

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

JOB

*Suffering is a mystery—
an invitation to explore and to listen.*

OVER 2.5 MILLION SOLD

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NAVPRESS 

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Job

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Objectives

Most guides in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies cover one book of the Bible. Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the books they explore, they share some common goals.

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to the book.
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides.
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need, so that your only other reference is the Bible.
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole.
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take 60 to 90 minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional questions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

Optional Application. Nearly all application questions are optional; we hope you will do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

For Thought and Discussion. Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles.

They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not give obvious answers. They are good for group discussions.

For Further Study. These include: (a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses, and (b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson, and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his or her own application questions.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you—a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

Overview and details

The study begins with an introduction to the book of Job. The key to interpretation is context—what is the whole passage or book *about*?—and the key to context is purpose—what is the author’s *aim* for the whole work? In lesson 1, you will lay the foundation for your study of Job by asking yourself, *Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did they want to accomplish? What is the book about?*

In lessons 2 through 13, you will analyze successive passages of Job in detail. You will cover the dialogue (3:1–37:24) topically rather than passage by passage because the debaters jump from point to point, and the thoughts are easier to follow if arranged by topic.

In lesson 13, you will review Job, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

Kinds of questions

Bible study on your own—without a structured guide—follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage *say*? Then you interpret: What does the passage *mean*? Lastly you apply: How does this truth *affect* my life?

Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clearcut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don’t let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passages as God’s Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, “Lord, what do You want me to see here?” “Father, why is this true?” “Lord, how does this apply to my life?”

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you to remember.

Study aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 123. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

Scripture versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. Other versions cited are the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the King James Version (KJV).

Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. A paraphrase such as *The Living Bible* is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

Memorizing and meditating

A psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you, and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it over to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return to your passage as often as you can during your day, for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

For group study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and businessmen’s studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later years any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You

will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called "For the group." These sections give advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each "For the group" at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

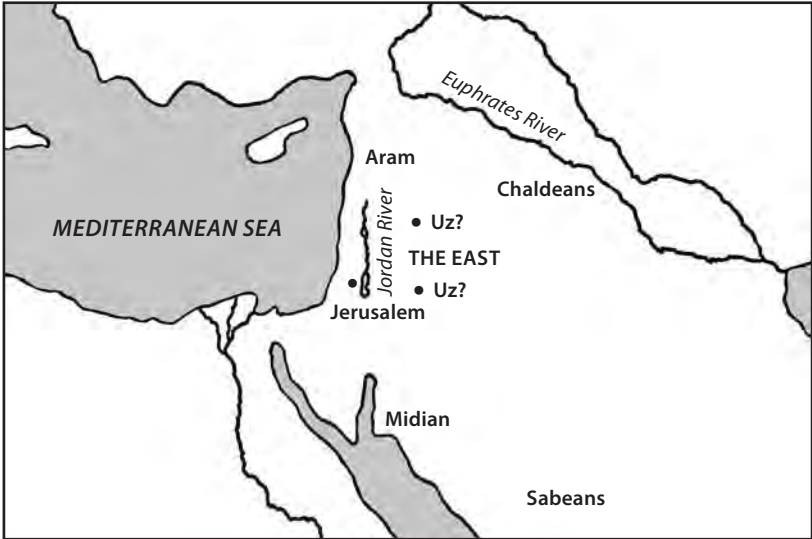
Notes taken during discussion will help you to remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board (pre-formed shower wallboard works well), so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Pages 125–126 list some good sources of counsel for leading group studies.

INTRODUCTION

Job and God

Map of the Near East



Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

(James 5:10-11)

“The patience of Job” is proverbial, but in fact Job wasn’t patient. The Greek word in James 5:11 praises Job’s perseverance, and that is what he was: loudly, emotionally, impatiently perseverant in the face of suffering that would drive

most people to despair. In one man's story, the relationship between man and God is explored profoundly.

The Story

The plot is simple: Job is a good man overwhelmed by sudden calamities. He doesn't know why; only the reader knows what is happening in heaven. Three friends visit Job to comfort him, and the four heatedly debate why Job has been so afflicted. Failing to persuade Job, the friends finally fall silent. Job still insists his suffering is unjust and demands redress from God. Then a young man named Elihu appears, claiming to have the ultimate answer for Job but adding few new insights. At last the Lord Himself appears. He asks Job a long series of questions. This response changes Job's attitude, and he repents of his rash words about God. In the end, the Lord rebukes Job's friends and praises Job, and He restores to Job double what he lost.

