

MANual Lessons from Job

This year-long journey through The MANual, my NIV Bible for Men, has led us through lessons from the Books of Moses and the History of Israel. (I've included links to each of those lessons at the end of this post). We now venture into a section called the Books of Poetry, starting with the book of Job which addresses the profound question, "Why does God allow good and upright people to suffer?"

Isn't Scripture all the Same?

The Poetry section consists of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. It's the third section of the Christian Bible after the five law books of Moses and twelve historical books of Israel which is slightly different from Scripture that Jesus would have known. Though we use the word "Bible" commonly today, the appropriate term for the Hebrew Scriptures used by the Jewish faith is Tanakh. This is derived from the Hebrew letters of its three components: the Torah (the Law), Nevi'im (the Prophets), and Kethuvim (the Writings).

While the contents of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament are nearly identical, they are organized (canonized) differently to help people understand some important statements that Christ made in the New Testament. Essentially, the two sacred texts tell a different story: the Tanakh speaks of Jews returning to the homeland whereas the Old and New Testaments focus on salvation through Christ's death and resurrection.

About The Book of Job

The Book of Job is one of the most celebrated pieces of biblical literature. It's the oldest of any book of the Bible written approximately 2100-1800 B.C. The author of the 42 chapters is unknown, yet it's possible that Job himself wrote

it. Some presume Moses wrote Job during the 40 years he traveled in Midian, which is not far from a region called Uz.

The main theme of Job is about why God allows good and upright people to suffer afflictions and hardships. You may think this strange since the previous historical books were lessons about the Israelites disobedience. If God wants us to live a righteous life, why should we suffer like Job?

Through his severe trial, Job came to deeply understand the greatness of God and the reasons for human suffering that caused him to undergo a positive, life-changing experience.

Chapter 1 opens as Satan suddenly comes before God to accuse Job. The Accuser claims that Job was trusting God only because he was wealthy and everything was going well for him. God said to Satan, "There is no one on earth like him, he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains high integrity." (2:3) Satan seeks God's permission to test Job's faith and loyalty. God grants Satan permission to do so, within certain boundaries and charged him not to harm Job physically.



Men of God: Job

Job was a man who was blameless and upright, feared God, and shunned evil (Job 1:1). He was an extremely influential and wealthy man of his time. Job owned thousands of sheep, camels, and other livestock. He had a large family with seven sons and three daughters, and many servants. Job is spoken of as "the greatest of all the people of the East" (1:3). He lived in the land of Uz, in the kingdom of Edom, roughly in the area of

modern-day southwestern Jordan and southern Israel. Job is also mentioned as a historical figure in the New Testament (Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and James 5:11).

Satan destroyed Job's children, servants, livestock, herdsman, and home; but Job continued to trust in God. Next, Satan covered Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Job's wife tells him to curse God and die (2:9), but Job asks her, "Shall we not accept good from God and not trouble?" (2:10). Throughout all of this, Job did not sin against God.

- In what ways do you personally respond when experiencing suffering?
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Advice from Friends

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, came to visit their friend Job to share in his anguish. At first, they grieved with Job but told him that sin caused his suffering when they began to talk about the reasons for Job's tragedies. The friends tried to get Job to confess and repent of any sins that caused these tragedies and to turn back to God. Unable to convince Job otherwise, the three fell silent (2:13). They sat with him and just listened for seven days. They cried with him and shared in his sorrow.



Silence is Golden

Sometimes the best counsel you can give to a hurting friend is no counsel at all. That's what Job's friends did at first

while Job explained his situation to them. But the friends quickly rushed to judgment and offered the ideas that popped into their heads. They viewed Job's suffering as God's judgment against his sins. But they didn't listen well enough to Job, who maintained his innocence.

- Do you have friends who can sit with you when you are hurting?
 - Conversely, do you listen well to friends or family or do you quickly offer advice?
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Chapters 3 through 31 of Job include multiple rounds of discussion between God, Job, and his friends. The three friends give plenty of bad advice. Eliphaz the Temanite poses a loaded question: "Who that was innocent ever perished?" (4:7) meaning that humans have no chance of being sinless. Bildad the Shuhite, feels the same way as Eliphaz, but adds, the question, "What if it was Job's kids or ancestors who had sinned?" Zophar the Naamathite says that God is just, and Job must have done something to offend him so the wicked are punished and Job's predicament is his own fault. In response to his first two tests, Job curses the day that he was born and sees no justice in why he must suffer.

Job challenged each of these friends to point out any evil deed that he has committed. He states he failed because he is mortal but that it is not his fault since he was created as a sinner. The cycle repeats at each round of discussions with the friends. Job also argues his case with God; eventually realizing that God is the source of all wisdom and the first source of wisdom is to fear God (28:20-28). Job finally reaches his last protest of innocence, "The words of Job are ended." (31:40).

Chapter 32 opens as a fourth friend, the young bystander Elihu enters the debate. His response to rebuke Job's three

friends, and tells him that he needs to humble himself. Elihu says Job must submit to God's use of these trials that were intended to purify his life. Elihu's message was to look at his pain from another perspective; that God's sovereignty over all of nature was a reminder of His sovereignty over our lives. However, these arguments failed to convince Job who just wanted answers for his suffering.

God Answers Job

In chapters 38-42, God speaks out of a mighty storm (38:1) to Job and restores him. He knows Job received poor guidance from his friends but to drive home the point it is better to know God than to get all the answers. God reminds Job of His Almighty powers saying, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" God declares that humans do not know everything, and humbles Job by asking a series of questions that no human could possibly answer. For example, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" and "Who commands the morning to appear?" and "Who directs the movement of the stars?" God then brings him to an understanding that believers don't always know what God is doing in their lives by saying, "Tell Me, if you know all this".

Confronted with the power and majesty of God, Job fell before Him in humble reverence – speechless. God also rebuked Job's friends but restores Job to health, happiness, and prosperity beyond his earlier state. The main difference is Job fears God and his friends do not.



God Buddy Focus

The book of Job reminds us that God is God and we are not! He controls everything. When we see the thunderclouds above and a

flash of lightning, we remember His awesome majesty. When we see a spectacular sunset or powerful waves crashing on the beach, we remember His creative power.

But does God also control evil in this world? Does he send lightning bolts down as judgment and retribution against our sins? Does He send false friends to trick us into self-doubt?

Although it's natural to think this way, God does not cause evil. He abhors everything imperfect, broken, and fallen. The Good News is that His deep love enables us to live a full and righteous life as we trust and obey Him.

This week:

1. Take the time to read the last few chapters of Job. How is God speaking to you during your suffering?
2. Do you feel specifically selected for testing like Job? Why or why not?
3. Do you have friends that will sit with you and listen when you most need it?

Next up is my challenge to provide lessons all 148 Psalms. (Spoiler alert! I will need likely two or more posts to do it any justice).

Links to the MANual Lessons

The Books of Moses

MANual Lessons from Genesis
MANual Lessons from Exodus
MANual Lessons from Leviticus
MANual Lessons from Numbers
MANual Lessons from Deuteronomy

The History of Israel

MANual Lessons from Joshua
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MANual Lessons from Judges

MANual Lessons from Ruth

MANual Lessons from the Prophet, Samuel

MANual Lessons from the Books of Kings
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MANual Lessons from the Chronicler

MANual Lessons from Ezra

MANual Lessons from Nehemiah

MANual Lessons from Esther
