

STUDY GUIDE



CHURCH NAME

WHY I AM NOT A CHRISTIAN

WHY EVIL AND SUFFERING?

JOB 1:1–2:10

07/02/2017

MAIN POINT

“Why me?” is a normal reaction to evil and suffering.

INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Think back over a time in your life when you faced a seemingly insurmountable challenge. What predominant emotions did you feel during that time?

At the time, how did you think God felt about your situation and what did you think He was doing? Did you think God was waiting? How was that different from what He actually had planned?

In times of suffering, we sometimes cry out, “Why me?” Other times we see tragedies that happen to others—loved ones and those in distant countries who are suddenly wiped out in devastation. The pain strikes us as random and meaningless. “Why?” is probably one of the oldest questions in history. Agnostic philosopher, David Hume, once famously said; “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?” Even believers in the Bible have asked that question! The story of Job is one of the greatest examples.

READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOB 1:1-22.

Based on these verses, what kind of man was Job? What do you think the people in his community thought about him?

By all accounts, Job was a respected and upstanding member of his community. In fact, based on these verses, he had everything anyone could ever want. But pain and suffering is no respecter of qualities like these; it comes on us all at some point in our lives. Job’s blessed life was about to be turned upside down.

Who brought Job into the conversation—Satan or God? Why is that important to know?

How have you seen God use your pain for your progress?

While we as the audience know about this conversation between God and Job, Job did not. He only knew that his circumstances had dramatically changed. But even in the midst of those troubles, Job chose not to curse God or walk away from Him. He persevered in the middle of pain and suffering, even though he didn't understand why it was happening.

What are some ways Job might have responded to what he was going through? What are some of the ways you have responded when you've experienced that kind of pain?

Why is it hard to remember that God is still God and that God is still good when you're experiencing pain?

Job recognized that his circumstances were more than a streak of bad luck. God is sovereign in both good times and bad times. But Job chose instead of focusing on his circumstances to look higher. True faith is not dependent on our circumstances; it must find its root in something that does not change—the character of God. No matter what's happening in our circumstances, God is working for good. Our job isn't to know exactly what He's doing; our job is to hold on and not give up. When things are falling apart around us, the best thing we can do is trust.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOB 2:1-10.

Why do you think God allowed Satan to afflict Job a second time?

What does this account teach us about Satan and evil?

Satan roams the earth looking to harm God's people, and he does not give up easily. Yet in light of Satan's destructive nature, God is sovereign while Satan's power is limited. God allowed Satan to strike Job's health, but not to take his life. We see God's mercy amidst Satan's attacks on Job. Similarly in Job 1:12, Satan was allowed to attack Job's life but his attacks could only go so far. One day Satan's power will be taken away and he will be thrown in hell, where he will stay forever (Rev. 20:10).

What words or phrases in these verses describe Job's continued faith in God?

How might a person without faith in God respond to losses differently than a person with faith?

How have you used a trial in your life as a witness to others of your love for God?

Crushed by the loss herself, Job's wife saw Job's faith as futile. Yet despite external pressure, Job believed he must be ready accept both the good and the bad times. Job chose to praise God in both situations, because He trusted in the Lord over His circumstances rather than the circumstances themselves (2:10; see also 1:21).

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOB 19:25-26.

What hope did Job express in his suffering?

What must you believe about God to express such confidence in suffering?

The truth is; God is perfectly, all-powerful, totally good, and perfectly loving but Job still comes to a place where he doesn't understand why he is suffering. God never answers Job's question: Instead, God challenges him with even better questions (see Job 38–42) so Job bowed down and worshiped. Even though he still had no philosophical

resolution to his problem, he learned that there is a historical resolution when he said, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26, ESV). God does punish all the wicked, but not only the wicked suffer. In fact, God's Son suffered more than any human being that has ever lived, yet He did not sin. There are times when we do experience suffering because of our sin, but this was not the case with Job, and it is not the case for many Christian men and women who suffer for reasons beyond their understanding. No matter when and why we suffer, we can say with Job, our redeemer lives, and will one day free us from our suffering.

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Who do you know who is suffering like Job? What could you do to reach out to them and comfort them in their time of need?

