

## **JOB: A MAN OF FAITH IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING**

### **Session 1**

#### **Introduction**

Trees snap like toothpicks or fly upward, torn from the earth. Whole rooftops sail, cars tumble like toys, houses collapse, and a wall of water obliterates the shore and inundates the land. We have just seen it up close and personal : in the US - a hurricane.

A hurricane cuts and tears - but only solid foundations survive its fury. But these foundations can be used for rebuilding after the storm.

**WHAT KIND OF FOUNDATIONS DO YOU, ME, HAVE IN OUR LIVES?**

For any building the foundation is critical. It must be deep enough and solid enough to withstand the weight of the building and other stresses.

Lives, human lives are like buildings - and the quality of the foundation will determine the quality as a whole. In Matthew 7: 24 Jesus says

***“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and put them into practice is like a wise man who built his house upon the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; YET IT DID NOT FALL BECAUSE IT HAD ITS FOUNDATION ON THE ROCK.”***

Too often, inferior materials are used in people’s lives - and when the troubles or tests come - lives crumble.

Job was tested - he had a life filled with possessions, prestige, people, family - and then suddenly he was assaulted on all sides devastated, stripped down to his foundation - But his life’s foundation was built on GOD - and he endured.

**THE STORY OF JOB - THE MAN OF GOD - Riches to rags, and then Rags to riches again.**

A theological outline about suffering, divine sovereignty and an **AMAZING PICTURE OF FAITH THAT ENDURES**. Job is an amazing book, possibly one of the greatest works of ancient literature - inspired by God.

The man Job - who fears God in the midst of intolerable suffering! It explores the impenetrable questions of suffering and the sovereignty of God and discusses and debates the very essence of what is WISDOM!

In this series in Job we will plunge into the depths of despair with Job, see if his “friends” were actually friends, reflect on what the scripture says Job was correct in doing, and what he wasn’t. Then we shall study

how God responded, and then ask ourselves How do we respond to God's sovereignty and can we then mirror Job's practicing of wisdom. And as we study God's word let us analyse our lives - let us check our foundations, what are our foundations, the foundations of our lives?

So briefly a bit of background - we don't know who the author was - inspired by God it truly was but we are given no clues to the author.

What is not disputed though is the book as part of what we call "Wisdom Literature" which includes Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Psalms and Song of Songs. At the very centre of the book of Job is this question: "What is true wisdom?" it centres on an inner wisdom debate -

## **TRADITIONAL WISDOM                      V                      TRUE WISDOM**

You see traditional wisdom of the time was called "The Doctrine of Retribution" which means that you are suffering because you have sinned.

The crisis of wisdom, is best illustrated in the book of Job - Job's three friends - as we shall see - have a simple doctrine of retribution, their arguments amount to this. Many experiences and thinking of the time point to righteousness and prosperity, folly and evil.

Therefore all experiences of evil of suffering must be the direct result of sin - UGHHHH - WRONG ANSWER!! - And I shall seek, with God's help and expound why this is?

The crisis of wisdom is the background and context for the story of Job - and in it we find the central question of suffering and the sovereign will of God - this is a question that spreads down the generations and cultures and is relevant today - as it was in Ancient Israel. For non-Christians it is one of the major stumbling blocks, "How can God be love in a world of suffering?"

The book does touch on a God of love and unjust suffering - but it also wants to discuss wisdom and right wisdom!

### **Job 1**

And so to Job, the man himself.

In Job 1: 1 we find Job, a man who was "blameless and upright, who feared God and shunned evil" This verse puts in context the whole debate, the whole book that was to follow - how to be "blameless and upright" "Fear the Lord" Yes, that is the whole premise of the wisdom literature. We can even see in Chapter 1: 5 Job realised his sin, because

he offered sacrifices to God - to ask forgiveness. Job feared God, was blameless and upright - a true practitioner of wisdom.

The scene is set for us in the opening verse, this gives us vital information that helps us interpret the debate that was to follow. Everything was rosy in Job's garden, he had a lovely family, thousands of livestock, then Job's life was to change forever.

We the readers are told a number of things that have a profound implications for our understanding of the book:

- Job is not from these parts, this is a universal story of wisdom.
- Job is a righteous man, blameless and upright (but not perfect)
- Job is a true practitioner of wisdom.

In Proverbs 1: 7 it says:

*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."*

So what is wisdom, a definition for wisdom - I like the one my tutor used: "The art of living life successfully."

The story then moves on, in Chapter 1: v 6 - 12 we find the first heavenly assembly - what we have to notice from this is that:

1. Yahweh - the Lord is in control. This is his council and he will set the limits, v 12 "Everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself, do not lay a finger."
2. Satan here is a title name, his character is as the accuser.
3. Who is Satan? Satan was originally an angel of God, who became corrupt through his own pride, was thrown out of heaven and ever since has been working evil in rebellion against God. His main objective is to try and hinder God's work in people - but he is limited by God's power! For it says,

*"He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world."* 1 John 4:

4

Satan can only do what is permitted, but he actively looks for people to attack. In the story today Satan wanted to prove that Job worshipped God, not out of love, but because God had given him so much - Fair weather believers only follow God when everything is going well.

