

SESSION 1

Job as poetry

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Select verses in Job

BUILDUP THEME



LEARN DOCTRINE

God gave us the book of Job to both humble us and give us sure hope in Him.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will value the book of Job and seek to understand and apply its message.

MEMORY VERSE

“Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life” (Psalm 42:7, 8).

Teacher Preparation

- He is a modern day Job! Have you said that upon hearing the news of someone facing multiple tragedies or losses? Perhaps you thought that about yourself at some point. In reality, no one has faced the tremendous loss Job experienced in such a short amount of time. We would all have to admit anything we have faced or will face won't raise to the level of Job's tragedy. But that doesn't make our experiences any easier. We still need help and hope in life. That's why God gave us the book of Job.
- Read Job 42:5 and 6. Job stopped asking why questions but only after he gained a deeper understanding of who God is. He saw and experienced God's greatness and goodness. He then humbled himself and resolved to trust God no matter what happened.
- Your students need a fresh gaze at God's greatness and goodness. Use this session to prepare them for that fresh gaze by introducing them to reading Job as poetry. Encourage them to be ready to learn alongside Job and come out the other side with humility and a renewed hope in the Lord.

Session Summary

Suffering is the blight of life, and poetry is the language of the soul. Job presents his message about suffering through poetry. It is his personal message of the humility he gained from a revelation of God's greatness and the hope he gained from a demonstration of God's goodness. This session presents the book of Job as a piece of poetic literature. It is unlike any other book in the Bible. We can best gain from Job's experiences as we understand the book's poetic structure.

Session Starters

Option 1—New Lessons

Steps

1. Talk about the opportunities God gives us to learn to know and trust Him more.

Just when our lives are humming along and we think we know God well, God teaches us deeper truths about His goodness and greatness. Job had an unbelievable opportunity to learn about God. God taught him the “Who” behind the “whys” and “why nots” of life.

ASK: When has God used troubles to teach you? (Q1)

ASK: What did you learn? (Q2)

2. Transition to the Bible study.

God gave us the book of Job to help us when we face opportunities to deepen our trust in God. We will witness God’s humbling of Job and Job’s hopefulness in God as a result. Our study of Job’s account will transform our lives, humbling us so we might build our hope in God.

Option 2—Common Issues

Steps

1. Present and discuss two or three current event tragedies or disasters that caused widespread destruction and despair (e.g., forest fire, hurricane, mass shooting, disease outbreak, earthquake).

ASK: How do you respond when you first hear the report of a terrible disaster or tragedy?

ASK: What are your thoughts toward God? Have you ever been tempted to question His goodness?

2. Discuss facing struggles that don’t make sense or seem undeserved.

All of us have “issues” in life. None of us has a dream life that glides along without any bumps or setbacks. And we sometimes watch each other go through trials that we hope and pray never happen to us. We would all certainly say that about the trials that came upon Job.

ASK: What common issues make the book of Job applicable to all of us? *We all experience personal, family, or national losses. Everyone is touched by disasters and tragedies eventually.*

3. Transition to the Bible study.

God included the book of Job in the Bible because we need it. It both humbles us by presenting God's greatness and moves us to hope by presenting God's goodness. Our study of Job's account will transform our lives, humbling us so we might build our hope in God.

Bible Study

I. Introduction to Job

The book of Job provides the thoughtful reader with a depth of understanding concerning the profound issues of human suffering. Job is a treasure, a gift from a loving God to those who love Him enough to seek deep and substantial wisdom that speaks to life's most perplexing questions regarding affliction.

A. The purpose of Job

In general, the book of Job addresses the problem of human suffering; more particularly, the problem of suffering by the righteous person. The purpose of Job is to teach deep and profound lessons about God to those who hope and trust in Him. In so doing, Job also teaches important lessons on how believers are to respond suffering.

Job is not a book for the faint of faith. It is not a "how to" on hard times in daily life. It doesn't present a series of steps to take to overcome life's downturns. (Other portions of Scripture provide help in these areas.) Job is a book for the strong of faith, or those who desire to be. It is a majestic presentation of God Almighty and the wonder of Who He is. To some extent, Job doesn't seek to answer the "why" questions of human suffering. It does, however, answer the "Who" question of human suffering for the careful reader and seeking believer.

