

BIBLE STUDIES ON THE BOOK OF JOB
MAJOR SERIES I, 2010

*No man is an island. entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main; if a clod be washed
away by the sea, Europe is the less, as
well as if a promontory were, as well
as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes
me, because I am involved in mankind,
and therefore never send to know for
whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

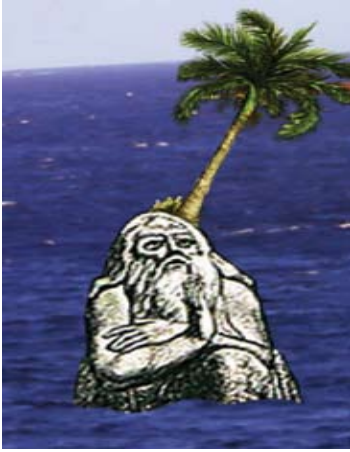
written by John Donne in 1624, in
Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions

MEDITATION XVII. ,

NUNC LENTO SONITU DICUNT, MORIERIS.

Now this bell tolling softly for another,
says to me, Thou must die.

for the complete passage, and other meditations by John
Donne, follow the link on the small group website.



An introduction to studying the book of Job

The book of Job concerns itself with the question of faith in a sovereign God. Can God be trusted? Is he good and just in his rule of the world? Job will declare outright that God has wronged him (19:6–7). At the same time, Job is certain that his “enemy” is actually his advocate and will vindicate him.

The book sets out from the beginning to show that the reasons for human suffering often remain a secret to human beings. Indeed, Job’s sufferings come upon him because Satan accused him in the heavenly courts, and the reader never learns whether these reasons were explained to Job. Probably they were not. There is irony in the book of Job, due to the fact that God seems both too close and too far away. On the one hand, Job complains that God is watching him every moment so that he cannot even swallow his spit (7:19). On the other hand, Job finds God elusive, feeling that he cannot be found (9:11). Though God is intensely concerned about humans, he does not always answer their most agonizing questions.

At the same time, Job’s friends offer no real help. They come to “comfort” him (2:11), but Job ends up declaring them “miserable comforters” who would “comfort” him “with empty nothings” (21:34). These friends represent an oversimplified “orthodoxy,” based on a misreading of the wisdom tradition to the effect that all troubles are punishments for wrongdoing. Their “comfort” consists largely of applying this message to Job, urging him to identify his sin and repent of it. In so doing, these friends serve as a mirror for all readers who might be inclined to say similar things to people in distress.

Astonishingly, the Lord does not take Job to task over his words, instead calling them “right” (42:7). The book as a whole illustrates that a full understanding of God’s reasons for events is not a prerequisite for faithfulness amid terrible suffering. Further, Job’s deep perplexity and questioning are not a provocation to God.

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

The book of Job addresses a universal problem for all people of all faith perspectives, even for those who believe that the world is the result of impersonal forces operating in a predetermined manner. The author of Job specifically addresses those who believe in a personal Creator, known by the name Yahweh (the Lord), according to his self-revelation. His work is simply about God and man; it was written to those who struggle with the justice of a sovereign God in a world filled with suffering.

The author does not provide a theodicy in the sense of defending the justice of God.

Job's friends' wisdom is a human effort to resolve this dilemma, but as far as the author is concerned, these efforts fail. God also declares that the friends are in the wrong (42:8). Elihu's intervention probes further, but neither is he the intermediary whom Job seeks. The author is concerned about the triumph of faith in a time of suffering. To this end his hero succeeds. Job can triumphantly declare, "I know that my Redeemer lives" (19:25). Job's resolve to love and trust the one who seems to attack him as an enemy is evident throughout.

Literary Features

A prose account of the fall and restoration of the pious Job frames the book as a whole (1:1–2:13; 42:7–17). Here readers meet a blameless man, whose peace and prosperity are tragically disrupted when—unknown to him—God points him out to Satan (see note on 1:6). The question posed in 1:9, "Does Job fear God for no reason?" appears to be the leading concern of the prose, and it receives a full and satisfactory answer by the book's conclusion.

