



8

Job's Suffering

Key Themes

- God tests the faith and obedience of His children.
- God is sovereign over all things—even our sorrow and pain.

Key Passages

- Job 1:1–2:10, 38:1–7, 40:3–5, 42:1–6; Genesis 1:31, 3:16–19; James 5:11; Romans 8:28–30

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Recognize that God is sovereign over every circumstance.
- Describe the faith and trust of Job.
- Relate the trials in our lives to God's plans for us.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “Do good things happen to good people?”

Have students use bookmarks to mark Job 1:1; Job 31:5; Job 38:1; Genesis 1:31; Genesis 3:16; James 5:11; and Romans 8:28 in their Bibles.



Studying God's Word

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The account of Job proclaims the sovereignty and omnipotence of God over all things—both good and bad. Job's faith and trust in God remained firm through much affliction. As children of God, we can find comfort in knowing that He works everything in our lives according to His good purpose.

Study the Prepare to Share section.

Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Understanding Trials

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Students will take time to personally reflect on the purpose of trials in their life.

Student Guides

Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Read the following passages to prepare your heart and mind for this week's lesson: Job 1:1–2:10; Job 38–42; James 5:11; Romans 8:28–31.

"Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'" (Job 1:8). Thus begins this epic account of God's blameless servant turned over to the devices of Satan by God Himself. Oh, the sovereignty of God! It is too deep for any human to grasp—yet it is the very power that upholds all things in the universe (Hebrews 1:3).

God's sovereignty is the theme of the book of Job. The book opens allowing us a glimpse into the relationship between God and Satan. God controls Satan and uses him to accomplish His purposes on the earth. Satan can do only what God allows him to do—and in this account, God allowed Satan to test Job (Job 1:6, 1:8, 1:12, 2:6).

Job quickly discovered through his messengers that in one day he had lost his livestock, servants, and children (Job 1:13–19). And what a lesson we can learn from Job's faithful response as he tears his robe, shaves his head, falls to the ground, and worships the one who has taken every blessing from him in one day (Job 1:20). His worship and prayer in this desperate time provide a solid example of steadfast trust in the sovereign, almighty hand of God.

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21).

God was not finished with Job yet, and He permitted Satan to again afflict Job—this time in his body and health (Job 2:7). With grace that could only come from God Himself, Job stood true to His Creator as he responded to his wife who suggested Job curse God and die (Job 2:9). Job plainly understood God's sovereignty as he asked her, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10).

Job's friends approached to comfort him, but they only served to confound him with their accusations that it was because of his iniquity against God that he was suffering in this way (Job 4:7–8). They insisted that if Job would only repent of his sins, God would remove his

suffering (Job 11:13–19). But if he refused to repent and continued in his wickedness, he would die (Job 11:20).

In chapter 19, we find Job clinging in his suffering and despair to the one thing he knew for sure—that his Redeemer lives! How Job yearned for what his heart knew to be true—that he would one day behold the Redeemer God with his very eyes (Job 19:25–27). Within the midst of this long Old Testament book, God gives us a foreshadowing of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and the gospel of forgiveness and redemption He would provide.

Job's suffering and the accusations of his friends continued. And finally, Job begged that the Almighty would answer him and reveal the purpose, wisdom, and reason behind his pain. In answer to Job's question, the Lord began a tirade of rhetorical questions—questions meant to humble Job by the demonstration of God's power, wisdom, knowledge, and greatness (Job 38–41).

In the end, God did not intend to answer Job's questions about the purpose of his suffering, but meant to draw Job's focus to Himself—the sovereign Ruler, Creator, and Sustainer of the entire universe. Job learned his lesson well when he answered the Lord by saying, "I know that you can do everything, and that no purpose of yours can be withheld from You" (Job 42:2).

Our God is in control. We know that all things work together for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28); that our God is in heaven and does all that He pleases (Psalm 115:3); that He works all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11); and that no one speaks and it will come to pass unless the Lord has commanded it. Both woe and well-being proceed from the mouth of the Most High (Lamentations 3:37–38).

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Throughout this account Job continued to argue his innocence, and his friends continued to tell him he must be guilty because bad things don't happen to good people. This is a very popular misconception even today, and one that Jesus's disciples held to, but one that Jesus flatly rejected (see John 9:1–3; Luke 13:1–5).

