

## OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE

February 21, 2018

### Job

#### *Answers to the Questions (Lesson 14)*

Page 75 – On the seventh day (of the second banquet) an intoxicated King Xerxes summoned Queen Vashti to display her beauty, but she refused. Xerxes' aides advised him to give her royal position to another in order to emphasize to women everywhere that *every man should be ruler over his own household*. After the anger of the king subsided, the most beautiful virgin girls from the kingdom were escorted to the harem at Susa and given 12 months of beauty treatments. Esther was among them, and she won the king's favor.

Page 75 – Haman told the king a lie about the Jews (a mixture of truth and error). He even offered a bribe to force Xerxes to issue a law demanding the annihilation of all the Jews. Lots were cast to determine the date on which it would occur (eleven months later).

Page 76 – Mordecai knew that God would be faithful to raise up a deliverer, but he also realized that God had a purpose for positioning Esther in the palace. He reflected on the possibility that her sole purpose in becoming queen was to intervene for God's chosen people.

The way Haman is described is similar to Satan:

3:2 All the royal officials at the gate of the king knelt down and paid honor to Haman.

3:9 He ruled through hatred.

5:11 Haman exercised excessive pride.

7:6 The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman.

7:9 He is ultimately destroyed.

Page 77 – In a strange twist of events, Haman is hanged on the very gallows he built for Mordecai. Then the king makes an edict allowing the Jews to arm and protect themselves on the day set for their destruction. When the day comes the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them but the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. Chapter 9 records the Jews' complete victory and the subsequent feasting and celebration.

The providence of God is found on every page and yet there is not one mention of God, prayer, sacrifice, Israel, or any other religious symbol. It is so obvious that God is directing every aspect of this story that we find ourselves inserting his name even when it is not there. The author also modeled his work after the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-45.

Both accounts take place in the courts of foreign monarchs, and both highlight heroes who rise to prominence in the palace and are providentially used to rescue their people.

Page 78 – Jews were permitted to pay honor in the way that Haman asked of Mordecai but because Haman was an Amalekite, Mordecai would not bow down to him. This also explains why Haman plotted to kill all the Israelites – it was part of the ongoing war between the forces of evil (the Amalekites) and God's chosen people.



Chapters 1:2-2:13

The book begins with a simple prose story that describes Job's piety.

Then there is the conversation between God and Satan which leads to a decision to test Job.

Then the disasters that befall Job become the test of his piety.

Chapters 3-42:6

Abruptly the style of the book changes as Job and his friends debate the meaning of suffering

Also discussed is the proper posture Job should assume toward God.

This dialogue is composed in elegant, sophisticated poetry and full of striking images.

This section ends with the long speech from God and the brief reply from Job.

Chapter 42:7-17

Just as abruptly the style shifts back to simple prose for the conclusion.

Job's well-being is restored and the remainder of his long life is briefly described.

It is difficult to date the book because it contains no references to historical events / persons.

Scholars generally agree that it was written between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.

It was more likely written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

Neither the character of Job nor the story of his misfortunes started in Israel.

The name *Job* is not a typically Israelite name.

Job and his three friends come from non-Israelite locales.

But there is one Biblical text that associates Job with two other non-Israelite characters.

It is found in Ezekiel 14:14 and 20

Noah is the hero of the flood story and is a non-Israelite.

Daniel is not the hero of the book of Daniel but a legendary Canaanite king.

Rabbinic tradition ascribes the authorship of Job to Moses. However, the author is anonymous and it is more plausible to assume that he was an Israelite sage who lived on the outskirts of Palestine since he set his story outside Israel (in southern Edom or northern Arabia).

Job, Ecclesiastes and the Book of Proverbs belong to the genre of wisdom literature.

The three books share attitudes and assumptions but differ in their conclusions:

Proverbs makes confident statements about the world and its workings that are flatly contradicted by Job and Ecclesiastes.

---

The first theological question of the book deals with the motivation of humans to be pious:

*Why does Job reverence God?*

*Is it to bargain for security and one's well-being?*

*Is our relationship dependent upon (or independent of) circumstances?*

In our historical books of the Bible we learned blessings come from obedience to God.

The question by Satan asks whether such expectations corrupt the relationship.

Just from the prose portion of the story, it poses some interesting challenges.

