

Approaches to Job

Sessions

1. Making Sense of Human Suffering (Text Focus: Ch 1, 2, 42)
2. Genre and Intertextuality: (Text focus Ch 7, Psalm 8)
3. Animals and Environment (Text Focus: Ch 38-41)
4. Job and the Body, Job and Christ

Overview

The Prologue 1:1–2:13

The Poetic Debate 3:1–42:6 (3:1–26 Job; 4:1–5:27 Eliphaz; 6:1–7:21 Job; 8:1–22 Bildad; 9:1–10:22 Job; 11:1–20 Zophar; 12:1–14:22 Job; 15:1–35 Eliphaz; 16:1–17:16 Job; 18:1–21 Bildad; 19:1–29 Job; 20:1–29 Zophar; 21:1–34 Job; 22:1–30 Eliphaz; 23:1–24:25 Job; 32:1–37:24 Elihu; 38.1-42:6 YHWH's two speeches and Job's Responses)

The Prose Epilogue 42:7–17

Further Reading

Bimson, John J. *The Book of Job and Environmental Ethics: The Message from the Whirlwind* (2020) Grove Books.

Dell, Katharine J. *Where Can Wisdom be Found, Job: an Introduction and Study Guide* (2017)

Fox, Michael V, and Katharine J Dell. "God's View of His Animals in Job 38:40-39:30." *Human Interaction with the Natural World in Wisdom Literature and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Tova L. Forti*. N.p., 2023. 23–32. Web.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo, and Matthew J O'Connell. *On Job : God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987.

Kynes, Will. "'Ask the Plants': Job's Dialogue with Floral Metaphors in Psalms 1 and 90." *Human Interaction with the Natural World in Wisdom Literature and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Tova L. Forti*. N.p., 2023. 9–22.

Lambert, W.G. *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. Winona Lake:Eisenbrauns 1996 (2nd ed.), p. 63-89.

Southwood, Katherine *Job's Body and the Dramatized Comedy of Moralising* (2021)

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Session 1: Making Sense of Suffering

Chapter 1

1There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. 2There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. 3He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. 4His sons used to go and hold feasts in one another's houses in turn; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5And when the feast days had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt-offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, 'It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.' This is what Job always did.

6One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. 7The LORD said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?' Satan answered the LORD, 'From going to and from on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.' 8The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.' 9Then Satan answered the LORD, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? 10Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.' 12The LORD said to Satan, 'Very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him!' So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

13One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house, 14a messenger came to Job and said, 'The oxen were ploughing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, 15and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you.' 16While he was still speaking, another came and said, 'The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you.' 17While he was still speaking, another came and said, 'The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you.' 18While he was still speaking, another came and said, 'Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, 19and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you.'

20Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshipped. 21He said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.'

22In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing.

Chapter 2

1One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. 2The LORD said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?' Satan

answered the LORD, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.' 3The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason.' 4Then Satan answered the LORD, 'Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. 5But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.' 6The LORD said to Satan, 'Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life.'

7So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

9Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.' 10But he said to her, 'You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

11Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. 12When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. 13They sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

Chapter 42

1Then Job answered the LORD:

2'I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

3"Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?"

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

4"Hear, and I will speak;

I will question you, and you declare to me."

5I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,

but now my eye sees you;

6therefore I despise myself,

and repent in dust and ashes.'

7After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. 8Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done.'

9So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

10And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. 11Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. 12The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. 13He also had seven sons and three daughters. 14He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Kerenhappuch. 15In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. 16After this Job lived for one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. 17And Job died, old and full of days.

Reward and Retribution: the Babylonian Theodicy

Date: c. 1000BC

Format: Clay Tablet

Form: Acrostic Poem of 27 Stanzas (19 well preserved), dialogue between "sufferer" and "friend"

Language: Middle Babylonian

Source: Multiple copies have been found across Assyria and Babylon

Sufferer XXIII

I have looked around society, but the evidence is contrary.
The god does not impede the way of a devil.
A father drags a boat along the canal,
While his first-born lies in bed.
The first-born son pursues his way like a lion,
The second son is happy to be a mule driver.
The heir stalks along the road like a bully,
The younger son will give food to the destitute.
How have I profited that I have bowed down to my god?
I have to bow beneath the base fellow that meets me;
The dregs of humanity, like the rich and opulent, treat me with contempt.

