

Introducing the Old Testament

Worksheet for Week 3

Job

Our study topic for this week is the book of Job. During this course, we'll be looking at five OT books in detail: Job, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Micah. In approaching these books, I suggest that you first read the chapter in Philip Yancey's book. Then, read the introduction to the book in your study bible and, if you have one, the entry on the book in your Bible dictionary. Then read through the daily passages suggested on this worksheet. If you feel ambitious, you could even read the entire book, though some of these are quite long. You might want to read the passages in an easier translation like the New Living Translation, and then read the passages in the NRSV or NIV.

Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament

In much of this course, we'll be concentrating on the storyline of the Old Testament, helping us to find the unity and coherence among the 39 books. However, some books of the Bible lie outside this story and offer us an alternative and important form of the community's faith. Often they provide an important corrective to conclusions we might draw about God, life, and ourselves if we had only the stories. These books – Job, some of the Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes – are referred to as wisdom literature and the book of Job is an excellent example. In a recent book¹, the authors provide a few keys to help us unlock this wisdom literature.

- Wisdom literature reflects on the “lived experience: of everyday life.” Job, Proverbs, and many of the Psalms don't speak to great events and grand transformations, they speak to the daily grind and struggles that face every person.
- The wisdom literature insists that all the ordinariness of everyday life is filled with ethical and moral significance. Everyday we must decide whether we walk in the shadow of God's wisdom or our own. Wisdom in the Bible is always about living within God's moral will for his people.
- The wisdom teachers reflect and interpret the experiences we all share. They want to teach the young, those who are to be inducted into the community of God's people.
- The wisdom teachers are not just passing on common sense, rather, they reflect on the reality of God's creation, how it works and what it means for us all as we try to make our way through life and to God. The book of *Proverbs* is “common sense permeated by God's will.”

Job

As you work your way through Job, there are a few things to keep an eye on.

- The first two chapters set the stage. As readers, we know the whole story and we know how it is going to end. After all, God is God. So, all the mystery lies in how Job will respond to what we know is about to befall him. Thus, Yancey is drawn to his conclusion that Job is a story of faith.
- Every community develops a set of rules and guidelines about how life should be lived. Not surprisingly, these guidelines (this wisdom) are invariably based on the common-sense observation that actions have consequences; that good deeds are rewarded and bad deeds are punished. It is pretty easy to see that this wisdom is essential to the orderly functioning of a community. Indeed, this is the wisdom of most of Proverbs. Job, however, reminds us that life is not quite so simple, that the innocent truly do suffer.
- If we had only the stories of Israel, we might conclude that if we suffer then it is because we have sinned. But Job is a crucial balancing of the canon!! Though the Bible generally teaches us that if we sin, then we will suffer (no surprise there!) – BUT, we cannot say that if we suffer, then it is because we have sinned. Job suffered – but Job was blameless.
- Though Job is innocent, he did not choose to endure his suffering; it was thrust upon him. Jesus was both truly innocent and chose to endure his suffering. When we consider Job's story and our own suffering, we always need to remember that God himself chose to suffer for us all.

¹ Bruce Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999)

Bible Readings for Week 3

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Day 1 Job 1 and 2 - the wager is made	Day 2 Job 4 - Eliphaz believes the innocent do not suffer
Day 3 Job 8 - Bildad believes that the innocent will prosper and the guilty will suffer	Day 4 Job 27 - Job affirms his innocence
Day 5 Job 38, 40:1-14, & 42 - God speaks, Job repents and is restored	Weekly Prayer Concerns