How do we reconcile that God is good and powerful, but there is so much suffering in this world? Do you know people who are asking this question? How could you help them see God's plan in suffering?

When you are personally suffering, how do you maintain your hope and confidence in Christ, your living redeemer?

PRAY

Thank God for Jesus, your redeemer, who lives and reigns, and is sovereign over your suffering. Ask God to comfort those you know who are suffering through the comfort of His presence. Pray that when you suffer, you would honor God through your suffering and lead others to see Him.

COMMENTARY

JOB 1:1-22

1:1. Job was blameless and upright. The personality of Job is most attractive, and pleasing to God Himself. He was completely honest. He was devout; he feared God, like Abraham (Gen. 22:12). And he was moral; he turned away from evil. He rejected what was wrong; he did not merely shun it. The fact of Job's genuine righteousness is essential to the book. It begins with a clash of opinion between Yahweh and the Satan on this point. The slanderer denies it; Yahweh sets out to prove it.

1:2-3. Job had an ideal family of seven sons and three daughters, both numbers and their sum being symbols of completeness, a clear token of divine favor. Job's wealth was measured in livestock, and once more the numerals indicate the ideal.

1:4-5. Job's children were able to enjoy the best of everything. No disapproval of this pleasant life is expressed. We need not suppose that they spent all their time in roistering and did no work. There is no hint of drunkenness or licence or laziness. Job expresses no anxiety on this score, although he is aware of the danger that they might slip into profanity. These delightful family gatherings are part of the atmosphere of well-being that begins the story. They are a mark of good fortune, or rather of God's blessing.

1:6. Most commentators assume that the Lord's court assembles in heaven. There is nothing in Job about the location of the levy. Satan's insolence shows a mind already twisted away from God, but his hostility is not on the scale of a rival power. There is evil here, but not dualism. The Satan may be the chief mischief-maker of the universe, but he is a mere creature, puny compared with the Lord. He can do only what God permits him to do. In the assembly he is more like a nuisance than an official. Satan is not God's minister of prosecution; it is the Lord, not the Satan, who brings up the case of Job.

1:7-10. The conversation is informal, in keeping with a popular tale. The Lord's first greeting is the same as Jacob's to the men of Haran (Gen. 29:4), and means little more than the commencement of conversation. On the lips of God

the question does not betray a need for knowledge, but an invitation to state his business.

1:11. The basic questions of the book are raised. God's character and Job's are both slighted. Is God so good that He can be loved for Himself, not just for His gifts? Can a man hold on to God when there are no benefits attached? Satan suggests a test to prove his point. His language is abrupt; he commands God with imperative verbs: literally, "But now, you just extend your hand and damage all his property."

1:12. The Lord accepts the challenge. The Satan is given permission to do what he likes with all Job's property. But he must not touch Job's person. The Satan goes out, eager to get on with the mischief.

1:13-19. In swift succession four messengers come with news that his happy world has fallen in ruins. Since his children were feasting in their eldest brother's house, this was probably the beginning of the weekly cycle. This would be the day when Job had offered sacrifices to ensure the favor of God. Nothing could have stunned him more than the arrival of such news just as he had made fresh peace with his Lord.

1:20-22. Job's response was magnificent. His actions were deliberate and dignified, like David's (2 Sam. 12:20) and Hezekiah's (2 Kgs 19:1). Men of standing wore a robe over their tunic. It was ripped as a gesture of grief immediately on receiving bad news. Shaving the head was part of the mourning rituals in Mesopotamia and Canaan, often described in ancient texts. Because of its heathen associations it was actually forbidden by the Law, but it is often mentioned in the Old Testament. Since nothing wrong is seen in his action here, it is worth noting that Job does not resort to gashing his body in the way Israel's neighbors often did in bereavement. Job sees only the hand of God in these events. It never occurs to him to curse the desert brigands, to curse the frontier guards, to curse his own stupid servants, now lying dead for their watchlessness. All secondary causes vanish. It was the Lord who gave; it was the Lord who removed; and in the Lord alone must the explanation of these strange happenings be sought. Job passed the first test. He did not charge God with wrong.

JOB 2:1-10

Verse 1. The second heavenly scene was, as before (see 1:6), yet another time of the angels presenting themselves before God. The appearance of Satan in this heavenly scene indicates a sustained access that he has into the presence of the Lord, before whom he continually accuses the righteous (Rev. 12:10).