Many today insist that a loving God would not let innocent people suffer. They have no concept of their own sinfulness, nor do they understand the holiness of God—that He can't tolerate any disobedience against Himself. Instead, these people make a god in their

imaginings to suit their own desires and reject what the Bible clearly teaches—there are no innocent people (Ecclesiastes 7:20); all of mankind has sinned (Romans 3:23); and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

But is the suffering we experience on earth the direct result of our sin? Is the suffering a manifestation of God's punishment? Scripture tells us that God disciplines His children. However, this discipline is exhibited out of the Lord's love for us—we are not perfect, and consequently we need training from our heavenly Father (Hebrews 12:5–7). Paul also explains that our suffering may be a consequence of a sinful decision, choice, or lifestyle—God is not mocked by our rebellion; we will reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7–8); our suffering and trials often test our faith and produce patience (James 1:2); we can be humbled by affliction brought on by God (2 Corinthians 12:7); and often our trials give us the wisdom and understanding to comfort others in their troubles (2 Corinthians 1:3).

We often will not be given a clear answer as to why we are suffering—just as Job's question was never answered by God. However, we must remember that God is our sovereign, holy God and He is able to work all things together for good for those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). His desire for His children is not to necessarily make us happy—but to make us holy (1 Peter 1:15) while conforming us throughout our lives to the image of His own Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The book of Job has often been praised as a masterpiece of literature.

Victor Hugo wrote, "Tomorrow, if all literature was to be destroyed and it was left to me to retain one work only, I should save Job." Alfred Lord Tennyson called Job "the greatest poem, whether of ancient or modern literature." Daniel Webster said that "the Book of Job taken as a mere work of literary genius is one of the most wonderful productions of any age or of any language." And Martin Luther said that this book is "more magnificent and sublime than any other book of Scripture."

When was the book of Job written and who is its author? Except for the first eleven chapters of Genesis, the book of Job is probably the oldest book in

the Bible. Most likely, Job himself was the original author (Job 19:23–24), writing down an account of his life after the restoration of his health and prosperity. He probably lived around the time of Abraham, and because there is no mention of the laws given by Moses—or even of Israel—it is believed he definitely lived before Jacob.

Job was considered "the greatest of all the men of the East" (Job 1:3) and he "dwelt as a king in the army" (Job 29:25). Job lived in the land of Uz, which is believed to be the land of Edom (see Lamentations 4:21). Uz, who perhaps settled there first, was a grandson of Shem (Genesis 10:22–23).

Job is not a fictional character in a great dramatic poem, as many have suggested. He was a real man who served a real God, and as James said, a man who persevered and experienced the compassion and mercy of God: "You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (James 5:11).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Oh dear Lord, as I prepare for this week's lesson, I thank you for your sovereignty in all things. I thank you too, Lord, that you have given me the gift of faith—a faith that knows that you are in control of all that happens in my life. And as I journey through this life, I pray that even as the difficult times continue to come, I will be able to stand on the foundation of your Word, your sovereignty, and your omnipotence—knowing that through it all you are working for my good because I love you and I am called according to your purpose. Lord, please bring the hearts of my students to a faith that stands on the rock of your sovereignty and the truth of the gospel, so that as they encounter hardships they will do so knowing that your perfect plans are being worked out for their good.

Review

In last week's lesson, we looked at the origin of different people groups as a result of the confusion of the languages at Babel. We looked at a map of how the people had spread across the Middle East and into Asia, Africa, and Europe.

? Who can briefly explain the connection between the events of Babel and cavemen?

As the people spread, they sought shelter where they could find it—and caves were a great place for that. They also made tools from materials that were available until they could establish cities and develop or acquire technologies that were lost as the people scattered.

As the people spread across the world, they carried their family traits with them and, as a result, different characteristics became concentrated in different areas.

? In light of these events, how many races are there on the planet and what is your biblical support? *There is only one race—the human race. Acts 17:26 and Genesis 3:20 support this idea as well as knowing that only eight people were aboard the Ark to repopulate the earth.*

Knowing that God has created each person in His image, we should respect and value each person regardless of their characteristics. This also reminds us that individuals from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people harbor the sin inherited from Adam, and is in need of the Savior. That is why it is so critical that we share the gospel with all people so that they might avoid the penalty for their sin and can bring worship to the Lamb who is worthy of praise.

