

Lecture 2: The Book of Job

January 17, 2020

The Book of Job

Wisdom Literature

- Job – suffering
- Psalms – worship
- Proverbs – family
- Ecclesiastes – the meaning of life
- Song of Solomon – marriage

Overview of Job

- Setting – chapters 1-2
- Plot – chapters 3ff
- Resolution?
 - Job eventually sues God (chapter 31)!
 - Will God speak to Job?*

Theodicy – The Problem of Pain

1. Atheist's Objection
2. Justice, not Goodness
3. Why?

Two Issues

1. Suffering
 - Is there a reason?
2. Knowledge
 - If so, can I know that reason?

The Crisis of Conventional Wisdom

At the beginning of the book, all are agreed:

$R \Rightarrow P$ [If you are righteous, then you will prosper.]

The friends still believe in this version of moral causation:

$\sim P \Rightarrow \sim R$ [contrapositive – logical equivalent]

Job has experienced a crisis in his faith:

$R \cup \sim P \Rightarrow \sim(R \Rightarrow P)$ “*God, You have wronged me!*”

The Book of Job

August 30, 2019

The Wisdom Literature

If you open an English Bible to the middle, you will find this collection of books.

Note: A Hebrew Bible would have a different arrangement.

Together, these books comprise the philosophical and practical corner of the Old Testament.

These five books are not as historically bound as other books and are of universal application.

Consider how each of the five books covers one aspect of day-to-day life:

Job – suffering
Psalms – worship
Proverbs – family (parenting, work, human relationships)
Ecclesiastes – the meaning of life
Song of Solomon – marriage

What aspects of day-to-day life are missing?

Overview of Job

Who would like to paint the backdrop to the book of Job?

Righteous man – prosperous, ten children, intercedes for his family (lest they curse God...)

How does the story begin?

Accusation: Job serves God because of what God gives him.

Common motive for religion (cf. the prosperity gospel – e.g. Russell Conwell, “Acres of Diamonds”).

Test: Satan takes away all of Job’s possessions.

Divine causation – God, Satan, nature/humans, Job is hurt—and yet Job ascribes it directly to God.

Satan is a dog on God’s chain (Luther)—he will go as far as God permits, but no farther.

Result? Job blesses God (Job 1:21).

Shane & Shane describe their mom’s reaction to their dad’s death (“Though You Slay Me”).

Psychologically possible at first—but for how long?

Accusation: Job will do anything to keep his health (“skin”).

Test: Satan takes away Job’s health—he sits on the ash heap and scrapes his sores with shards of pottery.

Result? Job’s wife tells him to curse God and die, but Job rebukes her (Job 2:10).

Pastor Marty Bacalia:

When Satan took what Job possessed, his children died.

When Satan touched Job’s body, his wife turned on him (cf. Gen. 2:24).

I’ve been told that divorce is more painful than losing a spouse to death.

Then what happens?

Three friends come to comfort Job, but find him so pained that no one speaks for seven days.

Then Job speaks and what does he utter?

A curse! He does not curse God, but he comes close—he curses his birthday (ch. 3).

Job’s wife wanted him to curse God, so that he could die. I think she could not stand to see him suffer.

Euthanasia

The Bible acknowledges that there are sufferings so great, death would be a welcome relief.

And Job has that option—the suicide option—but he refuses to exercise it, even at the urging of his wife. *Why?*

The Cycle of Friends

Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad—all from Edom apparently, a land known for its wisdom.

What is their main contention?

Job must have done something wrong.

Now before we bounce on them, let us consider how extreme the situation is:

Tragedy occurs—even the death of a child—but who loses all children, possessions, health at once?

Would we too not be tempted to think something must be the cause of this inordinate calamity?

In the spirit of helpfulness, we attempt to find the root cause by convincing Job of doing wrong.

Illus. A friend has had trouble with finances and I suspect mismanagement. *Why?*

The friends invoke visions, tradition, and philosophy, but Job remains heated and adamant about his innocence.

They chase their tail through three cycles until Bildad breaks off exhausted—and Job keeps talking.

Side Board

At the beginning of the book, all are agreed:

$R \Rightarrow P$ [If you are righteous, then you will prosper.]

