

**THE FRAMEWORK OF THE BOOK OF JOB****CHAPTERS 1 & 2**

- ⇒ we are introduced to Job (1:1-5)
- ⇒ the first test – Job loses all his possessions and all his children (1:6-22)
- ⇒ the second test - Job is stricken with physical disease (2:1-10)
- ⇒ we are introduced to his three ‘friends’ or ‘comforters’ (2:11-13)

**CHAPTERS 3 – 37**

- ⇒ Job & his ‘friends’ debate the nature of God, the causes of suffering, life, the universe and everything in an exhaustive (and no doubt exhausting) game of verbal tennis

**CHAPTERS 38 – 42**

- ⇒ God speaks (38 - 41)
- ⇒ Job replies (42. 1 - 6)
- ⇒ Job’s fortunes are restored to him double, all except one... (42. 7 - 17)

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Narrative</b>	<b>Job’s Comforters</b>	<b>Job</b>
1:1 – 2:10	Prologue: Job’s calamity & its cause		
2:11-13	Job’s friends arrive to ‘sympathise with him and comfort him’		
3:1-26			Job’s first speech
4:1 – 5:27		Eliphaz (speech 1)	
6:1 – 7:21			Job (response 1)
8:1-22		Bildad (speech 1)	
9:1 – 10:22			Job (response 2)
11:1-20		Zophar (speech 1)	
12:1 – 14:22			Job (response 3)
15:1-35		Eliphaz (speech 2)	
16:1 – 17:16			Job (response 4)
18:1-21		Bildad (speech 2)	
19:1-29			Job (response 5)
20:1-29		Zophar (speech 2)	
21:1-34			Job (response 6)
22:1-30		Eliphaz (speech 3)	
23:1 – 24:25			Job (response 7)
25:1-6		Bildad (speech 3)	
26:1 – 31:40			Job (response 8)
32:1 – 37:24		Elihu (speech 1)	
38:1 – 41:34	The LORD speaks		
42:1-6			Job (response & repentance)
42:7-17	Epilogue (Job’s friends rebuked; Job’s fortunes restored)		

## **THE THEME OF THE BOOK**

- ⇒ For many people, Job is simply a study in pain and innocent suffering ...
- ⇒ [biblically, there's no such thing as 'innocence' in the human condition (Romans 3:10, 23), so I prefer to talk of 'undeserved suffering']
- ⇒ But Job is actually a study in faith, using suffering as the dramatic vehicle for the author's exploration of the key question: how can we keep faith with a God who seems to have broken faith with us?

## **SO WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM JOB?**

### **1. the devil is real**

- ⇒ he is a spiritual being, a fallen angel, no more, no less (Isaiah 14; Luke 10:17-20)
- ⇒ he spoils what is good and of God (John 10:10)
- ⇒ he lies & is the father of lies (John 8:44)
- ⇒ he prowls the earth, looking to devour (Job 1:7; 2:2; 1 Peter 5:8)
- ⇒ he attacks God's people (1 Chronicles 21:1)
- ⇒ he blinds people to the truth (2 Corinthians 4:4)
- ⇒ he sows doubt in God & His Word (Genesis 3; Matthew 4:3-6)
- ⇒ he tempts people to sin (Genesis 3:6)
- ⇒ he accuses the righteous (Revelation 12:10)
- ⇒ he controls this world (1 John 5:19)
- ⇒ he is not as powerful as he thinks, and can be resisted (James 4:7)
- ⇒ his doom & destruction is certain (Revelation 20:10)

### **2. human life is the battleground in a spiritual war**

- ⇒ Ephesians 6:10-18
- ⇒ Job 1 & 2 – what are we to make of God's wager with Satan?

### **3. a frank exchange of views does not harm our relationship with God**

(7:19; 10:20-21; 14:18-19; 16:9; 19:7; 30:20 – 21:26-27)

- ⇒ God does not blame Job for his anger or his accusations against heaven
- ⇒ it is Job's 'friends' who are required to ask Job to pray for them
- ⇒ when life goes bad, God would rather we raise our voices in anguish than hide behind the polite mask of inadequate and inauthentic theology
- ⇒ how do we make room for lament in our modern church life?

### **4. ultimately, our wholeness lies beyond death**

- ⇒ Job 19:25-27: an astonishing declaration of faith in a world where belief in the afterlife was at best shadowy
- ⇒ Beware 'health and prosperity' teaching just as much as teaching which claims the days of signs and wonders are over
- ⇒ the biblical reality – a holding together of the 'now' and 'not yet'

## **5. Job's 'comforters' could use a little pastoral training ...**

- ⇒ they only get one thing right, and that's the week they spend sitting with him for a week without speaking
- ⇒ their theology sounds good but is full of holes
- ⇒ their main motivation is not to comfort Job but to shore up their own flawed theology, which tells them that suffering is always caused by sin (it isn't - see Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-5, although it can be – see Romans 1:18-32)

In fact, these 'friends' display the characteristics of religious legalism

- ⇒ an unswerving (but faulty) dogmatism about what is right & wrong
- ⇒ an argumentative rationality which presents half-truths as the whole truth
- ⇒ an unhealthy obsession with other people's sin & a disinterest in forgiveness
- ⇒ a hardness of heart and lack of pastoral sensitivity leading to heavy condemnation
- ⇒ an alarmingly zealous passion for (their understanding of) 'truth' which tragically blinds people to the pain of others

*See the appendix below for a fuller examination of the conversations between Job and his friends*

## **6. sometimes we receive no answers to life's pain and mystery**

- ⇒ Even when the Lord finally breaks his silence, he offers Job no answers, but rather a sense of the limited perspective of our human viewpoint (38:22-38)

## **7. it is God's presence which provides the ultimate answer**

- ⇒ or rather, it staunches the flow of emotional incontinence and dissipates the need for questions – when God speaks, Job repents and is somehow satisfied
- ⇒ what do other major religions have to offer compared with the Cross?

