but not his person.*

#### C. Scene Three: Meanwhile back in Uz (1:13-22)

*This portion of the story really hit me this week. I've got so much stuff. None of it is as valuable as Job's stuff, but it means alot to me and I'm spoiled and I don't like to lose my stuff.*

##### 1. Job Losses His Possessions (13-17)

*Job is at home while his family parties at his oldest son's house. Three servants come, one by one, with the bad news: The Sabeans, a nomadic tribe, killed all his farm hands and stole his oxen and donkeys. Fire from heaven fell (lightning/a meteor?) killing all his sheep and shepherds. The Chaldeans raided the ranch, rustling all his livestock and killing all his hands. So far, so bad. He has lost everything but his family and three servants.*

## *Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey*

### **2. Job Losses His Family (18-22)**

*Then the coup-de-Gras: A great wind came (hurricane?) levelled his son's house and killed all his children and grandchildren. Bummer! Did Job pass this unbelievable, torturous test? **Read Job 1:20 through 22***

#### **WITH FLYING COLORS!**

#### **D. Scene four: Meanwhile Back in Heaven (2:1-6)**

*Satan's back and he's losing. Will he yield to God? Never!*

##### **1. God's Pride Restated (1-3)**

*Do I dare say that God rubbed it in? "Have you checked out Job lately? If I'm right, I think he still loves me and lives righteously even though he lost everything." (Kemble par.)*

##### **2. Satan's Proposal Renewed (4-5)**

*Satan answers with an old Jewish proverb, "Skin for skin," which means that man values nothing as much as his own skin. "Touch his bone and flesh and he will curse you to your face." (v. 5)*

##### **3. God's Permission reissued (6)**

*God's answer is, "Do your worst, but don't kill him."*

#### **E. Scene Five: One More Time in Uz (2:7-10)**

*Now my mind flashed back to a time in my life when I suddenly found out I had a very deadly cancer in my left kidney. I had always said, "If I ever have cancer, just sew me up and let me die in peace." Not true. I would have done anything to live just one more day and see my family one more time.*

##### **1. Job Lost His Health (7-8)**

*Satan "smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head." (v 7) He was soooo sick. When I was young and in ministry as Art Director for a Christian boy's organization, I came down with a siege of boils, 21 of them two or three at a time. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, and I couldn't sit down to work so while the entire staff went into the beautiful Northwoods of Michigan, I got to stay home and paint the entire office complex. It was all I could do standing up. I have this affinity for Job. He was desperate and tormented.*

##### **2. Job Lost His Wife (9-10)**

*She may not have died, but she was dead to him emotionally and spiritually. "Why don't you just curse God and die." (v 9) Our mate's words can crush us, but still Job remained righteous.*

##### **3. Job Lost His Friends (11-13)**

*Elphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, Job's three best buddies came to the rescue, "to sympathize with him and comfort him." (v 11) After all, what are buddies for? He certainly didn't lose them physically,*

## *Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey*

*but he lost their trust and support. Sometimes silence is golden, but perhaps they could have said something to him about God's faithfulness and tender mercy. Did Job pass this test? **Read Job 13:15***

***AGAIN, VICTORIOUSLY***

### ***II. ACT TWO: Dialogue in Poetry (3-42:6)***

*Job now had to face, perhaps his hardest test, advise from his friends.*

#### ***A. Scene One: In Ashes in Uz (3-37)***

##### ***1. Monologue (3)***

*Did Job suffer silently? Hardly! He did a very thorough job of cursing: He cursed the day he was born; He cursed the sun and the moon ("blot them out"); He cursed the world (calling on the monsters tear it up and wipe it out); He cursed life and extolled death (Get me out of here).*

##### ***2. Dialogue with Three Friends (4-31)***

*We don't have time to study the complex interaction between Job and his three friends, but it happened in three rounds of argument and rebuttal. I developed a simple chart of what I think are their four main arguments.*

*Study this chart and I think you will find that they are based on four false assumptions that are still held by many in the church today.*

#### ***REFER TO DEBATE CHART***

*Notice: Job didn't argue with their basic creeds, only with their belief that he was suffering for those reasons. His primary argument is always the same: "I didn't do anything wrong. If I did, show me what it was."*