Friend XXIV

O wise one, O savant, who masters knowledge,
In your anguish you blaspheme the god.
The divine mind, like the centre of the heavens, is remote;
Knowledge of it is difficult; the masses do not know it.
Among all the creatures whom Aruru formed
The prime offspring is altogether ...
In the case of a cow, the first calf is lowly,
The later offspring is twice as big.
A first child is born a weakling,
But the second is called an heroic warrior.
Though a man may observe what the will of the god is, the masses do not know it.

W.G. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns 1996 (2nd ed.), p. 63-89.

Job and Liberation Theology: Gustavo Gutierrez

Gustavo Gutiérrez-Merino Díaz OP (8 June 1928 – 22 October 2024) was a Peruvian Catholic philosopher, theologian, and Dominican priest who was one of the founders of Latin American liberation theology. His 1971 book *A Theology of Liberation* is considered pivotal to the formation of liberation theology at large. He held the John Cardinal O'Hara Professorship of Theology at the University of Notre Dame and was a visiting professor at universities in North America and Europe.

On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent

Gutiérrez argues that the book of Job destroys the idea that righteous people will always be rewarded with wealth and prosperity. He argues that suffering is not necessarily a result of personal sin. Gutiérrez emphasizes that Job represents the "innocent sufferers" of the world, particularly the poor and marginalized, who suffer unjustly. He argues that faith requires solidarity with the poor, who are the "disinherited" and exploited in human history. The central message, according to Gutiérrez, is that God's love is gratuitous (free and unearned) and not part of a transactional system of "doing good, getting rich". Job's story challenges the notion that faith is only for the sake of reward, asking if it is possible to love God without expecting a "payback".

The poet wants to turn Job into an archetype, to make him the spokesman not of his personal experience alone but of the experience of all humankind. Living as I and many of my readers do in a continent where the suffering of the innocent is a massive reality, the wager on which the book is based has special meaning for us. Gutiérrez, p. 24

The Book of Job does not claim to have found a rational or definitive explanation of suffering; the poet is quite aware that the subject is a complex one. On the other hand, his faith prompts him to inquire into the possibility of finding an appropriate language about God that does justice to the situation of suffering. Not to make the effort is to risk succumbing to impotent resignation, a religion of calculated self-interest, a cynical outlook that forgets the suffering of others, and even despair. Gutiérrez, p.117.

His personal courage and his trust in God impel him to follow paths that are a challenge to the theology of his day. At once more traditional than those who boast of being such, and more innovative than the standards of the mediocre allow them to be, the poet of the Book of Job is guided by God's hand to discover ways of talking about God. [...]

For Job to leave his own world and enter into that of the poor already meant taking the path of gratuitousness and not simply that of concern for justice. On the other hand, all prophecy has as its starting point an encounter with the Lord and the Lord's unmerited love (see the theme of the prophetic vocation in Isa. 6; Jer. 1:4–10; Ezek. 2 and 3). emphasis on the practice of justice and on solidarity with the poor must never become an obsession and prevent our seeing that this commitment reveals its value and ultimate meaning only within the vast and mysterious horizon of God's gratuitous love. Furthermore, the very building of a just society requires a stimulus and an enveloping atmosphere that gratuitousness alone can supply. The point here is not to assign greater importance to the element of play and gratuitousness than to justice but to ensure that the world of justice finds its full meaning and source in the freely given love of God. P. 120

- What are your previous experiences of reading the Book of Job? Which parts do you find memorable? Is it helpful/problematic? What questions do you have?
- What lessons do you think we are supposed to take from the story?
- How does the figure of The Accuser/ Ha Satan differ from the snake at the start of Genesis? Is this Satan? Can they be said to be the same figure?
- What similarities can you see between Job and the Babylonian Theodicy?
- What differences strike you?
- In what ways does Job challenge the classic Reward/Retribution Theology of the era?
- How does Liberation Theology offer insights for approaching the book of Job? How helpful do you find this approach?
- In what ways does the Book of Job's challenge to a simple schema of reward/retribution theology anticipate the teaching's of Christ?
- What do you think of the critique from Liberation Theology that Job is essentially a "rich man's bad dream" – he begins the story as a wealthy man and has his wealth restored to him at the end. Why might some readers find this example unhelpful or irrelevant?
- Is Job an everyman figure? Why/why not?
- How could we approach this story from a feminist perspective? What do you think of the figure of Job's wife and how might we critique her?