

## Reading the Book of Job

### The Big Picture

1-2	Narrative Prologue
3-31	Job's Dialogue w/ the 3 friends (3 cycles)
32-37	Elihu's Monologue
38-41	Yahweh's monologue
42:1-6	Job's response
42:7-17	Narrative Epilogue

### Main Themes in Job

1. The story is cast as a "dramatic irony": From the prologue to the epilogue the reader knows more than any of the characters. This creates tension: We become observers to Job's journey and how he comes to find resolution with God. He is offered as an example to us.
2. Main Plot Conflict: Job suffers without deserving it (2:3), or ever knowing why.
3. Job's friends wrongly apply the message of Proverbs
  - *Premise*: Suffering is always the result of sin, blessing results from obedience – Eliphaz in Chs. 4:1-9, Bildad in 8:1-7
  - *Fact*: Job is suffering
  - *Conclusion*: Job must have sinned – Zophar in 11:13-20
  - *Problem*: **The reader** knows that Job has not sinned [Chs. 1-2]
4. Job's response
  - He maintains his integrity: 7:20-21
  - He agonizes and intensely wrestles with God; does God cause suffering? 9:21-35
  - He demands an answer from God – a court hearing: 13:13-23
5. God's response (Chs. 38-41)
  - As creator and sustainer of the world, God is intimately involved with the workings of his creation. He has not fallen asleep on the job – Ch. 38
  - God owes an explanation to no one, not even Job: 40:6-14
  - God never directly answers Job's questions

Ch. 38 – Questions about Job's *non-participation* in creation and its management

Ch. 39 – Questions about the life of wild animals

Chs. 40-41 – Questions about Leviathan and Behemoth [these are either mythical creatures commonly known to ancient readers OR they describe some kind of hippo and alligator]
6. Point: The book of Job does not explain **why** we suffer, but gives us a model for **how** we can relate to God in the midst of suffering. We must maintain faith and hope alongside our frustration and disillusionment. We are shown two different portraits of Job in the book:
  - (a) Patient Job who trusts and waits on God (the prologue and epilogue)
  - (b) Protest Job who argues, yells, and wrestles with God (the dialogues)God approves of Job's struggle and wrestling as "speaking rightly" about God and condemns Job's friends for arrogantly assuming they know how God works in the world. [see 42:1-8]

God challenges Job to consider the fact that he is one very small part of a vastly complex world that sometimes seems to operate contrary to justice. But lack of human comprehension does not make it so. The point is that God's will and ways do not always make sense to *people with limited perspective*. God's intention is not to browbeat Job, nor force him into submission, but to show him that any human relationship with God is first and foremost founded on *trust*.