ASK: What are some "why" questions of human suffering? (Q3) *Why do "good" people suffer when so many "evil" people seem to live carefree? Why does God allow suffering to continue seemingly without end? Why does God allow things to happen that cause deep heartache? Why doesn't God always answer prayers to take suffering away?*

B. The literary style of Job

Poetry is the language of the soul. It communicates feelings along with its message. Like a work of art that blends colors on a painter's canvas, a poet creatively arranges his or her words in verse form to present a vivid picture. Jonah provides a good example of communicating feelings as part of his message.

READ: Jonah 2. **ASK:** What evidence in this passage suggests poems are the "language of the soul"? (Q4) *Jonah cries out to God*

in desperation; he talks about his inner life and soul; he describes his feelings of helplessness and then his newfound hope in God.

Jonah isn't an exclusively poetic book. Neither is Genesis, which includes Jacob's poetic blessing of his sons (Gen. 49:2–27), nor Judges, which includes the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5). The books that are exclusively poetic, or nearly so, are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations. Such poetic books display powerfully emotional language, yet each bears its own distinct style and purpose.

Job is a poetic narrative drama and Psalms a poetic hymnbook. Proverbs contains wise maxims while Ecclesiastes is a poetic discourse on the philosophy of life. Song of Solomon is a poetic love cantata and Lamentations includes poetic dirges lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem.

Hebrew poetry has three basic characteristics: meter, parallelism, and a rich use of figurative language. The writers incorporated these language tools under the Holy Spirit's guidance to present truth with emotion.

"Meter" refers to a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, establishing a line of poetry. The Hebrew language has meter in the stressed and unstressed syllables used by the writer. Linguists, though, don't agree on how to identify Hebrew meter. Any Hebrew meter is obviously lost in the English translations. We can, however, learn something of the Hebrew meter by observing the poetic structure.

Most English editions of the Bible display the structure of poetic verse by how they group verses or sections of verses. Translators knew how to group the verses and phrases by simply paying attention to the meaning. Meaning reveals Hebrew poetic structure. Job often wrote with multiple lines working together to communicate an overarching idea.

BIBLE STUDY: Have learners browse Job 38–41, looking for groups of verses or phrases that are obviously related. **ASK:** What connects the grouped phrases and verses you observed? (Q5)
They communicate one idea or emotion though sometimes from different perspectives. They share a common message and purpose.

READ: Job 38:39–41. **ASK:** What common point does God make through this group of verses? (Q6) *God's care for and attention to both the majestic and mundane of His creatures proves He is neither distant from nor disinterested in the affairs of men.*

Meter creates a general "feeling" or "atmosphere." For example, the "qinah" meter, or dirge meter, expresses sadness. Other kinds of meter communicate emotions ranging from joy to the adventuresome note of epic discovery. The book of Job includes a wide variety of meters, thereby expressing a wide spectrum of human emotion.

ASK: What problems might arise if we read Job like any other book

and thereby failed to read it as poetry? (Q7) *We would risk overlooking the heart of the message and getting lost in the minutia. We would overemphasize examples and symbols and miss the intended meaning.*

II. Literary Features of Job

A. Parallelism

There are six major kinds of parallelism. Each includes various numbers of lines to communicate ideas. The basic linear unit in Hebrew poetry is a “bicolon” or “couplet,” which is two lines of poetry, usually of similar length and style and with parallel or related ideas. A “monostich” is one line of poetry that stands alone. Three related lines working together make a “tricolon” and four a “quatrain.”

In **synonymous parallelism**, line two states essentially the same thought as line one. It may even use the same words and terms or similar words and terms. The speakers in Job use synonymous parallelism frequently.

