



## Class 6 - Ruth, Samuel, Job

Old Testament Seminar - Immanuel Church

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### Introduction

[SLIDE #2]

This morning we start with the books of Ruth and 1 & 2 Samuel. Here, we'll see a crucial turning point in the history of redemption: the rise (and sadly the fall) of the great King David. If there is any Old Testament figure who can rival Abraham in the way God uses him to reveal His plan for redemptive history, it is King David. These three books center on David. Just as God's promises to Abraham set the context for everything we've read so far, God's promises to David will now set the context for the rest of the Old Testament.

[PRAY]

### RUTH

[SLIDE #3]

Let's start with the book of Ruth, which is the historical and theological prelude to King David. In terms of context, the author of this book is unknown. It was most likely written during David's reign. But look at 1:1 – the actual events of the story take place, “In the days when judges ruled.” This is most likely in the early part of the 11th century BC. As we discussed last week, this 350-year period of the judges was a time of great turmoil and disorder. The book of Ruth, then, *acts as hinge point* in God's redemptive plan. The Lord is preparing his people to transition away from the chaos of their self-centered rule. And to the good rule of King David, *who is foreshadowing the true King—Jesus Christ*.

The question at the heart of this book - for the characters in the story and for modern readers - is does God still care? Does He still care for Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, in light of the loss of her husband and sons? Does He still care for Israel in the middle of three centuries of rebellion?

The clear answer in Ruth is that *God is our “kinsman-redeemer” who perfectly cares for us in the midst of our trials.* You can see a summary of this in the **theme** statement on your handout:

*God sovereignly orchestrates all things - even trials - for the good of His people, who He will one day redeem through the perfect rule of the kinsman king. (repeat slowly)*

The book of Ruth is about Naomi, an Israelite woman in Moab, whose husband and sons have died. That leaves her and her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, alone in a foreign land and unable to provide for themselves. The rest of the book of Ruth is essentially about two days in Ruth's life. Chapter 2, is when she finds favor with a man named Boaz who provides food for her and Naomi. And chapters 3-4, is when Boaz marries her to maintain her family line. For our overview of Ruth, we'll look at three main texts in the book, which provide snapshots into the story.

[SLIDE #4]

## 1) The Bitterness of Sin: 1:11-12, 20

In verses 11-12 and 20 we hear Naomi plead with her daughters-in-law to leave her so that they might avoid what she understands to be a hopeless fate. It is in these pleas that we hear all of Israel's despair. Look at 1:11-12: [Read Passage]

But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? [Skip Down to vs. 13]

“No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.”

And as she enters Bethlehem in verse 20: “Do not call me Naomi [which means pleasant]; call me Mara [which means bitter], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.”

And with that statement, Naomi is telling us a lot of what she thinks about God. Is he a cruel God as she suggests? Does he make our lives bitter? Well, in one sense, Naomi and her people deserved the bitterness of life - and worse. The famine she was fleeing from was God's judgment for their sin. And even her act of fleeing was sin. Her husband was seeking to escape God's judgment by disobeying the Covenant and leaving the Promised Land.

But is God all justice and no mercy? Well, as we read through this book, we see God respond to

Naomi's attitude as he overwhelms her with his mercy. And that begins right here in Chapter 1. Orpah leaves as Naomi suggests, but Ruth stays with her mother-in-law. Her promise to Naomi is beautiful and poetic.

“Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”

That leads us to Snapshot #2,

## **2) The Kindness of Kinsman Redemption: 4:9-12**

The key to understanding the redemption God will bring Ruth and Naomi is the notion of what's called the “kinsman-redeemer.” As detailed in Leviticus 25, the kinsman-redeemer was originally set up to allow families to buy back, or “redeem,” their relatives from slavery or debt-bondage. Over the years, this role took on the additional responsibility of marrying the childless widow of a male family member and having children with her so that his family line could continue. This responsibility of the kinsman-redeemer wasn't obligatory, but it was still highly valued in Jewish culture at this time. As we see in Ruth 4:9-10, a man name Boaz is this kinsman-redeemer, and he redeems Naomi's family by marrying Ruth.