*Should one serve God unconditionally and without question?  
What is the nature of the relationship between God and human beings?  
What is the nature of God and how does one come to know about God?*

The second theological question is that of the proper conduct of a person in suffering. For the friends, suffering is an occasion for moral and religious self-examination. For them it is to be understood in some way as a communication from God.  
For the righteous it is to be borne with the confidence that God will restore (4:4-7)  
For the morally immature it is a form of educational discipline (5:17-19)  
For the wicked it is judgment (15:20-35)  
For those who are ethically challenged it is a warning (33:14-30)

Implicit in all of this is the assumption that God is always right. It is the human who must make use of the experience to learn what God is communicating. Job does not engage in these arguments. Rather than turning inward in self-examination, Job demands an explanation from God. For Job, God has no right to cause suffering unless that person deserves punishment. For Job, the proper response is not humble prayer but a confrontation with God.

The issue of suffering leads to a discussion about the true nature of God and about justice. Job is not unique in raising the issue of believing in a just God while so many injustices exist. What is unusual is the way in which Job attempts to resolve this dilemma.  
Job envisions a relationship of mutual accountability.  
He believes there are to be no discrepancies in power.  
Both parties have to acknowledge common standards of justice that are binding.

These thoughts are not fully developed in the book of Job but become provocative possibilities.

Also interesting: The theological issues raised are set up as alternatives between the traditional positions defended by the friends and the radical challenges posed by Job  
The friends argue for the goodness of God and the moral order of the world.  
They understand suffering to have a purpose and it is important to submit to God.  
Job questions the justice of God and describes the world as moral chaos.  
Suffering is seen as victimization and Job is willing to take God on.

They all make justice central to their understanding of God. They disagree as to whether justice is part of the world order or if God should be called to account for failing to enforce such justice.

The speech made by God in the whirlwind challenges the friends and Job. God starts by speaking about the great structures of creation. God speaks little of the role of humans in the cosmos. God confronts Job with things that his legal arguments cannot possibly comprehend.

The response of God leads us back to the original question posed by Satan:  
*Why does one reverence God?*

And the answer is not about the nature of human piety but about the character of God.

The voice of God carries authority and contains the essential truth of the book of Job. When we look back at the various views articulated by different voices ... they are not so much contradictory as they cannot be measured by the same standards

### *Other Lessons Learned*

In some cases a plurality of voices can never be merged into one because they speak from different experiences and different perspectives. Serious theological conversation places different voices in relationship precisely so their limitations as well as their insights may be clearly identified.

The truth that emerges is not to be found either in the triumph of one voice over the others or in an emerging consensus. It is to be found in the intersection of the various voices in their mutual examination.

Choosing how to live involves deciding about the nature of God, the structure of creation, the place of suffering in the world, and the significance of the moral and pious life. The significance of our choices can be appreciated only when it is questioned from other perspectives and by persons who have made different choices.

The conversation started in Job continues ...

Martin Luther: Job is magnificent and sublime as no other book of Scripture.

### **Assignment for February 21**

Complete the Exercises on Pages 70-82

Read Psalm 1-89 (or the portions outlined on Page 82)

## HEBREW POETRY

We are now entering the section of the Bible called *Hebrew Poetry*.

English poetry was developed from Greek and Latin poetry which is primarily sound-based.

Hebrew poetry has much in common with Canaanite poetry.

It is basically thought-based in balanced, parallel lines.

General Characteristics:

It is very compact.

It expresses truth, feelings or experiences in imagery.

It is primarily written and not oral and is highly structured.

Balanced lines (parallelism)

Word plays

Sound plays

Synonymous	the lines express the same thought in different words
Antithetical	the lines express opposite thoughts by means of contrast
Synthetic	the next two or three lines develop the thought
Chiasmic	a pattern of poetry expressing the message in a descending and ascending order with the main point found in the middle of the pattern

These are the types of sound patterns found in poetry. It is a play on ...

alphabet	acrostic
consonants (repeated)	alliteration
vowels (repeated)	assonance
repetition of similar sounding words with different meanings (pun)	paronomasia
words (when pronounced) sound like the thing they name	onomatopoeia
special opening and closing	inclusive

There are several types of poetry in the Old Testament:

dedication song	Numbers 21:17-18
ballads	Numbers 21:27-30
drinking songs / love poems	
laments	
war songs	Numbers 10:35-36
special benedictions	Numbers 6:24-26

Review Judges 4 (prose) and Judges 5 (poetry) as they are both the same event.

--Psalms 2:1-2--

The earth is the LORD's  
the world

For it was he who founded it  
and planted it firm

and all that is in it.  
and those who dwell therein.  
upon the sea  
upon the waters beneath.



Here, we have a synonymous distych.



Here, we have another synonymous distych.

--Proverbs 3:13-14--

Happy is he  
and the man

For wisdom is  
and the gain she brings is

who has found wisdom  
who has acquired understanding

more profitable than silver  
better than gold.



This last distych is really clever because the poet has three levels of synonym-patterns at once.