Today, we are going to look at a descendant of Shem by the name of Job. We will see in the text that Job was from the land of Uz. From Genesis 10, we know that Uz was a grandson of Shem through Aram and likely settled in a region south of the Dead Sea.

The book of Job is the oldest book of the Bible, and most scholars think that Job was the author. Job lived at about the same time as Abraham, around 2100 BC.



➤ Write on the board, "Do good things happen to good people?"

➤ Have students use bookmarks to mark Job 1:1; Job 31:5; Job 38:1; Genesis 1:31; Genesis 3:16; James 5:11; and Romans 8:28 in their Bibles.



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

Today we will be using a little different style of examining the text. We have a lot of ground to cover, so we are going to read a passage from Job and then make some basic observations, read another passage and make some observations, etc. We will cover Job 1:1–2:10 in five chunks, so open up your Bibles to Job and let's begin.

Let's read Job 1:1–5 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Observe the Text

? How is Job described? *Blameless, upright, feared God, shunned evil.*

Job 1:1–5

- ? **How many children did Job have?** *Ten—seven sons and three daughters.*
- ? **How wealthy was Job?** *He was the greatest (richest) of the people of the East. He owned 3,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 pairs of oxen, 500 donkeys, and a very large household (servants).*
- ? **Why was Job presenting sacrifices?** *He was afraid that his sons and daughters may have sinned against God, so he was offering on their behalf.*

Let's read Job 1:6–12 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Job 1:6–12

Observe the Text

- ? **Where is this scene taking place?** *It occurs "before the Lord," so it is likely in the throne room of heaven.*
- ? **Who are the characters?** *The sons of God, Satan, and the Lord.*
- ? **In verse 8, how did God describe Job?** *He was God's servant; he was unique among men. He was blameless and upright, fearing God and shunning evil.*
- ? **What attribute of God is demonstrated in God's statement that there is no other person like Job on earth?** *God must be omniscient to make this statement.*
- ? **From Satan's perspective, why did Job fear God?** *Satan suggested that Job only feared God because God had blessed him and protected him and his possessions.*
- ? **What did Satan expect to happen if Job's possessions were taken away?** *Satan believed Job would curse God to His face.*
- ? **How does God respond to Satan's proposal to test Job?** *God gives Satan permission to do anything to Job except harm him personally.*

OMNISCIENT
(Refer to Attributes poster)

Let's read the next part of the passage, Job 1:13–22, together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Job 1:13–22

Observe the Text

- ? **What does the first messenger (v. 14) report to Job?** *The Sabeans stole his oxen and donkeys and killed all the servants working with them.*
- ? **What does the second messenger (v. 16) report to Job?** *Fire from heaven burnt up all of the sheep and servants with them.*
- ? **What does the third messenger (v. 17) report to Job?** *The Chaldeans took the camels and killed all of the servants with them.*
- ? **What does the fourth messenger (v. 18–19) report to Job?** *A great wind blew down the house where all of his children were feasting and killed them all.*
- ? **What phrase is repeated in this passage?** *"While he was still speaking . . ."*
- ? **How did Job respond after he heard all of these messages?** *He rose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and then worshipped God. Also, he did not sin nor charge God with wrong in his response.*

Job 2:1–6

- ? **What was Job's view of God's role in what had just taken place?** *God had given him what he had, and God had taken it away. He did not charge God with wrong, but offered a blessing.*

Let's continue and read Job 2:1–6 together. Here we find another scene before God. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Observe the Text

- ? **How does this passage compare to the first scene before God (1:6–8)?** *It presents the same order of events: Satan appearing before God and being questioned about his actions. Then God commends Job.*
- ? **In verse 3, how did God describe Job?** *The same way He did in chapter 1, but He added that Job still held his integrity even after his trial.*
- ? **What was Satan's response to God?** *Satan suggested that if Job were personally harmed, he would curse God.*
- ? **What permission did God grant to Satan?** *Satan could harm Job, but not take his life.*

Job 2:7–10

Let's read what happened in Job 2:7–10 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Observe the Text

- ? **What did Satan do to Job?** *He struck Job with boils over his entire body.*
- ? **How did Job respond?** *He sat in ashes and scraped his sores with a piece from a broken pot.*
- ? **What did Job's wife ask him to do?** *She told Job to curse God and die.*
- ? **How did Job respond to her request?** *He called her foolish and explained that God brought both good and bad into his life.*
- ? **To this point, had Job sinned in his responses to his circumstances?** *No, he had not sinned with his lips.*

Discover the Truth

We have just sped through this text, and there is much more that we could draw out of this passage, but we are examining the idea of God's sovereign control over events in the world.