So the provision of Ruth is God's first display of mercy in response to Naomi's charge. This marriage is the second, as a redeemer steps in to provide for these two widows. And the result is snapshot #3: we see

## **3) The Wisdom of God's Good Plan: 4:13-17**

By God's grace, this redemption was not only a blessing to Ruth and Naomi – it blessed the whole nation in a way that they could never have imagined! Look at verses 13 through 17 [Read]:

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons,

has given birth to him.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Amazingly, Ruth is the great-grandmother of David, Israel’s greatest earthly King. Even more, David would be an ancestor and a preview of the greater King to come: Jesus Christ.

Through the entire book of Ruth, we not only see that God DOES care for his people, but that he does so in ways that far exceed our own knowledge. Naomi and many other characters in this story consider their dire circumstances and conclude that God is far off and unconcerned. Nothing could be further from the truth. What is actually happening is that God is sovereignly directing human events. He is meeting the specific needs of Naomi and Ruth. But in addition he’s preparing the way for the coming king who will rescue Israel from the tumultuous time of the judges (David). And even beyond that, he’s working toward the future redeemer-King who rescues God’s people from their sin.

We can remember this when we are tempted to despair in the midst of trials and tribulations. Take comfort in knowing that, “...for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) Then you’ll be able to echo Naomi’s praise of Boaz in 2:20 with words to God: His “kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.”

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

[SLIDE #5]

## 1st and 2nd SAMUEL

Now for 1st and 2nd Samuel. This is the transition to a king. The books are named for the prophet Samuel, the main hinge between the time of the judges and the monarchy. He was both Israel’s final judge and the one who anointed the nation’s first king. Originally compiled as a single text, we don’t know who wrote these two books. 1st Chronicles 29:29-30 suggests the prophet left written records. But the account of Samuel’s death in I Samuel 25 suggests that at least much of the book was written by someone else.

As you read through these books on your own, here’s the central **theme** to keep in mind: *God*

*rules His people through the king who is a representative of the people and whose actions will bring God's blessing or punishment.*

Samuel continues the answer to the question of Ruth: *Does God still care?* These books demonstrate God's great compassion for his people. He gives them a king who is to be their example, defender, and representative. Saul (and many who follow) may fail in these duties, but God is still proven faithful by establishing the line of David. Which ultimately culminates in the rule of Jesus Christ, who perfectly reigns over all creation.

## Historical Overview

Let's turn now to a historical overview, which you can follow on the outline on page 3 of your handout. The books of Samuel fall into five historical sections. The first is the story of the prophet himself in 1 Sam. 1-7. Here we read the story of his miraculous birth and subsequent calling and service as God's prophet. Chapters 8-15 are the transition to monarchy where Samuel anoints Saul as King over Israel. God twice rejects Saul as King due to his disobedience - in chapters 13 and 14. Then the story shifts to the back-and-forth between the newly anointed King David and Saul, as Saul stubbornly seeks to hold on to power. That's chapters 16-31. Moving into 2 Samuel, the life of David - both the good and bad - takes center stage. The first 20 chapters of 2nd Samuel catalog the death of Saul, the establishment of Jerusalem as the capital, God's covenant with David, several battles, and the rebellions of Absalom—David's son - and Sheba, a Benjamite. Finally, in chapters 21-24 we have a series of events that draw the narrative to a close. These include the death of Saul's sons, multiple wars with the Philistines, David's last words, and his sin of taking a national census.

