***Job: A Study in Suffering…And Faith***

Lesson One: Introduction

***Objective(s):***

1. Gain a general understanding of the book, particularly its organization.

2. Appreciate the struggle of Job as he attempts to understand the source of his suffering.

1. **Historical and geographical setting of the book**
   1. It is important to make a distinction between the time that Job lived and the time when the book of Job was written.
   2. Job apparently lived during what is known as the patriarchal era, possibly near the time of Abraham. Such can be deduced from the following informa­tion:1
      1. There are no clear references to the Law of Moses or its institutions in the book. This would be unusual if Job lived virtually any time after Moses.
      2. Job offered sacrifices on behalf of his family, a practice reminiscent of patriarchal days when there was no established priesthood compara­ble to that under the Mosaic economy.
      3. The probable length of Job’s life fits well with the common lifespans of the patriarchs (42:16).
      4. Some of the language (even the use of certain words) suggests a setting in the patriarchal days.
      5. It should be noted that the strength of some of these arguments depends in part on the location of the land of Uz.2
   3. The location of the “land of Uz” is uncertain. Two main suggestions are offered by scholars:
      1. Uz was the description of an area between Damascus and the Euphrates River and on the edge of the Arabian Desert.3
      2. Uz was located somewhere on the border of Edom and the Arabian Desert. This possibility places Job closer to the commonly accepted locations for the places of origin of the three friends.4
2. **Authorship of the book of Job**
   1. As noted above, it is almost certain that the book of Job was not penned at the same time that the historical character lived.
   2. The author does not identify himself and there is scant evidence upon which to base even a good guess.
      1. Suggestions of specific writers include Moses, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch and Job himself.5
      2. Some have even suggested that the author lived in post-exilic days.6
   3. Of course, even if the book of Job should join the ranks of other biblical books whose authors are unknown, the important consideration is its inspired quality. If the book is inspired, the identity of its human author is not critical.
3. **Survey of the book**
   1. The book of Job may be divided into either three or five major sections.
      1. The book can be handily divided into:7
         1. Prologue (chapters 1-2)
         2. Dialogue (chapters 3-42:6)
         3. Epilogue (42:7 to the end)
      2. If the book is divided into five sections, they would probably be as follows:8
         1. Job tested (chapters 1-2)
         2. Job’s controversy with his friends (chapters 3-31)
         3. Elihu’s presentation (chapters 32-37)
         4. Jehovah spoke to Job (chapters 38-41)
         5. Job blessed (chapter 42)
   2. Between the prologue and epilogue, there are basically three cycles of speeches or debates as they are sometimes called. Each of Job’s three friends spoke and Job answered them in turn.
      1. Zophar is the only one who did not speak a third time.
      2. At the conclusion of the speeches by his friends, Job presented a monologue reaffirming his innocence.
      3. Following Job’s monologue, the younger man Elihu spoke and offered a different explanation of Job’s suffering.
      4. Finally, God spoke, questioning Job and thus demonstrating His majesty.
   3. Most Bible students are aware that the book of Job concerns itself with the problem of suffering and particularly innocent human suffering. Job did not understand why he was suffering and thus the stage was set for a discussion of the problem of human suffering in general.
      1. Job’s three friends held a common, but erroneous idea as to the reason for mankind’s suffering and Job’s in particular.
      2. Their reasoning is clearly summarized by Jackson as follows:9
         1. *The philosophy of Job’s friends can simply be expressed in this fashion. (1) Suffering is the direct result of personal sins (and in proportion thereto). (2) Job is suffering greatly. (3) Therefore Job has committed some great sin. Their error, of course, was in the major premise of their argument. There is no basis for the assumption that suffering is always the consequence of personal wrongdoing.*
   4. Main characters of the book:
      1. God (prologue and epilogue)
      2. Satan (prologue)
      3. Job
      4. Job’s three friends: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar
      5. Elihu
   5. Some scholars have suggested that the book of Job is simply an elaborate poem having no real historical basis. According to this view, the writer simply invented these characters for the purpose of teaching Israel about suffering (perhaps in response to the exile?).10 Nevertheless, other biblical references to Job refer to him in the company of accepted historical personages such as Daniel and Noah (Ezekiel 14:14, 20; James 5:11).
4. **Information on Hebrew Poetry**
   1. It should not be surprising that a large portion of the book of Job is in the form of Hebrew poetry. As Jensen puts it, “poetry is the language of the heart” and the book focuses on a character who was in a great deal of anguish, both from actual suffering and from ignorance of the reason for the suffering.11 It is therefore imperative that the reader have some knowledge of Hebrew poetry.
   2. Unlike more modern verse recognized as poetry because of either rhyme or meter, Hebrew poetry depends upon neither. Instead, Hebrew poetry employs a device known as ***parallelism***. There are three common types of parallelism:12
      1. *Synonymous* - the second line of the couplet repeats the thought of the first line (e.g. 4:9, 15:14; this is the most common type of parallelism in the book of Job).
      2. *Antithetic* - the second line of the couplet forms a contrast to the first line (e.g. 16:20).
      3. *Synthetic* - the second line “completes or fills out the thought of the first” (e.g. 4:19-21).
5. **Purpose of the book**
   1. Of course, the entire book deals with the problem of pain and suffering. In particular, the book of Job tackles the problem of innocent suffering.
   2. At the same time, it seems that this problem is the occasion for a lesson on living by faith. The book is an affirmation of the glory and perfec­tion of Jehovah, One worthy to be worshipped and praised. Jackson, with a good bit of acumen, notes that the charge of Satan concerning Job’s “selfish service” is in reality a stab at God himself. He is charging that there is no reason for man to serve God other than physical blessing and thus God must bribe man in order to receive worship from him. The character Job proves to be Jehovah’s defense.13
   3. There are a number of other biblical doctrines which receive attention in the book and to which we will pay notice in the lessons dealing with the text.

**Endnotes:**

1Wayne Jackson, *The Book of Job* (Abilene, Texas: Quality Publications, 1983), p. 10.

2Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), p. 456.

3Irving L. Jensen, *Job* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 5.

4Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol V* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), pp. 852-3.

5Jensen, p. 6. 6Jackson, p. 11.

7Dale Hesser, *Job* (Austin, Texas: R.B. Sweet Co., Inc., 1965), pp. 7-8. (Note: this is largely a division on the basis of the type of language.)

8Jackson, p. 11. 9Jackson, p. 12. 10Jackson, p. 9. 11Jensen, p. 9.

12Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 292.

13Jackson, pp. 13-4.

***Study & Discussion Questions:***

1. What is the nature of Job’s struggle in the book?
2. Can you think of some reasons that people suffer, other than as a result of their personal sin?
3. What is the main message of the book?