We also cannot pass this text today though without reflecting on the Sovereignty of God. In v.8 it says "Have you not considered my servant Job?" In v. 12 "Very well then, everything he has is in your hands"

**GOD ALLOWS/PERMITS calamity to come upon Job - FOR HIS PURPOSES. How about that? God in His divine plan will test Job, by allowing him to suffer - and so the four-fold test comes to Job:**

- **V. 13 - 15 - loss of the oxen & donkeys - WIPED OUT - WHAT NEXT?**
- **V.16 - loss of the sheep - WIPED OUT - WHAT NEXT?**
- **V. 17 - loss of camels - WIPED OUT - WHAT NEXT?**
- **V. 18 - 19 - The worst of all, his perfect sons & daughters are killed - WIPED OUT!!**

**CAN YOU IMAGINE???? Even in writing this message, trying to get my head, far less my emotions around this:**

- **All my possessions**
- **My house**
- **My car**
- **AND MY TWO BEAUTIFUL GIRLS, BETHANY & HANNAH!!!**

**Job got up and tore his robes - in despair - like I would - like anyone would, but what is very important to remember here that the purpose of these events and the heavenly council are hidden from Job. This makes his response truly remarkable -**

***“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away,***

***May the name of the Lord be praised.***

***In all this Job did not sin by charging God with wrong doing.”***

**Job 1: 21**

**HOW ON EARTH DID HE MANAGE TO SAY THAT - after all that had just happened to him - COULD I SAY THIS, COULD YOU SAY THIS??? The accuser Satan is proved wrong, Job does bless and praise God. In these verses we find the interpretive key to the whole story - Job’s suffering is not caused by sin.**

**Then if that is not enough, A SECOND TEST COMES!! In Chapter 2: 1 - 10 - Again we see repetition:**

- **Satan is there**
- **Satan boasts**

**And then it is important to note the admission of divine admission: God says**

***“Though you incited me against him to ruin him - WITHOUT ANY REASON.”***

**Job 2: 3**

**And again, God saying, “without any reason” this further stresses the fact that this is innocent suffering - it is not the result of sin.**

**Then Satan again asks to test Job and God again sets the limit,**

***“You must spare his life.”***

**There is order, nothing is beyond Yahweh’s control in all that goes on.**

**Then, another righteous response from Job - despite his wife’s temptation Job responds with in Chapter 2: 10:**

***“Shall we accept good from God and not trouble. In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.”***

**JOB ACCEPTS GOD’S DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY.**

**Now there is another assembly, but this time - on earth. Word has spread about the calamity, and three friends, travelled from a distance, come to console Job. According to Jewish tradition, people who come to comfort someone should not speak until the mourner speaks.**

**Yes, they were there to console him, but they were also there to offer their “WISDOM” on how the calamity should have befallen him. How and why did this happen to poor Job? Although their desire was genuine, but we find out that they have a strange way of providing “comfort.”**

**So what are some things we may learn from today’s passage:**

- 1. Many people think, or propose theology that believing in God protects them from trouble, so called “prosperity” theology, and when calamity comes they then question God’s goodness and justice. Is God capable of rescuing us from suffering, ABSOLUTELY, if it is in his will - BUT he may also allow suffering to come, for reasons that we do not or cannot understand. Daniel 3: 17.**

**It is Satan’s strategy, as we see in Genesis Chapter 2, with Jesus in the temptation in the wilderness in Matthew 4/Mark 1 - at this very moment, when calamity comes to doubt God. Here Job shows us a perspective much broader than seeking his own personal comfort. If we always knew why we were suffering, our faith would not have room to grow. And this leads us to the next question?**

2. **How deep does your faith go? Will you, will I put the roots of your faith down deep into God so that you can withstand any storm, any hurricane of life that you might face.**

**Job was a model of trust and obedience to God - YET GOD permitted Satan to attack him in an especially harsh manner. In our tests and trials though God wants us to trust him and express our faith to the world.**

**How do we respond to our troubles: Do you, do I ask God?**

**“Why me?” or do we say**

**“Use me”**

3. **Finally, Job like David in the Psalms did not hide his overwhelming grief. He had not lost his faith in God, instead the display of his emotions showed that he was HUMAN! He had a beating heart, he felt things, he showed how much he loved his family and was not afraid to express these emotions - TO GOD!!**

**The Psalmist says in Psalm 42:**

***“Why are you so downcast my soul?***

***Why so disturbed within me?***

***Put your hope in God, for I will yet***

***Praise Him, my Saviour and my God.”***

**God created us, our emotions and it is not sinful to express them as Job did. Have you cried out to God, with the cries of your heart?**

**So, 7 days of mourning, silence are about to happen according to Jewish tradition. 7 days of silence, prayer and much deep thinking and to plunge to the depths of their souls - and ours.**

**Amen.**