- ? **Who brought about the calamities in Job's life?** *Satan.*
- ? **Who gave permission for the calamities to occur?** *God.*
- ? **How did Job demonstrate his understanding of God's control over his circumstances?** *Job said that both the good and bad in his life were the result of God's hand. He also said that nothing he had was of his own doing, but that the Lord had given him what was taken away. Rather than cursing God, Job blessed God as he understood God was in control.*

After all that had happened to Job in a very short time, he recognized that both good and adversity come from God. God had given Job his family and his wealth, and God had taken Job's prosperity away. For many, this is

SOVEREIGN

(Refer to Attributes poster)

a difficult idea to accept. For many, the adages “God helps those who help themselves” and “good things happen to good people” have replaced biblical truth about the circumstances in our lives. We see that mentality in the next section of Job.



READ THE WORD

Rather than reading through the next 30 chapters, I will give you a summary of what took place and a few quotes.

As Job was mourning his losses, his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, showed up. They sat with him for seven days grieving together. Then Job cursed the day he was born, wishing it had never come (3:1–26).

Eliphaz responded to Job first in chapters 4–5 and suggested that Job’s suffering was the result of sin. Look at verses 4:7–8. “Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off? Even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.”

In chapters 7–10 Job rejected the claim that he had sinned. However, Job called for God to give him an explanation for his sufferings (chapter 13).

Zophar took up the charges, urging Job to repent. This cycle repeated itself with the three friends accusing Job and Job looking to God for hope and relief, knowing he had not sinned.

In chapter 32, Elihu, a younger man, broke in to rebuke the others and their false understanding of God. He explained that God is just, fair, almighty, wise, and loving. Job’s only sin was his demand that God answer him on his terms.

That led up to chapter 38 where God entered in a whirlwind. Rather than answering Job’s questions, however, God took a different approach.

Turn to Job 38 and follow along as I read verses 1–7. We will also look ahead through the end of the book to answer a few more questions.

Job 38:1–7

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? What did God tell Job to do? *Job is to prepare himself to be questioned by God.*
- ? What followed God’s instructions to Job? *A series of questions.*
- ? Was Job able to answer any of these questions? *No, they were rhetorical questions that only God could answer.*
- ? How long does this continue in the text? *Through the end of chapter 41, with a small break in chapter 40 where Job began to recognize his limits.*

Job 40:3–5

? In Job 40:3–5, what was Job’s answer to God’s questions? *He recognized that his past attempts to question God were flawed and decided to stop talking.*

Job 42:1–6

? Chapter 42 marks the end of the questioning. How did Job respond to God’s series of questions in Job 42:1–6? *He acknowledged that God knows everything and does as He pleases. Job repented in dust and ashes, acknowledging that he was nothing.*

Discover the Truth

Nowhere in this exchange did God give Job an explanation for the suffering that he endured, yet Job recognized that God had ordained his circumstances and that he had no right to question God’s motives. This idea is reflected throughout the Bible. Let’s look at a few cross-references to help us understand this idea.

Genesis 1:31

In Genesis, we find the origins of suffering. Would someone read Genesis 1:31? *Have a volunteer read the verse.*

According to this verse, was there any suffering at the beginning of creation? *No, everything was “very good.”*

Genesis 3:16–19

Let’s look at Genesis 3:16–19. What examples of suffering do we see in these verses? *Sorrow, pain in childbirth, toil, sweat, death (return to dust).*

What was the initial cause of suffering in the world? *Adam and Eve’s sin.*

From these verses, we see that all suffering is ultimately the result of sin in the world. While these verses give us an explanation for why suffering exists in general, it is important to note that they do not address why a specific person may be experiencing a specific suffering.