A simple plot, but in the course of it the author deals with such questions as:

What is God like? Is He really perfectly good, just, and sovereign as the Scriptures tell us?

What is man in God's eyes? Is he a worm or a prized work of art? An enemy, a friend, or a pawn?

What does God expect of man? What is "righteousness"? How should a person relate to God?

What is faith? Can a person doubt and question God, and still have faith?

Why do people suffer? Is suffering always punishment for sin? Does God let innocent people suffer, and if so, why?

Why do people obey God? Do they do it only to gain rewards and blessings? Would anyone keep worshipping God if there were no tangible benefits?

How can someone help a friend who is suffering? What are some of the right and wrong things to say?

Questions like these are as relevant now as they were three thousand years ago.

Difficulties

As relevant as it is, Job is not an easy book for modern readers. First of all, it is written mostly in poetry, and Hebrew poetry is different from what most of us are used to reading. Second, it is full of words that occur rarely or never in the rest of the Old Testament and phrases that baffle even experts. A quick comparison of several translations reveals that translators have often come to varied views of what a given verse means. Some versions, such as the Jerusalem

Bible and New English Bible, follow a theory that the only way to make sense of Job is to move verses around (putting 24:6 before 24:3, for instance). These difficulties don't mean that non-experts in Hebrew can't study Job; they mean only that we will get more out of the book if we do several things:

First, whenever possible, compare at least two translations. For example, the KJV, NASB, and RSV attempt to be literal, so they are often unintelligible when the original is obscure. The NIV and TEV try to be intelligible, so they often paraphrase or make an educated guess when rendering a difficult verse.

Second, know at least the basic rules of Hebrew poetry. The Study Skill on pages 39–40 deals with that.

Third, understand what *wisdom* is in Hebrew tradition. Job is a book about wisdom, as are Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. (We will discuss wisdom shortly.)

Fourth, pay attention to the *context*—the overall gist—of each verse. What are the whole passage, the whole chapter, and the whole book getting at? Remember that in the end, God rebukes Job's friends for their words—does this mean that what they say is always true, sometimes true, or always false? God praises Job—does this mean that what he says is always true, sometimes true, or always false? Passages from other books of Scripture can sometimes help us decide what is true and what is false. For practice in this kind of discernment, you might look at the following verses describing God. The first pair are Job's words, and the second are the words of one of his friends.

Job: "Even if I summoned him and he responded, I do not believe he would give me a hearing. He would crush me with a storm and multiply my wounds for no reason" (9:16-17).

"But he stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases" (23:13).

Eliphaz: "Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can even a strong man be more pure than his Maker?" (4:17).

"What pleasure would it give the Almighty if you were righteous? What would he gain if your ways were blameless?" (22:3).

Because translations of Job differ so much, we have given few explanations of individual verses. If you need more help, consult a commentary (see page 123 for some suggestions).

Wisdom

Basically, "Wisdom is the discipline of applying truth to one's life in the light of experience."¹ Wisdom is meant to be not theoretical and abstract but practical and personal. It should teach a person to live responsibly and successfully by learning from his own and elders' experience.

In most developed nations of the ancient Near East, there was a class of wise men and women devoted to gaining and teaching wisdom. In Israel, at

least by the time David became king (1010 BC), they became important as the teachers and counselors. A parent would send a child to a wisdom teacher, and the wise man or woman would act as parent to the pupil (in Proverbs, for instance, the teacher addresses “my child”). Of course, most parents taught their own children at home, but anyone with enough money wanted a proper wise man for his son.²

Wise men liked to arrive at truth and edify an audience by debating some principle for living. However, the contest was not like a modern debate, where the speakers try to find flaws in their opponents’ facts and logic and to support their own deductions. Instead, the winner of the ancient debate was the one with the most “brilliant rhetoric.”³ When you read the debate in Job 3–37, you might feel that the men jump from point to point, repeat themselves, ignore each other’s statements until chapters later, and generally talk past each other. However, the result is brilliant and moving poetry. This is the style of an ancient debate.

One of the basic tenets of wisdom was that God punishes the wicked and blesses the righteous. The wise came to regard this not as a general principle but as an absolute law. There was no such thing as an innocent person suffering. Therefore, everybody knew that the prosperous people in town were the godly ones, and the poor and afflicted were impious. This was justice, and because God was just, could He ever fail to obey this law? “No” was the firm response of the wise. But the author of Job, himself steeped in the wisdom tradition, had some radical views on this subject.