Within those prose bookends, though, a dramatic poetic dialogue unfolds as readers listen to the main protagonists in the story. Job's soliloquies (chs. 3; 28; 29–31) bracket three rounds of impassioned debate (chs. 4–14; 15–21; 22–27) with his "friends"—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (cf. 2:11). Their dialogue descends from intuitive integrity in Job (cf. 3:23–25; 6:4) and sympathy from his friends (4:2–5) at the beginning, to embittered self-justification in Job (ch. 27) and outrageous accusation from his friends (ch. 22) at the end. Throughout, the main concern seems to be a question Eliphaz voiced: "Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?" (4:17; cf. Job at 9:2; 31:6; Bildad at 25:4). Consequently, Job himself comes under increasing scrutiny as he mounts an increasingly bold defence of his innocence in the face of the simplistic ethical onslaught of his friends.

Job longs for divine vindication, and for an intermediary who can bring this about (cf. 9:33; 16:19–21; 19:25–27). The reader, who has had a privileged glimpse into the heavenly mysteries behind Job's suffering, is prepared by the end of the dialogues for God to declare to the disputants their errors and relieve Job of his misery. It is not to be, however—at least not yet.

Instead, a new character makes an entrance, one who alone in the book bears a Hebrew name: Elihu ("he is God" or possibly "Yahweh is God") son of Barachel ("may God bless" or "God has blessed"; cf. 32:6). Through five uninterrupted chapters (chs. 32–37) he rebukes both Job and his friends—but how are readers to understand his intervention? Commentators vary dramatically in their assessments. From the text itself, certain factors stand out. (1) Elihu provides in small measure the "intermediary" for whom Job hoped. Elihu himself is not the answer to Job's quest, but he does point in the right direction. (2) The dialogues to this point appeal to tradition and observation; Elihu introduces the notion of inspiration (32:8, 18–20). (3) Elihu cites and finds

wanting both sides of the debate (33:1; 34:2). Again, Elihu anticipates the stance that God himself will take (chs. 38–42). (4) Perhaps most important, Elihu reorients the entire debate. The focus slowly but surely swings away from Job and the problem of human morality, urging attention to God alone as the grounds of certainty and hope (cf. 36:22–23; 37:14–24).

At the same time, Elihu may be overestimating his own contribution (32:6–10). He knows no more of the actual reasons for the events (chs. 1–2) than the three friends do, and some of his arguments overlap theirs. Further, when the Lord finally speaks (38:1), he seems to ignore Elihu entirely (cf. also 42:7). Elihu may be asserting some true things at the core of his argument, but how he applies these things and the conclusions he draws about Job contrast significantly with the Lord’s speech to Job. On a literary level, Elihu’s speech builds suspense by delaying the final outcome.

Finally, the Lord appears in the whirlwind (38:1; 40:6)—as Job had suspected he might (cf. 9:17a). The “Yahweh speeches” (chs. 38–41) do not directly engage Job’s questions but point rather to the reality of the God behind, and now clearly within, his suffering.

The most important key word in the book is the term “comfort”; the book shows where true comfort is to be found. In 2:11 Job’s three friends come to comfort him; in 6:10 Job takes comfort in not having denied the words of the Holy One; in 7:13 Job claims that God will not allow his bed to comfort him. In 15:11 Eliphaz claims to be offering the comforts of God, while in 16:2 Job calls his friends miserable comforters, and in 21:34 he declares they are trying to comfort him with empty nothings. In 21:2 Job sarcastically offers to his friends the “comfort” of hearing him out. The key comes in 42:6: now that God has spoken, Job can say that he is “comforted in dust and ashes.” When Job’s relatives and friends come to comfort him in 42:11, this is probably ironic: Job found the comfort he needed in the vision of God’s unsearchable wisdom.

