

# Tips for Studying Job

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Many people concentrate on the first two and last chapters, dismissing most of what's in between. A careful reading of the entire book reveals a very modern message dealing with a problem believers face repeatedly. But this is important: this is book about **believers**, not about those who have not yet come to Christ. Keep in mind the following facts:

1. This is an Oriental book. It's written with the thoughts and expressions of Eastern peoples. It helps to shed the predispositions of Western thought.
2. This is a book of Hebrew poetry (except for chapters 1-2 and 42:7-17), which is unlike Western poetry, but poetry nonetheless. God chose to speak to us through different kinds of literature, so the study of Job is purposefully different than, say, Genesis or a book of history.
3. This book addresses a difficult problem, the presence of evil in a world ruled by God. It is **not** about suffering and hardship in general, but the fact that evil **does** befall **righteous people**.

## *The Man*

We know that Job is not a fictional character invented for a poem and that he actually existed because of the mention of him elsewhere in Scripture. (Ez. 14:14-20; Ja. 5:11). Although a godly man, he was perplexed because he could not explain why God would allow him to experience these things.

## *The Theme*

Do not assume this book is about why a loving and righteous God permits the godly to suffer because that question is never answered in this book. The theme is actually more akin to "**How** do the righteous suffer?" It states clearly in 2:3 that God had no cause against Job and in 42:7 God rebukes Job's friends for not speaking the truth about God. But much of the argument back and forth between Job and his friends has to do with the assumption that such a thing could only come from God as a punishment for sin, when in fact there was no sin.

While it's true God chastens His children for sin (Heb. 12:1-13) and such is evidence of His love, it's also true the wicked have their enjoyment

today but will be cut down. (Ps. 37; 73). However, neither of these situations fits Job's life. Nevertheless there are divine purposes for permitting Job to suffer, among them being a testimony to Satan and the angels (Eph. 3:9-10; 1 Pe. 1:12), and even in the end to those around him.

The main lesson is more along the lines that God is sovereign in His dealings with His children and will never permit anything to come about in the life of an obedient Christian that is not ultimately for his own good and God's glory. God does not have to explain Himself; it's enough that we know He cares and never makes a mistake. The greatest application of the book of Job is that we don't live by explanations but by promises. The book of Job is a kind of guide to how the righteous should live in the face of suffering.

## *The Friends*

The poetry flourishes and expands their answers, but you will find that they boil down to basic, understandable arguments which represent different personalities believers have to deal with. Eliphaz bases his ideas on a "spiritual experience" he had one night (4:12-16), Bildad's a "traditionalist" who tries to build his case on "wise sayings", and Zophar is certain he knows more about God than anyone else. It's important to note that when Elihu speaks up at the end that God does not rebuke Elihu but the three others.

## *The Answer*

There is no pat answer to why the righteous suffer. It's important to note that James commends Job (Ja. 5:11) **NOT** for patience, but endurance. Job certainly became impatient with his friends, but he is an example of the biblical definition of endurance, which is faithfulness under trial. Job's faith affirms that God is completely sovereign and does not have to explain His ways, but works according to His own purposes. (Rom. 8:28) When trials come we should not pose the question, "How can I get out of this?" or "How can I make this end?" but "What can I get out of this, Lord?"