Beyond the history of 1st and 2nd Samuel, though, are some significant theological themes that we need to grasp if we're to understand the deepest purpose of Samuel's books. *What this narrative teaches us about God - not Samuel, not Saul, and not even David - is the main point of this text.*

That's significant, because when we read 1st and 2nd Samuel as just a collection of inspirational historical stories, *we miss the point.* For example, consider the account of David and Goliath in 1 Sam. 17. How many times have preachers and teachers used this story as some sort of promise that God will deliver us from the "giants in your life?" What you need to do, they often argue, is take the "stone of faith," and "the stone of prayer," and "the stone of Bible memorization" and conquer that GIANT in your life! Well, that's not what the story's about at all. And many of those promises just aren't true. They're not God's promises. Instead, this story is full of theological

meaning. It's about how the king that God chooses is the king who prevails – because in the context, God's favor has left Saul and is now resting on David. It's about how Israel's God is truly great, because Goliath expresses his disrespect for Yahweh – and that's why God defeats him. And this story is a significant chapter in the whole Bible's story about the Savior that is to come. *Because unlike the judges who cared only for themselves, David is a savior who acts because of his jealousy for the fame of God's name!* God is telling us that the Christ, like David, will save his people out of a commitment to God's glory. If we ignore themes like this and try to apply these books to our lives without putting them in the context of redemption history, we'll miss the point. And we may read into them promises that God never made. So, we'll spend the rest of this section considering two broad theological themes: kingship and rest.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

[SLIDE #6]

## I. Kingship

First, kingship. Though God is the true king of Israel, the central drama in 1st and 2nd Samuel is the people demanding a king like the other nations around them. Listen to what the people tell Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:19-20:

“No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations”

Samuel, Israel's leader, is angry. He doesn't want God to grant this request. But God tells him to give them what they want. “For they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them,” he says in 8:7. God called this people out from the nations as a light to the world. But they want to be just “like all the nations.” How often do we trade our esteemed place as God's people for the lowly trappings of the world? Before we rush to judge Israel here in 1st Samuel, it is good to consider our own treasonous tendency to reject God as our King.

This terrible trade of God's rule for the rule of man is typical of a pattern that we see throughout the books of Samuel. The people put their hope in an earthly leader... and that leader forsakes God's ways and leads them into sin.

To emphasize the harsh reality that a human leader could never be the people's ultimate hope, a pattern emerges throughout the books of Samuel. As one leader declines, God raises up another to take his place, who in turn soon declines. It's an “X” pattern, a historical/theological intersection. Of course, cycle after cycle, the leaders - even kings - never provide the perfect rule that

the people need. This pattern begins with Eli the priest and will continue through David. Eli's judgment and decline is recorded in the opening chapters of the book, and 3:19-20 gives us the rise of Samuel:

“And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord.”

But then Samuel raises sons who are corrupt. And so Saul becomes king. *Decline and rise*. Eli transitions to Samuel, who transitions to Saul, who transitions to David. Which begs the question, is kingship going to work? Well, the answer is “no.” At least not the way the people of Israel thought it would. The people of Israel thought the establishment of an earthly king would bring them the comfort and safety they sought, but it did not. The kings keep declining. Even David sins and falls short.

And so, to further emphasize Israel's need for a perfectly righteous king, God begins to deal with the people based on the faithfulness or faithlessness of their king. The king functions as a representative of the nation, especially when it comes to the covenant blessings and curses that God promised in Deuteronomy<sup>1</sup>. If the king is faithful, the people are blessed with prosperity and peace. If he sins and breaks faith with God, the people are cursed with famine and exile, just like God foretold through Moses. For example, listen to 2 Sam. 21:1: “Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the Lord. And the Lord said, ‘There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.’” *One king's disobedience affects the whole nation*.

But, far from being outside of the Lord's plan, these developments point to a future hope when God's people will be led by a perfect king. Israel's monarchy was rooted in sinful desires and a lack of faith. But God used this to underscore man's utter inability to provide for his own good. Which is the first piece of the gospel! These kings point us to Christ in two ways. The ways that they fail highlight the need for someone better. But the tremendous good that they do - especially David - is a picture of what a perfect King will be like. Why does the New Testament reference David more than any other Old Testament figure? Why does Revelation 22:16 remind us that Jesus is “The Root and Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star?” Because no one prefigures the perfect kingship of Jesus like David did. 1st and 2nd Samuel don't just chronicle Israel's early monarchy. They point to the ultimate monarch, Christ himself.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

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<sup>1</sup>See Deut. 27-28

## II. REST

Let's turn to our second theological theme: rest.