The structure of Job

At first glance in English, it looks as though most of Job is in poetry, except for a prologue and epilogue (see 1:1–2:13; 42:7–17) in prose. Recently, however, scholars have been realizing that Old Testament (and other ancient) writers often put narrative in prose and speeches in poetry. This is true throughout the book of Ruth, and so it is in Job. The speeches in the prologue and epilogue are in poetry just like the dialogue; what makes Job unique is that it is mostly speeches.⁴ Some understanding of Hebrew poetry is a great help in interpreting Job. If you are interested, read the box on pages 39–40.

Prologue–body–epilogue was a common ancient form because people liked balance. We also find that two tests of Job (see 1:6–2:10) balance two speeches by God (see 38:1–41:34); the dialogue runs in three cycles with introduction and conclusion (see 3:1–27:23); and Job’s summary counterweights Elihu’s (see 29:1–37:24). The outline on pages 14–15 reflects this analysis.

Author and date

Scholars always want to know who wrote a book and when. For Job we just don’t know. Some experts think the book went through several revisions before the current version with the Holy Spirit’s seal of authority was produced. Others think one person wrote it, perhaps over several decades.

Dates from the time of Moses to 200 BC have been proposed. Details in the prologue (where Job is his family's priest and his wealth is based on animals) suggest that Job lived in the age of the patriarchs (about 2500 to 1500 BC). Most scholars now date the writing of the book somewhere between Solomon's reign and the exile to Babylon (970–586 BC). Those were the years of wisdom's greatest glory in Israel, so a book that debates the true nature of wisdom seems natural at that time.

First impressions

Most LIFECHANGE studies guide you through a book chapter by chapter, but this one is different. The debate doesn't unfold each side's argument step-by-step; instead, the speakers repeat themselves, digress, respond to a point made five chapters earlier, and so on. Therefore, to help you get a clear overview of forty-two chapters in just thirteen lessons, we've organized the study topically. You'll examine what everyone says about God's power in one lesson and man's nature in another so you can draw your own conclusions on each subject. The prologue, the interlude in chapter 28, God's two speeches, and the epilogue each make sense on their own, so lessons 2, 10, 11, 12, and 13 deal with these.

Many questions list several references from Job so as to give you as full a view of the book as possible. If your time is limited, you can skip some references in each question. If you feel that the selected references are too restrictive and force you to certain conclusions, you can read larger passages and make up your own mind.

Because the study doesn't cover 3:1–27:23 and 29:1–37:24 chapter by chapter, you should read as much of the book as possible before beginning lesson 2. Read at least chapters 1 through 6 and 38 through 42, and leaf through the rest of the book with the outline on pages 14–15 as a guide. If you take even an hour to skim the book and see what goes on in each chapter, you'll find it much easier later to organize and remember what you learn. Also, you'll get a taste of the poetry of Job, which is grand even in translation. It brings alive what can be just an old dry adage:

*The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom,
and to shun evil is understanding. (Job 28:28)*

As you read, jot here your first impressions of the book, questions you'd like answered as you study more deeply, how the story makes you feel, and so on.

II. Dialogue Between Job and His Friends (3:1–27:23)

- A. Job's lamentation (3:1-26)
- B. First round of speeches (4:1–14:22)
 - 1. Eliphaz (4:1–5:27)
 - 2. Job (6:1–7:21)
 - 3. Bildad (8:1-22)
 - 4. Job (9:1–10:22)
 - 5. Zophar (11:1-20)
 - 6. Job (12:1–14:22)
- C. Second round of speeches (15:1–21:34)
 - 1. Eliphaz (15:1-35)
 - 2. Job (16:1–17:16)
 - 3. Bildad (18:1-21)
 - 4. Job (19:1-29)
 - 5. Zophar (20:1-29)
 - 6. Job (21:1-34)
- D. Third round of speeches (22:1–26:14)
 - 1. Eliphaz (22:1-30)
 - 2. Job (23:1–24:25)
 - 3. Bildad (25:1-6)
 - 4. Job (26:1-14)
- E. Job's conclusion (27:1-23)

III. Interlude on Wisdom (28:1-28)

IV. Monologues: Job and Elihu (29:1–37:24)

- A. Job summarizes his case (29:1–31:40)
 - 1. Job's past honor and blessing (29:1-25)
 - 2. Job's present humiliation and suffering (30:1-31)
 - 3. Job's ultimate appeal and oath (31:1-40)
- B. Elihu states the human verdict (32:1–37:24)
 - 1. Introduction (32:1-5)
 - 2. Elihu's first speech (32:6–33:33)
 - 3. Elihu's second speech (34:1-37)
 - 4. Elihu's third speech (35:1-16)
 - 5. Elihu's fourth speech (36:1–37:24)