James 5:11

In James 5:11 we have a partial answer to the reason for Job’s sufferings. *Read the verse.*

? What did James use Job as an example of? *Perseverance.*

The Christians James was writing to were facing many trials and persecutions. James pointed them to Job as an example of persevering and trusting God to show Himself compassionate and merciful. Job had his family restored and his possessions doubled after his trials. Job serves us today as a witness to persevering in trials.

Romans 8:28–30

Let’s look at another passage. Turn to Romans 8:28–30, and would someone please read it? *Have someone read the passage.*

? What works together for good? *All things, both good and bad.*

? For whom do all things work together for good? *To those who love God and are the called.*

In verse 29, we see that the goal of those good and bad things in verse 28 is to conform us to the image of Christ. God uses the circumstances in our lives to make us more like Christ. He brought trials into Job’s life and Job

learned to honor God more as a result—he was more like Christ at the end of the trials.

If you look back through the verses leading up to verse 28, the “all things” includes the “sufferings of this present time” (v. 18).

Through all of his trials, Job trusted in God. He trusted that God had given him the blessings of his early days and that God had taken them away as He saw fit.



Understanding Trials

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

? What are problems that you face in your life at home or at school? *Have students list trials and problems they face, and write them on the board. List 12–15 problems.*

? Which of these problems are caused by your own personal sin? Which problems are caused by something else? *Discuss the items on the list. In a typical list some items (i.e., being punished by parents) are sin-related. Some (i.e., parents' divorce) are related to someone else's sin. Others (i.e., natural disasters) have nothing to do with personal sin. The objective is to show that many of the trials we face are not directly related to our own personal sin.*

Have the students take a few minutes to answer the questions on the worksheet in light of the lesson.

For some of you this may be a new idea or a new way to look at trials in your life. Take a few minutes to respond to these questions and then we'll wrap up the lesson.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

? Would anyone care to share how any of the attributes of God listed on the worksheet help them to trust that God is working all things together for good? For example, because God is wise, we can trust that the plans He has for us are the best—better than we could design for ourselves. *Allow discussion.*



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Now that we have looked at the account of Job, I hope you have a greater appreciation for the sovereignty of God over our lives—in both our sorrows and our joys. Job is an example for us in terms of perseverance and trusting God even in hard times. It is because we know the character of God—His wisdom, sovereignty, omniscience, justice, holiness, etc.—that we can trust that His plans are always best, even though to us they may appear as disasters.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? In light of the trials faced by Job, how would you respond to someone who made the claim that trials in your life or an illness you are facing is the result of sin you have not repented of? *While it is possible that sin is the reason for the trial, it is not necessarily so. From the account of Job, we know that trials are not necessarily the result of personal sin—Job was a blameless man according to God's description of him.*
- ? Some people would claim that Job was not a real person, but simply a character in a poem that helps us to understand suffering. How could James 5:11 be used to correct this misunderstanding? *If James is encouraging persecuted Christians, he would not point to a mythical figure as a model of perseverance. His use of Job as an example confirms Job's existence. To use a mythical figure in this context would be like encouraging someone who was trying to lift a heavy object to remember the example of Atlas or Superman.*
- ? What comfort can we draw from the behind-the-scenes look at the authority God exercises over the actions of Satan? *Satan is not free to do anything that he wishes, but must work within the limits of God's permission. This should give us comfort in knowing that it is an all-wise God who is controlling the trials that we face in life.*
- ? In Romans 8, we read that the circumstances in our lives are working together for good to grow us to be more like Christ. This is true for all who are in Christ by faith in His work on the Cross. How does this view of circumstances differ from those who believe in ideas like karma, fate, chance, or the general principle that what goes around comes around? *Rather than having no real hope about the future, Christians have a certain promise that God has called them to the position they are in. Trusting God offers a real hope that can't be found in chance or fate.*
- ? What idea have you drawn from our lesson today that you can put into practice as you face various trials throughout the next week? *Discuss various answers.*



MEMORY VERSE

Acts 17:26–27 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Ask God to help each person trust in His plans.
- Thank God that He is wise and sovereign.
- Ask God to grant each person the grace that he or she needs to face the challenges God sends.