Though Israel has inhabited the Promised Land for quite some time at this point, that time of the Judges can hardly be called restful. Well, with the establishment of David's kingdom, Israel finally begins to enjoy some of this promised rest.

In 2 Samuel 5, David finally takes his rightful rule over all of Israel, and establishes Jerusalem as the capital. Then in chapter 6, the Ark of the Covenant is brought to Jerusalem. The Ark of the Covenant was a chest that was kept in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle - the mobile place of worship while Israel "wandered" outside of the Promised Land. It was the throne of God on earth. So in chapter 6 we see God's throne and David's throne occupying the same city, Jerusalem. This is big. After generations of wandering without a land and without a resting place, God is finally giving Israel a sense of permanence and is even causing his presence to rest with them.

It's in this context that the narrative of Samuel crescendos as God makes a glorious covenant with David in 2 Sam. 7. Let's start by reading verses 1-3:

Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you."

Notice in verse 1 that David and the people have "rest," and now David wants to build a "house" for Yahweh. That is, he wants to build a permanent temple for worship. But Yahweh sends his prophet back to David to deliver the message to him that it's not time to build a temple. Far from being angry at David, however, the Lord blesses him. Look at verse 10:

"I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more."

Up to this point, God is simply restating his promises to Abraham. But then he promises something far greater. Let's keep reading where we left off.

"Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."



Here Yahweh plays with the word “house.” The Hebrew word can be used in two ways, just like the English one. David wanted to build God a house, as in a place to live. But God says that he will build David a house - as in, a “dynasty.” That line of descendants that we’ve been following from Adam, through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, now passes through David, and will pass through his sons on the throne in Jerusalem. You can see why it’s an exciting moment in redemptive-history. It’s not just the dynasty that’s in view. That word “offspring” in verse 12 is singular, and so verse 13 is saying that in that dynasty there is *one* king whose kingdom will endure forever!

Now, verse 13 also says that this promised king will build a house for God’s name. How should we understand what’s going on here? Well, now may be a good time to talk about what we call “near and far fulfillment” of prophecy. Whenever a prophet would make a prediction about the distant future, there was often a “near,” incomplete fulfillment of that prophecy. But then a longer-term, more complete fulfillment.

So, long-term, one of David’s descendants will reign forever and ever. His “house” will never end. But, short-term, David’s immediate son will build a house, meaning the physical temple that David wanted to build. This “near” prophecy comes to pass in Solomon, David’s first son to reign after him. No, his kingdom doesn’t last forever. But this near fulfillment points forward to David’s greater son—Jesus.

All of this demonstrates God’s plan to provide perfect rest for his people. The establishment of David’s throne and of Jerusalem as the city of God finally allows Israel to end their displaced existence and to construct a settled life. The promise that one of David’s sons will build a temple for the Lord further underscores this notion of rest. It gives a sense of permanence as the mobile tabernacle is traded for a glorious, fixed place of worship. Most importantly, Yahweh’s covenant with David secures that his “house” of peace and justice will be established forever through the Messiah to come. This rest, the rest that comes from Christ, is our hope too!

Think about how great our rest in Jesus is. In Hebrews 1:3 we read, “[Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ...” When Jesus completes his work and fulfills the promises of God, he sits down beside the father in the rest of victory. The battle against sin, death, and Satan is over. This is the king who reigns forever. This is the son of David whose rule will never end. And it is this true rest. It is the rest of the one who has completed his mission to save God’s people. And it’s the rest we can enter into in part now, though faith in Christ. And fully one day when this world passes away and we enter that final Promised Land of Grace!

[Take Questions]

## Introduction to Job

For the last portion of today's class we are going to look at the book of Job. You may find yourself wondering... Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel... Job? Yes. Let me explain.