The friends still believe in moral causation:

$\sim P \Rightarrow \sim R$ [contrapositive – logical equivalent]

[Eliphaz talks a lot like the prosperity gospel – chs. 4-5.]

Job has experienced a crisis in his faith:

$R \cup \sim P \Rightarrow \sim(R \Rightarrow P)$

i.e. “God, You have wronged me!”

Remember: To Job, what he is experiencing *feels like* wrath.

Resolution?

Job's Oath

Job is convinced that God will never talk to him (too almighty!), but he challenges him all the same (ch. 31).

Notice all the “If...” statements—declarations of innocence, as if on trial.

Then Job challenges God directly:

“If only I had someone to hear me!

Here is my desire: that Shaddai answer me, that my opponent write a brief...” (Scheindlin 126).

Job is suing God—calling Him to court!

Elihu's Speech

Elihu surprises us—a young man not speaking due to age, but now angry with the old men.

Elihu does not criticize Job's past as much as his current attitude towards God (self-righteousness).

Elihu's speech is cut short due to an approaching storm—God is coming!

God speaks from the storm—literally, Elihu and God are “on the same page” and should be seen together.

After God takes Job to the zoo, Job repents and has his prosperity restored.

Theodicy: The Problem of Pain [or Evil/Suffering]

C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (1940) – explained so popularly, the BBC invited Lewis to give radio talks.

These talks were later published as *Mere Christianity*, a very famous book about God and the Christian faith.

Three Traits about Theodicy in Job

1. *Atheist's Objection*

This may be the main approach of atheists for undermining the faith.

There is no shortage of atrocities to point at (genocides, child abuse, etc.).

How does a good God all so much suffering?

It comforts me that Job is already in the Bible—God is not surprised by the atheists' objections.

In fact, the book of Ecclesiastes will say it is better to be stillborn than to see the evil done under the sun.

And when God focuses on the problem of pain, we do not get a detached, objective analysis.

We get a story—and a story in *poetry*—so that we can feel the pain and identify with Job.

Instead of *The Problem of Pain*, we get *A Grief Observed*—Lewis' raw book after his wife died.

2. *Justice, not Goodness*

Instead of focusing on goodness (“You harmed me!”), the book focuses on justice (“You wronged me!”).

Justice implies it may be okay for God to harm people, if there is a right reason (e.g. wickedness).

Goodness expects God to do good only and to explain Himself, when He does not (no fear of the Lord).

3. *Why?*

Instead of asking “How?” (efficient causation), the book asks “Why?” (moral causation).

Twice in chapter three Job asks “Why?": *Why was I born? Why am I still alive?*

Asking “Why?” is a very human question and is not necessarily wrong—even Jesus asked “Why?” (cross).

Asking “Why?” assumes there is a purpose to the pain and implies a desire for God to speak.

When we suffer, we want God to speak to us.

In this book, God speaks to the “Why?” question for all time.

So good to have the wisdom literature!

Two Issues

1. Suffering

Is there a reason?

I often here people say, "I know this is happening for a reason," and I wonder to myself, "How do you *know*?"

For some reason, humans tend to assume there should be a reason—or why would we ask "Why?" so often?

2. Knowledge

If so, can I know that reason?

Note: It may not be comforting to know a reason exists and never know it.

An undiagnosed ailment obviously has a cause, but not knowing often increases the suffering.

The main tension in the book involves, "Will God speak?" and He does—in a storm.

Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among the Gods*

"How does a good God allow so much suffering?" (110).

Ravi answers:

1. This is not a "problem" to solve (QED), but a *mystery* to explain.
It will take several lines of reasoning.
2. *We* are involved—e.g. C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (1964).
3. In asking the question, atheists risk failing to justify the question.
How so?

If there is not God, how can there be *evil*? So what is the matter?

Medieval Views of God

Are we left with two views of God?

Friends: God is bound to some "justice" concept, known to humans.

Their wisdom may be correct in a limited sphere—it can be found in other places of the Bible.

Job: God is absolutely "free" and sovereign! So sovereign, He will not answer to me!

Sum: Are we left to choose between God is *moral* versus God is *free*?

What vision of God is behind these opposing sides?