READ: Job 3:11; 38:26. **ASK:** How does the repetition of thought in these couplets impact the reader? (Q8) *The repetition of thought causes the reader to take notice. The reader can't help but ponder the repeated thought.*

In **synthetic parallelism**, line two further develops the idea of line one. Line two either defines, proves, applies, or adds further information to line one. Synthetic parallelism gives further explanation or information in a striking way. Synthetic parallelism is common in Job and other wisdom literature. (See Proverbs 18:7.)

READ: Job 3:20; 5:17. **ASK:** How does line two in each couplet further develop the idea of line one? (Q9) *In Job 3:20, the second line adds further information about how Job feels about himself. In Job 5:17, the second line applies the information in the first line.*

In **antithetic parallelism**, line two of a couplet contrasts the idea of line one. Just as the whiteness of a pearl stands out sharply against a black velvet background, so an idea in antithetic parallelism stands out sharply against the background of its contrasting idea. Job 32:7 and 8 is an example of antithetic parallelism. Elihu contrasts the wisdom of man with the wisdom that is from God.

READ: Job 41:10. **ASK:** The first line in the couplet refers to Leviathan, a terrible sea creature. How does antithetic parallelism in this verse help the reader? (Q10) *The reader sees the foolishness of thinking one could successfully stand against Almighty God.*

The speakers in the book of Job didn't use antithetic parallelism as much as some of the others types of parallelism. Proverbs uses

antithetic parallelism far more frequently. Still, when we come across it, we should pause to take in the contrast and learn from it.

In **emblematic parallelism**, the writer states a truth in one line and gives a figure of speech that conveys that same truth in the other line. Psalm 23:1 is an example of emblematic parallelism. The figure of speech in the first line, the Lord as a shepherd, explains why David is sure all his needs will be met.

READ: Job 9:25, 26. **ASK:** How does the emblematic parallelism help us understand what the speaker wants to communicate? (Q11) *The three figures of speech help the reader visualize Job's view of his life from the perspective of his loss and suffering. He contemplates his life and sees it as brief and fleeting.*

In emblematic parallelism, the figures of speech make abstract points more concrete. We should spend time on the figure, not to read too much into it, but to understand the truth more fully.

Formal parallelism does not bear any semantic relationship, but simply uses poetic structure (meter) to emphasize the point. The second line finishes the same thought began in the first line.

READ: Job 38:3.

Even in English, we can hear the poetic structure, or meter, in the Job 38:3 couplet. But this couplet does not bear any of the other semantic features common to parallelism. Nor does Job 40:1 and 2, another example of formal parallelism.

Climactic parallelism usually requires at least a three-line stanza of poetry (tricolon) or a four-lined poem (quatrain). In climactic parallelism, all the lines of the stanza begin nearly the same way except for the last line, which gives the climactic statement or grand conclusion. David used this pattern in Psalm 29:1 and 2. In some cases, as in Isaiah 40:31, the point is given first and then the three parallel lines. God effectively used climactic parallelism when He questioned Job in 38:36–38.

READ: Job 12:14–25. **ASK:** There are two sets of climactic parallelisms in this passage (vv. 14–16 and 17–25). What are the key points they reveal? (Q12) *All wisdom and power belong to God; the most powerful and brightest people on earth grope in darkness like drunkards without God's help.*

When studying climactic parallelism, we should not read into the parallel statements so much that we ignore the main idea revealed in the climactic statement.

The message of the book of Job is greatly enhanced through poetry. Job, his wife, his friends, and even God braided their words together

with strong emotions. Understanding the types of parallelism they all used allows us to capture their emotions and ponder their points.

B. Figures of speech

1. Interpreting figures

Old Testament poetry employs figures of speech. A figure of speech is a word or phrase used in unordinary ways to create intensity, feeling, or emphasis. Figures of speech broaden our understanding. The figures of speech in the book of Job give us important insights, but we need to know what they are and how to gain a greater understanding from them.

Job lived in an ancient culture with limited experiences and objects to use as the basis of his figures of speech. So he and the other speakers in the book often turned to nature to convey truths. Even God used figures from nature that Job would understand. Though our understanding and encounters with nature are like Job's, there are differences we must take into account.