Outline

1. Prologue: Job’s Character and the Circumstances of His Test (1:1–2:13)
 1. The integrity of Job (1:1–5)
 2. The first test (1:6–22)
 1. The challenge in heaven (1:6–12)
 2. The loss of family and possessions (1:13–19)
 3. Job’s confession and confidence (1:20–22)
 3. The second test (2:1–10)
 1. The challenge in heaven (2:1–6)
 2. Job’s affliction and confession (2:7–10)
 4. Job’s comforters (2:11–13)
2. Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (3:1–42:6)
 1. Job: despair for the day of his birth (3:1–26)

1. Introduction (3:1–2)
2. Job curses his birth (3:3–10)
3. Job longs for rest (3:11–19)
4. Job laments his suffering (3:20–26)
2. The friends and Job: can Job be right before God? (4:1–25:6)
 1. First cycle (4:1–14:22)
 1. Eliphaz: can mortal man be in the right before God? (4:1–5:27)
 2. Job: life is futile (6:1–7:21)
 3. Bildad: the wisdom of the sages (8:1–22)
 4. Job: how can a mortal be just before God? (9:1–10:22)
 5. Zophar: repent (11:1–20)
 6. Job: a challenge to the “wisdom” of his friends (12:1–14:22)
 2. Second cycle (15:1–21:34)
 1. Eliphaz: Job’s words condemn him (15:1–35)
 2. Job: hope for a sufferer (16:1–17:16)
 3. Bildad: punishment for the wicked (18:1–21)
 4. Job: my Redeemer lives (19:1–29)
 5. Zophar: the wicked will die (20:1–29)
 6. Job: the wicked prosper (21:1–34)
 3. Third cycle (22:1–25:6)
 1. Eliphaz: Job is guilty (22:1–30)
 2. Job: God is hidden (23:1–24:25)
 3. Bildad: an unanswered question (25:1–6)
3. Job: the power of God, place of wisdom, and path of integrity (26:1–31:40)
 1. The mystery and majesty of God’s ways (26:1–14)
 2. A claim to integrity and a wish for vindication (27:1–23)
 3. Where is wisdom found? (28:1–28)
 4. The path of Job’s life (29:1–31:40)
4. Elihu: suffering as a discipline (32:1–37:24)
 1. Introduction: Elihu and his anger (32:1–5)
 2. The voice of youth (32:6–22)
 3. An arbiter for Job (33:1–33)
 4. An appeal to the wise (34:1–37)
 5. What right does Job have before God? (35:1–16)
 6. The mercy and majesty of God (36:1–37:24)
5. Challenge: the Lord answers Job (38:1–42:6)
 1. The first challenge: understanding the universe (38:1–40:2)
 2. Job’s response: silence (40:3–5)
 3. The second challenge: understanding justice and power (40:6–41:34)
 4. Job’s response: submission (42:1–6)
3. Epilogue: The Vindication, Intercession, and Restoration of Job (42:7–17)
 1. The Lord rebukes the three friends (42:7–9)
 2. The Lord restores Job (42:10–17)

Welcome to the first major study series for 2010: JOB: NO MAN IS AN ISLAND

On Sundays we worship together, study God's Word, pray and enjoy being a church family. In small groups we are able to delve deeply into the Word together, to take time to develop relationships so that we can encourage and challenge and support our brothers and sisters in Christ, to pray and to spur each other on in ministry.

Study	Passage
1	Job 1-2
2	Job 3-27
3	Job 28
4	Job 32-38
5	Job 38-41
6	Job 42

This program will match the studies with the sermons. If your group prefers a different schedule - go for it! Some groups like to take 2 weeks per study, others to do the study before the sermon.

Some helpful guidelines for you to think about in your small group:

- We will treat no question as stupid. Some people will have more experience in Bible study than others, but everyone must feel free to say what they think without fear of being ridiculed.
- We will remain focused throughout the study. We will always attempt to find a good balance between studying the Scriptures, sharing our news and praying for each other.
- We will remember that we gather together in a small group to grow in our knowledge of God and use our gifts to build each other up in the faith. We hope and expect that the Holy Spirit will perform a transforming work in our lives as we study God's Word and share together.
- We will be aware of what is going on in each other's lives and listen with empathy and concern instead of judgement or ridicule.
- We will agree to disagree in love. Open discussion is an adventure full of danger. People will differ. None of us will know the whole truth or be right all the time. We will respect and love and try to learn from each other even when we think the other person is wrong.
- We will make every effort to attend and participate faithfully in all small group meetings.