[SLIDE #7]

Take a look at the second handout you received when you walked in: "The Old Testament in Redemptive-Historical Order." You can see a thematic grouping of the books of the Old Testament, moving from the Creation of God's people in the Pentateuch to the establishment of God's people in the land, and the crowning of God's king that we just saw with Ruth and 1 and 2 Samuel. The next book in your bible, 1 Kings, begins the process of reversing all that with the disobedience of God's kings. That's a story told in Kings and annotated by the prophets. Then the exile, or the disestablishment of God's people, and finally the re-creation of God's people.

Now, in the middle, as the kingship is established, we have the wisdom and praise of God's king. Because if you think about it, the often-termed "wisdom literature" in the middle of your Bible is quite related to God's king. Many of the Psalms were written by David. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs are either credited to or closely related to David's son Solomon. These books were wisdom for ruling well as God's king - even more than they were intended for God's people.

And so we're going to take a break from Israel's *history of kings* to look at God's *wisdom for kings*.

Of course, ironically, as we get to Job you can kind of forget everything I just said. Because Job wasn't written by a king at all. So why are we studying Job now? Well . . . basically because it's wisdom literature and we're squeezing it in with the rest of the wisdom literature which does fit here. Job is timeless in its wisdom. *It seems to be set in the time of Abraham (or even before) based on how Job lives, how he measures wealth, and so forth.* But the use of the covenant term Yahweh for God by the narrator suggests that the story was compiled after the Exodus when God gave his people his covenant name. So it is a book we don't need to fit neatly into a chronology of outside events. It's interesting that when the characters themselves speak, they almost always use the generic term "God." But when the narrator speaks, he uses Yahweh, which you'll see in your bibles as "The Lord." So whoever compiled this knew a lot more about God than Job did.

[SLIDE #8]

So what is Job about? Most fundamentally, the book of Job is about asking some of life's most difficult questions.

Why do the righteous suffer in the same way as the unrighteous? The wicked seem to go unpunished, and many upright people suffer. How do we explain that? And, perhaps more importantly, how should the righteous conduct themselves when they suffer?

You can tell that two things are assumed here. (1) That God is sovereign, ordaining everything that comes to pass; and (2) that God is good, loving what is right and hating what is evil. The book of Job, much like the book of Ruth that we just saw and the book of Habakkuk that we'll get to in a few weeks, address the gap between what our circumstances seem to say about God and the reality in his Word of his goodness and sovereignty. When we look at life around us, it seems that either God isn't in control, or he doesn't actually care about what is good. *Job is about understanding how we can trust a good and sovereign God in the midst of unexplained suffering.*

**Notice I didn't say that Job explains why these things happen.** The book is useful in part because it explains why bad things happen to Job. But Job never finds that out. Instead, the book is about how we can trust a good and sovereign God despite the nature of our circumstances. Job is a book about trust. Not about perfect explanation. About amassing evidence so that we can take an intellectually honest leap of faith to trust God in difficult circumstances. Even when we will never find out this side of heaven why those circumstances came to pass.

So we can summarize the book of Job with a simple theme statement:

*God is completely sovereign over all the affairs of his universe, for his own glory. But often his motives, reasons, and goals behind what he does are not revealed to us. Yet we find in his character, and in our Redeemer, reason to trust in his care.*

This isn't some kind of New Testament systematic theology read into ancient literature. Instead, this is the message of Job. Job takes on mammoth issues. And it doesn't give us some simplistic, cliché answer. There is no one-to-one correspondence between evil and suffering, or between righteousness and reward, this side of heaven. Things are complicated and sticky. And Job's dealing with this is genuine and realistic. These issues need to be dealt with seriously, soberly, humbly, and reverently. But these issues *are* dealt with. There is real suffering in the book of Job. And wrongheaded attempts to answer the question of *why* God allows that suffering to happen. But finally, the voice of God who makes all things clear.

We're going to break down the book this morning into three big pieces. First, we'll observe that

*we often suffer. Next, that we sometimes understand. And last, that we can always trust.*<sup>2</sup>

So, we often suffer. We sometimes understand. But we can always trust. Let's get started.