V. The Lord and Job (38:1–42:6)

- A. First round (38:1–40:5)
 - 1. The Lord (38:1–40:2)
 - 2. Job (40:3-5)
- B. Second round (40:6–42:6)
 - 1. The Lord (40:6–41:34)
 - 2. Job (42:1-6)

VI. Epilogue: The Outcome of the Test (42:7-17)

- A. The Lord states the divine verdict (42:7-9)
- B. Job restored (42:10-17)

For the group

This “For the group” section and the ones in later lessons are intended to suggest ways of structuring your discussions. Feel free to select what suits your group. The main goals of this lesson are to get to know the book of Job as a whole and the people with whom you are going to study it.

Worship. Some groups like to begin with prayer and/or singing. Some share requests for prayer at the beginning but leave the actual prayer until after the study. Others prefer just to chat and have refreshments for a while, then open the study with a brief prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance and leave worship and prayer until the end.

Warm-up. The beginning of a new study is a good time to lay a foundation for honest sharing of ideas, to get comfortable with each other, and to encourage a sense of common purpose. One way to establish common ground is to talk about what each person hopes to get out of your study of Job and out of any prayer, singing, sharing, outreach, or anything else you might do together. You can also share what you hope to give as well as get. If you have someone write down each member’s hopes and expectations, then you can look back at these goals later to see if they are being met. Goal setting at the beginning can also help you avoid confusion when one person thinks the main point of the group is to learn the Scripture, while another thinks it is to support each other in daily Christian life, and another thinks prayer or outreach is the chief business.

Introduction. Ideally, everyone should have read the whole book of Job before you meet together. However, probably few people will have done this because Job is long and difficult for those who don’t often read poetry. Therefore, the introduction is meant to give you some basic background to make studying the book easier. To make sure everyone begins lesson 2 understanding the introduction, ask some questions about it, such as these:

- What is the plot of Job? (Have someone tell the story briefly.)
- What kinds of questions do the characters discuss in the dialogue? (You might discuss which of the questions are most interesting to group members. This information may help you guide the discussion later.)
- What is wisdom? How is the book of Job part of the wisdom tradition?
- How is the dialogue in Job different from a modern debate?
- When you read chapters 1 through 6 and 38 through 42, what first impressions, questions, and so on did you come up with? (Someone in the group should write the questions down so the whole group can keep them in mind during future sessions.)
- Did anyone read about Hebrew poetry on pages 39–40? What are the main things we should understand about it before we start studying Job?
- Is everything Job says true? Is everything he says false? How can you tell? Why is this important to remember?

How to Use This Study. Advise group members to read the “How to Use This Study” section on pages 5–8 if they have not already done so. You might go over important points that you think the group should especially notice. For example, point out the optional questions in the margins. These are available as group discussion questions, ideas for application, and suggestions for further study. It is unlikely that anyone will have the time or desire to answer all the optional questions and do all the applications. A person might do one “Optional Application” for any given lesson. You might choose one or two “For Thought and Discussion” questions for your group discussion, or you might spend all your time on the numbered questions. If someone wants to write answers to the optional questions, suggest that he use the margins or a separate notebook. It will also be helpful for discussion notes, prayer requests, answers to prayers, application plans, and so on. State clearly from the beginning how much time you expect group members to commit both for preparation and group meetings. Agree to be faithful about starting and ending meetings on time unless the group agrees to do otherwise.

Invite everyone to ask questions about the introduction or the “How to Use This Study” section.

Wrap-up. The group leader should have read through lesson 2 and its “For the group” section so that he or she can briefly tell the group what to expect in the lesson. Whet everyone’s appetite by asking the group to think about any optional questions that you plan to discuss. For example, if you want the group to focus on what God does in 1:1–2:13 and why, you might suggest that members think about the “For Thought and Discussion” questions that deal with that issue.

Worship. Many groups like to end with singing and/or prayer. This can include songs or prayers that respond to what you’ve learned in Bible study, or prayers for specific needs of group members. Some people are shy about sharing personal needs or praying aloud in groups, especially before they know the other people well. If this is true of your group, then a song and/or some silent prayer and a short closing prayer spoken by the leader might be an appropriate ending.

1. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 187.
2. Fee and Stuart, 189–190.
3. Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 28.
4. Andersen, 36, 45.
5. This outline is adapted from Andersen, 75–76.