Job 1-2: The good, the bad and the ugly

Getting started

What ideas do you already have about the book of

Job?

What are you looking forward to in this study series?

Discuss...

1. What do you think the writer means when he says that Job was 'blameless and upright' (1:1)?
2. Look closely at how Job is described in the rest of chapters 1-2. What else can we assume about his character and his life?
3. What do these chapters tell us about God? Why would God agree to this 'contest' even though it would make such a painful impact on Job and his family?
4. What do these chapters tell us about Satan - the accuser? Is there anything about this portrayal that is challenging or encouraging to you?
5. What do Job's friends do that is helpful for us as we care for others who suffer (2:11-13)?

My notes...

Explore some more...

In the Old Testament:

Gen 3:1-8; Isaiah:55:8-9;
Jer 10:23-24; Hab 3:16-19

In the New Testament

Matt 4:1-17; Romans
8:31-39; 1 Tim 6:7-8;
James 5:10-11; 1 Peter
5:6-7

Making an impact...

- Why do we follow and seek to serve Christ? How self-centred are our motives and expectations?
- How prepared would you be spiritually, emotionally and relationally if your life to change in an instant? How are Job's responses in 1:20-22 and 2:10 a challenge to us?
- These first chapters do not shy away from the mystery of suffering and its causes. The dramatic irony is intense (the reader knows more than Job and those around him). How can this develop your own understanding to pain and suffering?

A thought...

"We never know what a day will bring, good or ill. Our heavenly Father's plan unfolds apart from our awareness. Ours is a walk of faith, not sight. Trust, not touch. Leaning long and hard, not running away. No one knows ahead of time what the Father's plan includes. It's best that way. It may be a treasured blessing; it could be a test that drops us to our knees. He knows ahead of time, but He is not obligated to warn us about it or to remind us it's on the horizon. We can be certain of this: Our God knows what is best. " C.R Swindoll, *Job: A man of heroic endurance*, p325

Pray...

In your prayer time pray for each other:

- for the ability to "hold everything loosely" and yet still find value and purpose in our everyday work and lives
- in praise that God is sovereign and powerful, and that Satan's power has been defeated through Christ's death and resurrection.



Job 3-27: Who's to blame for suffering?

Getting started

group What makes a good friend? Share with the group about a time when a friend of yours has been an encouragement to you in your journey of faith.

Discuss...

1. In groups of 2 or 3 read through the responses of either Eliphaz, Bildad or Zophar. Share with the group what you think their main message is to Job, and why they do not really provide the comfort or the wisdom Job is looking for.
2. How does Job respond to his friends' counsel (6:15, 6:21, 12:2-3, 13:5, 16:2-3, 5, 19:2, 6:2-3)? Why is he so unimpressed?
3. In chapter 9 Job cries out for a mediator between him and God (9:14-20, 32-35). Why?
4. What are the big differences between how Job and his friends view God?
5. How does our understanding of Jesus and of the gospel shed light on the opinions of Job and his friends?

My notes...

Explore some more...

In the Old Testament:

Psalm 22; Psalm 64:1-4;
Psalm 139: 23-24; Prov
12:15-18; Prov 14:12;
Prov 16:24

In the New Testament

Matt 5:11-12; Romans
12:15; Galatians 6:1-10;
1 Tim 2:1-7; Hebrews
7:23-26

Making an impact...

- How available do you think you are to people who are suffering?
- What difference does it make that Job's friends talk *about* God while Job talks *to* God? How does prayer enrich our lives, even in the midst of uncertainty?
- Job expresses his deepest feelings (3:1-6; 19:25-27; chapter 23), especially his need to get close enough to God to be able to argue his cause. What encouragement can we have from Job's honesty? How honest are you with God?

A thought...

"Job refuses to suppress his feelings of injustice, his ugly thoughts about God and his fierce opposition to the divine plan for his life... The option of taking on God is also ours. How different parish life would be if people took on God rather than meekly accepting or blithely ignoring his involvement."