##### ***3. Dialog with Elihu (32-37)***

*Elihu, a younger and therefore a wiser man, enters, stage left. He comes closer to the truth and urges Job to humble himself, have patience, and submit to this as God's will. He believed that there must be some great purpose for Job's suffering and rebuked him for unjustly accusing God.*

*Everybody got it wrong: Satan was wrong to think Job loved God for the stuff. His wife was wrong to think loss of wealth, health, and family meant loss of everything. His friends were wrong when they thought Job had sinned. Elihu was wrong when he thought this was to mature Job.*

*Even Job was wrong when he thought God might be unjust.*

***Only God knew the truth about Job, and He wasn't telling!***

#### ***B. Scene Two: In a Whirlwind in Uz (38-42:6)***

*It is time for all men to shut up and listen to God.*

## *Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey*

### **1. God Speaks (38-40:2)**

*God does not choose to answer any questions, especially not why do bad things happen to good people? He chooses instead to ask him, Who do you think you are second- guessing me? (38:4) "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth! Tell me if you have the answer." Then He focuses, not on what is happening, but on who*

#### **He is:**

*He is the creator of the universe.*

*He is the controller of everything and everybody.*

*His providence is evident in all of history.*

*His character is one of holiness and justice.*

### **2. Job Responds (40:2-5)**

*Job wakes up, he understands, he becomes wise and humble:*

#### **Read Job 40:3-5**

*He has nothing left to say . . . the mouth is speechless.*

### **3. God Speaks Again (40:6-41)**

*If this were a football game, we would say God piled on. He has one more major point to make. HE IS POWERFUL More powerful than Job or any other man. In fact, think of the most fearsome creatures you can imagine, behemoth and leviathon, and they are nothing next to God.*

### **4. Job Repents (42:1-6)**

*Job yielded completely to a new vision of God. "I know now how great you are (v 2), I know I can't understand what you do (v 4), I know you are the teacher and I'm the student (v 4).*

*Then the capstone statement of understanding, (vv. 5 -6) "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee; Therefore I retract, And repent in dust and ashes."*

*J. Vernon McGee believes this is the primary purpose of the Book of Job, to teach repentance. He feels that we admit that bad people need to repent. People like Ahab need to repent. Saul needed to repent. Hitler needed to repent. That's an easy concept but what he feels we need to learn, and he's right of course, is that good people also need to repent. David, Job, Paul--"there is none righteous"--needed to repent. And, we need to repent.*

***I agree with him, but I see a bigger lesson in the Book of Job.***

## *Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey*

### **III. ACT THREE: Epilogue in Prose (Chapter 42)**

*It's only fair to find out what happens to our hero.*

#### **A. Scene One: Land of Uz (42)**

##### **1. Reconciliation (1-9)**

*God was upset because Job's friends had presented a false picture of Him. But, in His mercy and for Job's sake he has Job pray for them and offer sacrifice for their sins.*

##### **2. Restoration (10-17)**

*God restored Job's fortune, his extended family, and more stuff than he had before. He also allowed he and his wife to have exactly seven sons and three daughters and they were swell. Job lived another 140 years and died prosperous, happy, and I'm sure, very wise.*

#### **Lessons**

*Since it doesn't completely answer the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" what good is the Book of Job?*

- 1. It does give us one reason why a righteous person may suffer. Sometimes God may want to teach Satan a lesson, using us.*
- 2. It shows God's trust in his followers when Satan accuses them.*
- 3. It revealed the battle over the value of stuff to the inner man.*
- 4. It is a lesson in patience. (James 5)*
- 5. It teaches us that the righteous also need repentance.*

***But, I believe the main lesson is pointed out in Satan's initial question:***

*"Does Job fear God for nothing?" The answer is, NO, Job doesn't fear and serve God for nothing--*

- 6. The real benefit of being righteous is not health, wealth, or family*

## *Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey*

### ***IT IS FOR GOD HIMSELF!***

*God Himself brings about the triumph of righteousness. As the New Testament explains, true joy comes, not from people, places or things, but from a personal relationship with the God of the universe.*

***God is all, and in all! (Colossians 3:11)***

### ***Homework:***

*Read: As much of The Book of Psalms as possible.*

*Think: What use can I make of the Psalms?*

*Apply: Serve God this week for nothing . . . just because*

*He is who He is.*

***He's worth it!***