Note that some Bible versions replace figures of speech with what the translators believe were the authors' intended meanings. God, however, purposefully chose specific figures of speech to communicate specific truths. It is impossible to capture every nuance of a figure of speech by using a translator's plain language. We gain the most from a passage by studying its figures of speech.

2. Types of figures

A **simile** is a comparison, stating that something is like something else. Similes normally use the words "like" or "as." The book of Job employs many similes to reveal truth or to communicate a speaker's thoughts or point of view.

READ: Job 19:10. **ASK:** What information does Job's simile reveal? (Q13) *Job communicates that his loss of hope in this life seems permanent. An uprooted tree would surely die and cease to live and prosper as it once did.*

Job's use of simile in 19:10 reveals his feelings and perspective. It gives us a window into his heart, but it doesn't reveal God's perspective. God knew Job wasn't like an uprooted tree. Job still had a secure hope for both the present and the future. Job even admitted later in the passage that his future was still secure. He anticipated seeing his Redeemer (19:25, 26); he just didn't have much hope in his immediate circumstances. Job's simile, then, helps us understand the hopelessness that can accompany tragedy and pain. It also teaches us that we must trust God rather than our feelings.

A **metaphor** is a comparison that says one thing represents another. Metaphors state something is something else.

READ: Job 29:15. **ASK:** What does Job communicate about himself by calling himself “eyes” and “feet”? (Q14) *That he regularly made a practice of helping those who couldn't help themselves.*

Job also used metaphors to reveal what he is not. For instance, he said he is not a tree that has been cut down (14:7–10). Tree stumps can sprout again and return to strength. Job didn't have any hope in restoration. As with his uprooted tree simile in 19:10, Job's tree stump metaphor reveals what he is thinking and his outlook on life in the face of such deep despair and pain.

A **merism** communicates one basic truth or idea by expressing two opposites or extremes. For example, someone might say, “I worried about you day and night.” “Day and night” is a merism for every moment.

READ: Job 38:19. **ASK:** What merism is found in this verse? (Q15) *The Lord uses the place of light and darkness to refer to everywhere.*

With merisms, we must consider the truth the two parts reveal as a pair. We shouldn't get hung up on one or the other. They find their meaning when used together.

Personification attributes the characteristics of personality to an inanimate object or to an idea.

READ: Job 38:12. **ASK:** What does the personification of the dawn reveal to Job about God's greatness? (Q16) *Dawn's “obedience” to God reveals God's complete control over the daily processes of nature.*

God faithfully commands the sun and keeps it on a consistent and highly predictable path through the sky. Such attention and control demonstrate that God is both powerful and good. God's personification of the dawn revealed His goodness to Job, who counted on the sun to grow his crops that fed his family and provided for their needs and well-being.

Job isn't a book that can be read or studied on the fly. There is more in the book than this course could possibly cover. Commit to reading the book thoughtfully. Pause to ponder God's use of parallelism and figurative language. And praise Him for being so thoughtful in communicating truth to both our hearts and minds.

Session Application

Steps

1. Encourage your students to learn to read Job as poetry, reviewing the materials from this session on parallelism and figures of speech.

ASK: When have you gained from reading Bible poetry as poetry? (Q17)

ASK: What do you expect to gain from reading Job as poetry? (Q18)

Linger over Job as you would a fine meal and be nourished by the knowledge of God to be gained from the study. Job is meant to be pondered, not run through.

ASK: How might you linger over Job? (Q19) *By making the study a priority, meditating on its meaning, discussing it with others, and memorizing its key verses.*

2. Challenge your students to capture in a poetic way their responses to the many lessons in Job. Using their own parallelism and figures of speech can help them expand their understanding of God's truth. Give them a few of your own figures of speech to communicate your desire for the teaching of Job to impact their lives. See the following examples.
 - I pray God's teaching in Job will nourish your life like rain soaking a thirsty ground.
 - I trust the truths in Job are bright lights to illumine your walk with God.
3. Close in prayer, asking God to reveal His truth through Job as you study it over the next 12 weeks.