[SLIDE #9]

## **We Often Suffer**

When we first meet Job, we see that he is a righteous man. Chapter 1, verse 1: "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil." not only was Job righteous, he was wealthy, verses 2 and 3. And wise, as we see in verse five. In all, as we see in verse three, Job was "the greatest of all the people of the East."

What is most well-known about Job, though, isn't all of this. It's what he loses. Eight verses chronicle his descent into utter ruin. First he loses his wealth, verse 13:

13 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 14 and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." 16 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." 17 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." 18 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 19 and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

On top of all this, Job loses his health. Chapter 2, verses 7. All of this, taken from Job in a moment.

Suffering is universal. Yet sometimes we Christians avoid admitting the doubt, fear, failing, anger,

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<sup>2</sup>The remainder of this class is taken almost entirely from Mark Dever's chapter on Job in "*The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made*"

or conflict that suffering can bring. We like our church services to be like motivational pep rallies. But if we want to have a realistic understanding about what it means to be a follower of the Crucified One, if we want to live in the real world, we should recognize that, although we may be able to psyche ourselves up for a little while with a rose-colored version of Christianity, we won't be able to convince many people around us. And we won't be dealing honestly with ourselves either. Job is a good example of someone who suffers, and deals honestly with his sufferings.

That's the first thing we see in this book: we often suffer.

[Take Questions]

## **We Only Sometimes Understand**

The second statement that summarizes Job's message to us: *we sometimes understand*. This is really what most of the book is about.

Let me give you a brief overview of the rest of the book. You'll see it outlined on page 6 of your handout.

At the end of chapter 2, three of Job's friends come to comfort him, and they sit with them in silence for a whole week. Very wise of them. Finally, in chapter 3, Job breaks the silence. He pours out his complaint.

Then chapters 4-41 - all but the last chapter - are a series of dialogues.

4-31 contain three cycles of dialogues between Job and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. In cycles one and two, Eliphaz speaks and Job responds. Then Bildad speaks and Job responds. Then Zophar speaks and Job responds. Really, each of the speakers makes the same point. Job's friends: suffering has happened because Job has sinned. Job: not so! I'm innocent! At the end of the third cycle, Job makes his final protest. He almost demands for God show up and explain his suffering.

Instead of God, we hear from a young man named Elihu, who appears in chapter 32 and speaks all the way to 37. Elihu says he has been listening for some time but hasn't said anything because he's younger and doesn't want to disrespect his elders. But Elihu's not happy with anyone. He believes there has been far too much navel-gazing and pointing at Job, and not enough looking to God. So he gives four monologues on the greatness of God's justice and mercy which are

beyond human understanding. He challenges Job to consider that his sufferings might in some way be the deliberate acts of a loving God. And he concludes, 37:23-24 by saying:

The Almighty - we cannot find him; he is great in power; justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate. Therefore men fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.

Finally, in chapter 38, God himself enters the discussion and criticizes those who have “darkened counsel” with “words without knowledge” (38:2). In one of the Bible’s most remarkable passages, God paints a picture for Job and the others of his unique and sovereign power. As he says at one point, “Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind?” (38:36). God looks at the natural world and considers the many things he has made, from seas to stars, from ostriches to oxen.

Then in chapter 40, God asks Job directly, “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.” (40:2).

To which Job’s response is simple: “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.” (40:4-5).

God replies,

8 Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? 9 Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? 10 “Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. 11 Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and abase him. (40:8-11)

In the remainder of chapters 40 and 41, God continues to instruct Job and the others about who he is: “Who then is he who can stand before me? Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.” (41:10b-11).

In chapter 42, the last chapter, Job makes his final confession:

I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (3:5-6)

The story ends here in chapter 42 with God telling Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar that they have been wrong. He says that what Job has said about God is true. (42:7) Then he blesses Job. There

are some interesting things God does not say, which we'll get to those in a moment. That's a summary of the book.

Now, back to a main theme running through these chapters: We Sometimes Understand.