Verse 2. By divine initiative the Lord asked the evil one, "Where have you come from?" This question was not asked out of ignorance as if God did not know. The Lord knows all things. Rather, it was meant to illicit a confession from this fallen angel. Satan answered the Lord: "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." This world is the arena in which Satan is creating and wreaking havoc. Cast down to the earth with a third of the heavenly host (Rev. 12:10), Satan roams the earth like a condemned prisoner (Gen. 3:14), stalking prey, ambushing victims, until he will be finally placed into the bottomless pit of eternal destruction, a real place called hell (Rev. 20:10). But the Devil is not yet in hell. Instead, he is actively roaming the earth, bent on destroying lives.

Verse 3. Knowing Satan had been wreaking destruction on the earth, the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job?" Knowing Satan's first round of attacks had failed to shake Job's faith, with sarcasm the Lord reminded Satan that Job "was blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." The Lord stated that Job "still maintained his integrity," in spite of the devil's first assault upon his life. Job remained faithful and did not waver in his devotion to God. Although Satan had tried to incite God against Job to ruin him, God maintained that Job's suffering was without any reason. Satan, not Job's sin, was to blame for Job's suffering. Although Job underwent severe trial and pain, it was not because of any sin he had committed.

Verse 4. With audacious resolve, Satan indicted God by saying, "Skin for skin!" This was a bartering term that meant to trade one skin, such as that of an animal, for another skin. Satan, whose name means "the accuser," was charging Job with sacrificing the skin of his children, animals, and servants in order to preserve his own hide. Satan was convinced that Job would give all he had for his own life.

Verse 5. Satan asked God to stretch out his hand and strike Job's flesh and bones. He believed this would lead Job to curse God to his face, his original conviction (Job 1:11). Since the mouth spoke from the heart (Matt. 12:34), Satan understood that cursing God would represent Job's refusal to submit to God's sovereign rule.

Verse 6. The Lord granted Satan permission to attack Job: "Very well, then, he is in your hands." God removed the hedge of protection from around Job 26 (1:10) and allowed Satan even greater access to assail his life. This divine permission gave Satan virtually unrestrained power to harm Job's body. God's only restriction was, "You must spare his life." Again (see 1:12) Satan's power to afflict Job was limited by the Lord.

Verses 7-8. The impoverished Job was left to sit in the dust and scrape himself with a piece of broken pottery symbolic of his broken life. In scraping himself with broken pottery, Job may have been trying to get rid of the matter that oozed from his sores and thus alleviate the itching. Job's sitting among the ashes symbolized his grief and

despondency (2 Sam 13:19; Esth. 4:3). Ash heaps were traditionally located at town dumps. Job's "sores" were inflamed ulcerous sores (v. 7) that produced itching (v. 8), degenerative changes in facial skin (vv. 7,12), loss of appetite (3:24), depression (3:24-25), worms in the boils (7:5), hardened skin and running sores (7:5), difficulty in breathing (9:18), dark eyelids (16:16), foul breath (19:17), weight loss (19:20), continual pain (30:17), restlessness (30:27), blackened skin (30:30), and fever (30:30), all of which lasted for several months (29:2).

Verses 9-10. Job's wife appears only in these verses. Facing what she thought was his approaching death, she could not understand why Job remained faithful to God. She saw no value in his faithfulness. Perhaps she believed that by cursing God, the Lord might hasten Job's death. So she implored Job to do what Satan hoped he would do—curse God and die. She too had suffered the losses of possessions and children, but her response was completely different from Job's. How we respond to what happens to us reveals our commitment to God. Tragedy has the potential to destroy marriages unless husbands and wives support each other and put their faith in the Lord. Job responded to his wife's challenge by saying she spoke as a foolish woman. In the Bible a fool is one who completely renounces God's ways. He repeated his willingness to accept adversity as well as good from God. Job recognized that ultimately God is in control of every life, whether for good or for times of adversity. For Job, the central issue remained the same—he would remain faithful to God no matter what. The final phrase of verse 10 demonstrates that God's confidence in Job was right and Satan's accusations were false.