N.C. Habel, *Job, Knox Preaching Guide*, p28

Pray...

In your prayer time pray for each other:

- for discernment and wisdom when we seek advice, or receive it unsolicited
- for wisdom, compassion and grace when we have the opportunity to walk alongside those who are hurting
- in praise and thanksgiving that Jesus is our mediator and that the Holy Spirit's work in your lives as a comforter and guide.



Job 28:

Wisdom is out there

Getting started

Do you think our society values wisdom? Why?
Why not?

Discuss...

1. How does this 'hymn to wisdom' reveal the strengths and limitations of human accomplishment?
2. "Wisdom is looking at life from God's point of view" (Swindoll, p226), "Wisdom is a way of living before God" (Aktinson, p121). How are these ideas reflected in Job's thoughts about wisdom?
3. What truths about God are reinforced in this chapter?
4. How does this hymn put the speeches of Job's friends into context? In what ways does it criticise the friends' methods and conclusions about Job's suffering?

My notes...

Explore some more...

In the Old Testament:

1 Sam 12:12-15; Psalm 147:
4-10; Prov 1:7, 9:9-12

In the New Testament

Romans 15:13; Ephesians
1:15-19; 3:14-21;
Philippians 1:9-11; Col
1:9-14

Making an impact...

- Where do you normally seek wisdom? How has this helped or hindered you?
- In what ways does your life show that you 'fear God'? How could you improve in this?
- How can we best pray for ourselves and our friends to grow in wisdom? What should we be praying for? Maybe read some of Paul's prayers to consider how we can pray in a more directed and purposeful way.

A thought...

"...as we wrestle with Job in his pain, and struggle to make sense of his appalling situation - [we see] that there is more to life than we can understand with our senses. There is more to wisdom than the greatest of human skills. There is a different way of looking at everything - from the perspective of God the Creator. ...There is more to Job's predicament than Job himself will ever know. What is needed is a new beginning to our knowledge - to start not from our experience of misery like Job, not from our own mystical experience like Eliphaz, not from our understanding of theological tradition like Bildad, nor from our own inflated common sense like Zophar... wisdom will not come as part of the belief system of mankind, but only as a gift of God" D. Atkison, *The Message of Job*, pp 120-121

Pray...

In your prayer time pray for each other:

- that you will grow in wisdom and fear the LORD
- that you will look at life, and our world, through God's eyes
- for discernment when you hear 'wise words' from others



Job 32-37: Why friends don't always help

Getting started

Have you ever been so frustrated with other people's opinions or actions that you have had to speak up? Was it a wise move?

Discuss...

1. What impels Elihu to finally speak up (32:1-5)? Do you agree with his motives?
2. How does Elihu argue that God has been present in the midst of Job's sufferings (33:13-30)?
3. What is Elihu's opinion of Job in chapter 34 (v1-9 & 31-37)? Is he right in his judgement? What are the faults in his logic and presentation?
4. In 35: 9-16 Elihu deals with a second question—one that was asked by Job: "Why doesn't God answer prayer?" Is his answer satisfactory? How does it echo the friends' previous opinions?
5. In his last speech (36:5-26; 37:1-5) how does Elihu prepare Job (and us as the readers) for an encounter with God?

My notes...

Explore some more...

In the Old Testament:
Psalm 94:8-15,
Ecclesiastes 3:1-14;
Isaiah 45:9-13

In the New Testament
Acts 17:24-28, 1 Tim
6:11-16; Rev 15:3-4

Making an impact...

- In what ways is Elihu's God "too tidy and too small"? In what ways have you had the same view of God?
- Can you identify good advice in Elihu's speeches that could help you as you journey with others through suffering?
- Now that you have heard from all of Job's friends - what have you learned about offering comfort and guidance to those who are hurting?

A thought...

"[Elihu's final speech is] outstanding theology. Why did the man waste time and effort meandering in so many needless directions before arriving at this destination? But, thankfully, he finally got it right.... That's Elihu's message. Here he is Job! Our awesome God - all glorious above. 'Job listen. He's here. He isn't always silent. When he speaks there is no voice like His.' Job's view of God may have been enlarged, thanks to his friend's final remarks."