Job's friends maintained that we can *always* understand why we suffer. Their arguments can basically be summarized this way: "Job, what's happened to you is really bad. You must have sinned in a most extraordinary way, because God is just. And though you deny having sinned, we know you must have. There can be no other explanation."

And every time Job basically responds, "Oh no, this can't be because of my sin." Not that he's never sinned, but that no great, hidden sin has marked his life that would have called for such calamity.

Job's friends keep coming back to the basic idea "You get what you deserve." Really, their response is like the response of Jesus' disciples in John 9. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (9:2). They were every bit as right as the disciples.

And we can sympathize with them. They wanted to know why this could have happened to their friend Job. They didn't deny the reality of the material world like a Christian Scientist or a Buddhist who says, in essence, "suffering isn't real." And they couldn't abandon their orthodoxy by rejecting God's justice or his sovereignty. So this is what they were left with. How can an innocent Job suffer in the world of a God who is both sovereign and just? Logically, something has to give - and Job's innocence would seem to be the first to go. Now, in our world people give up on all three of these pillars. Some deny the reality of suffering, as I just mentioned. Some think God is well-intentioned, but unable to protect us. Others deny his goodness or his justice. But only the religion of the Bible has the audacity to maintain that all four can be true. Suffering. God's absolute control. God's goodness. And yet also Job's innocence.

We all have similar tendencies. We all assume, at some level, the right to understand what God is doing through suffering. So when we ask the question "why" in suffering, we don't do it humbly. We do it angrily. How dare God do this to us since we've followed him so faithfully. Or despairingly. I guess my trust in God didn't work for me after all. But why do we expect this kind of knowledge?

That's the point of Job. Perhaps more than anything else, Job teaches us that we don't have all the facts. In a moment, we'll look at the interchange between God and Satan that answers why Job suffered. But Job never knew that, did he? And God never explains it to him. There's nothing like "Oh Job, I'm so sorry for these troubles you've been having. Let me tell you what happened.

Satan came along. And he said... and so I said... and then, you see..." No. Nothing like that. Job is left in the dark.

So... Job's friends didn't understand why Job suffered. Job didn't understand why he suffered. We understand, but only because God told us. So the book of Job isn't about understanding why evil happens. Rather, it is simply telling us that only *sometimes* we understand. Only sometimes.

So if we don't get what we want - what Job wanted - an explanation, how can we continue to live faithful lives? That brings us to our third point. Often we suffer. Sometimes we understand. But we always can trust.

[Take Questions]

## **We Can Always Trust**

Faith exists because understanding doesn't. If we insist on living only according to our own understanding and completely apart from trust, then we cannot be Christians. We need to know how to trust.

The good news is, we have a basis for that trust: God's power! In some of the most beautiful poetry you will ever read, the book of Job displays the power of God. The one we're called to trust. Like the other great Old Testament books that grapple with the problem of suffering, we never find an explanation. But we do understand more of who God is. And in that knowledge of our Lord, we find the evidence we need on which to base our trust. We see his creation of all things. We consider his power and his competency. We observe his Providence in caring for everything he has created, particularly his care for us. And we know he is the one who can be trusted.

As I said, Job never understands why he suffered. What he's given is knowledge about God. And Job trusted that God!

But we are so much more blessed, aren't we? Because God lets us peak behind the scenes so we can understand why Job suffered. That's the heavenly court scene in chapter one. Now, in that scene, Satan was wrong, you know. Satan accuses Job of serving God for his own selfish ends (1:9-11). He says that Job serves God because he's wealthy. God knows that Satan's wrong, but he allows Satan to take away Job's wealth. And guess what? With all his wealth gone, Job continues to worship God. Satan was wrong.

But Satan has never been one to be put off just because he was wrong. So he accuses Job of



servicing God only because his health remains. "Oh surely," Satan says, "you can take everything a man has, but if you touch his body, then you'll find out what he really cares about. Then he will curse you to your face." Again, God allows Satan to do what he asks, taking away Job's health. And guess what? Even as Job's body wastes away, he still worships God.