## **8. how does all this really matter?**

- ⇒ if our life is the arena in which God and the devil play out their cosmic battle, then our response to God & the devil is of cosmic significance
- ⇒ the point lies not in the cause of our suffering but our response to it
- ⇒ discipleship is a long obedience in the same direction - what counts is not how many glorious highlights we can recall along the way, but that we're still going at the end (Matthew 24:13; Revelation 2:10; 13:10; 14:12; 21:7)

## APPENDIX: THE CYCLE OF SPEECHES AND RESPONSES (Chapters 3 – 42)

### 1. The first cycle of speeches and responses (3 – 14)

- ⇒ Job's lament (in a nutshell) – 'I wish I'd never been born' (cf Jeremiah 15:10; 20:14-18)
- ⇒ All 3 'friends' share the same fundamental view of why Job is suffering – it's his fault!
- ⇒ **Eliphaz** – 'When have the innocent ever perished?' !! (4:7) (cf John 9:1-3)
- ⇒ Part-truths presented as the whole truth become falsehoods (the Comforters' view of suffering and of God)
- ⇒ 'beware those Christians who carry a theological revolver' (Charles Spurgeon)!
- ⇒ 'Before you point out the plank in your brother's eye ...' (Matthew 7:3-5)
- ⇒ **Bildad** – a cold intellectual with almost no emotional awareness of Job at all – responding to the words of someone in pain is not the same as addressing their anguish
- ⇒ **Zophar** – almost thumping the table as he demands Job repent – as far as he is concerned, Job has got off lightly!!
- ⇒ Note how many words the 'Comforters' speak about God, but the total absence of words addressed to God. They don't pray for wisdom or for Job! (cf Pharisees)
- ⇒ 13:15 'Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him'

### 2. The second cycle of speeches and responses (15 – 21)

- ⇒ The speeches of the 'Comforters' are shorter – so are their tempers!
- ⇒ None of them has really 'heard' what Job has said at all
- ⇒ **Eliphaz** attacks Job, repeating what he has already decided
- ⇒ **Bildad** angrily asks Job why he stubbornly remains in denial; then tries to manipulate Job into confessing his sin – gasp at the insensitivity of 18:1-21!
- ⇒ **Zophar** – 'comforts' Job by detailing the fate awaiting the wicked (20:1-29)
- ⇒ How similar to the later Pharisees – dedicated to teaching a human law of restrictions over God's law of loving welcome; so eager to point out the sin in other's lives that it seems as though a gospel of forgiveness would spoil half the fun
- ⇒ Religious legalism always combines 'outward rightness' with 'inward wrongness'

### 3. The third cycle of speeches and responses (22 – 37)

- ⇒ **Zophar** drops out of this round, leaving the others to one desperate, final attempt to get Job to agree with their diagnosis
- ⇒ Now, clearly fabricated accusations are hurled against Job (22:5-11) – **Eliphaz** puts words into Job's mouth (22:13)
- ⇒ Note the element of spiritual bullying which has come to the fore – another sure hallmark of religious legalism
- ⇒ Now, a fourth voice enters the cycle – **Elihu**, who gives the longest individual speech in the whole book (chapters 32 – 37)
- ⇒ Note that he speaks out of anger (32:1-3), but also out of a measure of concern for Job (32:12)
- ⇒ Like many young people, he is 'full of words' (32:18) and there is a sense that his intervention is as much for himself as for Job (32:17-20)
- ⇒ However, his voice is significant – his real thrust is that no one can be as perfect as Job claims to be, and includes himself in this diagnosis (33:6-11)
- ⇒ **Elihu** also sounds a corrective note about God's nature – presenting him not as a 'punitive' God but as 'wooing' Job (36:16). He sounds a very contemporary warning to modern Western

Christians – ‘don’t abandon your faith just because you have been struck by suffering’ (36:17-21)

### **The epilogue – God speaks, Job repents (38 – 42)**

- ⇒ The LORD’s speech is one of the most magnificent in all scripture (38 – 41)
- ⇒ Job’s response is to recognise his own limited theology – his view of God and of himself
- ⇒ He is learning one of the hardest lessons of life – the most urgent problem with which we need to deal is not the problem in other people, nor in God, but in ourselves
- ⇒ At one level, the ‘Comforters’ were speaking truth in pointing out that no one is perfect and that Job is prey to sin like everyone else. Job’s words reveal the distortion of self which comes from rehearsing our own righteousness – ironically, Job is a victim (albeit unwittingly) of a similar religious legalism to that of his friends – and he cannot see the smaller imperfections which St Paul sweeps up in his great phrase ‘All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23)
- ⇒ But, in God’s sight, the callous and insensitive use of this truth by Job’s ‘Comforters’ was wrong, and earns them (but not Elihu) his rebuke
- ⇒ Utterly counter-intuitive as it may seem, the Job of 42:1-6 is a far healthier person in his soul than the Job of 1:1-5 ...

*‘the riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man’ (GK Chesterton)*