C.R Swindoll, *Job: A man of heroic endurance*, p259, 262

Pray...

In your prayer time pray for each other:

- for sensitivity and wisdom when people in pain ask for our counsel
- for a better understanding of God's sovereignty
- for patience and a desire to seek God's ways in the face of suffering



Job 38-41: God is still God

Getting started

When have you ever been in awe of God's power?
How did you respond?

Discuss...

1. What are the common themes in God's questions to Job (38:1-30; 39:17-25; chp 40)?
2. Despite the fact that Job wanted God to hear his complaint and claim his innocence, God does not answer him as we might expect. Why do you think Job is answered in this way?
3. Is God just bullying Job into submission with an impressive array of his power?
4. How does Job respond to God (40:1-5)?
5. How does God's response reveal the possibility of a personal and responsive God with whom we can have a relationship?

My notes...

Explore some more...

In the Old Testament:
Exodus 24:15-18; 1 Kings
19:10-18; Psalm 29; Isaiah
40:21-31; Nahum 1:3-6

In the New Testament
Colossians 1:15-20;
Hebrews 1:1-3, 10-12;
Rev 4

Making an impact...

- Is the awesomeness of God something you think about? How would dwelling on God's power & omniscience enrich your everyday faith?
- In what ways is God's answer to Job a rebuke to anyone who thinks they could govern the world better than he does?
- How comfortable are you when you get more questions than answers? How can your questions about God strengthen your faith?

A thought...

"In God, power, justice, and wisdom are all aspects of the one and the same divine character, so Job can let the matter rest in faith within the mystery of God. Faith, we said, is what God gives us to help us live with uncertainties."

D. Atkison, *The Message of Job*, pg 156

Pray...

In your prayer time pray for each other:

- for a greater sense of awe about God and His power
- for forgiveness for the times we have criticised God by our self-righteous attitudes and actions
- in praise that we follow a God who does seek a relationship with His creation - most clearly seen through Jesus' incarnation.

Job 42: Worship

makes sense

Getting started

From what you have looked at over the last 5 weeks, do you think you are more equipped to answer the question, “Why do people suffer?”?

Discuss...

1. After God’s speech, Job responds in worship and repentance (it is important to notice that he does not confess of the sins his friends think he has committed). What do Job’s words reveal about how he sees God and how he sees himself (42:1-6)?
2. Job’s friends would probably have agreed with all that God said to Job in chapters 38—41. Why does God judge that they have ‘not spoken of me what is right’ (42:7)?
3. How does Job show grace and mercy to his friends? Why do you think he does this?
4. In the end Job is given no explanation for his suffering. What does this show about the mysteries of our lives’ experiences and God’s sovereignty?
5. Is God just rewarding Job for putting up with everything he has experienced?
6. How does the epilogue reveal God’s grace?

My notes...

Explore some more...

In the Old Testament:
Exodus 50:15-21; Psalm
51:16-19; Isaiah 6: 1-5;

In the New Testament
2 Cor 4:16-5:3; James
5:7-11; Rev 21:1-5

Making an impact...

- Are you discouraged by the 'neat ending' and the renewal of Job's blessings or encouraged by his restoration? Why do you think you respond as you do?

- God declares that Job has done what is right (42:7), even though throughout the book Job has quarrelled with God, doubted God's justice, insisted on his own innocence and

even wanted to end his own life. How do Job's actions and God's response encourage you in your own responses to God?

- What how might we, or do we, misuse these freedoms of expression? To what result?

A thought...

"Just by looking at ordinary things, he realises that he cannot even begin to imagine what it must be like to be God. The world is beautiful and terrifying, and in it all God is everywhere, seen to be powerful and wise, and more mysterious when He is known than when He is but dimly discerned. The LORD has spoken to Job. That fact alone is marvellous beyond wonder."

F.I Andersen, *Tyndale Commentary - Job*, pg 291

Pray...

In your prayer time pray for each other:

- that God will continue to give us wisdom as we face the realities of life
- in thankfulness for the freedom that we have before God, especially through Jesus