Job's changing circumstances reveal that, as wealthy as he is, Job's not worshipping God because of his wealth. As healthy as he is, Job's not worshipping God because of his health. The true worship of God does not depend on our circumstances. We can certainly give him thanks for good circumstances. *But true worship is a response to who God is, regardless of our circumstances.*

In fact, that brings us to one of the central ironies of this book. I hope you noticed it. Most of the book consists of Job's friends saying to him, "Hey Job, I know you look virtuous, but there must be some sin here." But they were so far wrong, someone could have said to them, "Eliphaz, Zophar, Bildad, this suffering might have come on you had you been more virtuous!" Job faced this suffering not because of his vices, but his virtue! That was why of all the things God could have bragged about before Satan, he chose Job.

What does this mean for us? It means we don't trust God because we are so clever or holy but because his character is trustworthy. That was the only basis for trust that Job was ever given. He never read Job chapter 1. He was only shown God's character. Essentially, God says, "Job: look out the window at the beauty of my creation. And let that be enough information about my goodness and power to enable you to trust me while I rip your world to pieces." And Job trusted!

Think of how much more we know about God's character than even Job! How much more evidence we have to trust God. Skip from his vantage point to ours. In the gospels, we read of the greatest injustice ever perpetrated in the history of the universe: the murder of the innocent son of God. And we see how God used it for the greatest of good ever conceived: his glory through the salvation of mankind from his sins. So statements about suffering in the New Testament can point back to this pivotal event. If God can use even this for the greatest good, how much more confidence do we have in his good purposes in our own suffering? "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)

The pattern set in Job is what we get throughout the Bible. How does suffering of God's people jive with his sovereignty and mercy? No explanation, but a call to trust. And yet through the centuries, compounding more and more evidence on which to base that trust, culminating in the suffering of Christ and his glory.

At times, God does graciously allow us to see how he has used a difficult situation for our good.

And surely we should thank him for the consolation such moments of understanding afford. But there is danger in assuming that he *must* give us such understanding. What will follow is a counterfeit trust, a trust in our own abilities to figure out all of God's purposes within any particular trial. Rather than trust in God and in his character as he has finally revealed it in Jesus Christ on the cross. The only one who is worthy of our trust is not ourselves; nor is it our own clever ability to figure out life's knotty questions; it is God himself. We can trust God because, as Job said, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth" (19:25). How would Job's Redeemer redeem? By living more righteously and perfectly than Job ever could, and by taking upon himself more suffering than Job ever knew. Job's patience amid suffering, you see, was finally meant to point to the genuinely perfect righteousness and wholly undeserved suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. Through his death on the cross and his resurrection on the third day, Christ would defeat the powers of sin and death. God promises to forgive everyone who repents of their sins and trusts in Christ. And they too, along with Job, will stand with their Redeemer in the end.

## Conclusion

I mentioned earlier the story of the disciples asking Jesus, regarding a blind man, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Apparently they were asking the wrong question: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3).

God intends to display his glory in your life and in the lives of everyone around you. You can be certain of this. Now, how he specifically intends to do this would take us into other books of the Bible. But within the context of Job, we can see very clearly that he intends to display his glory in the lives of his children as they continue to serve him amid life's trials. And if you are God's child, reconciled to him through Christ, realize that your very suffering can exquisitely display the glory of God as you serve and worship him in a way that defies the world's comprehension and abilities. If you, Christian, are presently enduring a season of suffering, it may be that God is sitting in heaven right now and saying to the heavenly host about him, "Have you considered my servant?" Could it be that one day you will watch as God shows to all creation the presently unrevealed glories of what he has done by making you in his image and then remaking you as his child?

We often suffer. We only sometimes understand. And by God's grace, we can always trust.

[SLIDE #10]

Let's pray.

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This material is adapted from a course with the same name developed by Capitol Hill Baptist Church. It has been modified for our purposes and has been condensed to fit our time schedule. The original version is available on their website at <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/old-testament-overview/>