

The Eye of the Storm

Job



**6 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS**

The Eye of the Storm

Job

by Bryson Smith

Contents

The Eye of the Storm
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	How to make the most of these studies.....	5
1	Good times, bad times.....	9
2	Life is never that simple.....	17
3	Why me, God?	25
4	A word about wisdom	31
5	“Brace yourself...”	39
6	Faith, mystery and the meaning of life	47
	Tips for leaders	55

How to make the most of these studies

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

These ‘interactive’ Bible studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. The studies will take you through the book of Job, pointing out things along the way, filling in background details, and suggesting avenues for further exploration. But there is also time for you to do some sight-seeing of your own—to wander off, have a good look for yourself, and form your own conclusions.

In other words, we have designed these studies to fall half-way between a sermon and a set of unadorned Bible study questions. We want to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do a lot of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

Each study contains sections of text to introduce, summarize, suggest and provoke. We’ve left plenty of room in the margins for you to jot comments and questions as you read. Interspersed throughout the text are three types of ‘interaction’, each with their own symbol:



Investigate

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



Think it through

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries and write down your own thoughts and reactions.

When you come to one of these symbols, you'll know that it's time to do some work of your own.

3. Suggestions for Individual Study

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in Job and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it. You may be spurred to pray again at the end of the study.
- Work through the study, following the directions as you go. Write in the spaces provided.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the *Think it through* sections. It is important to think about the sections of text (rather than just accepting them as true) and to ponder the implications for your life. Writing these things down is a very valuable way to get your thoughts working.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you've learnt.

4. Suggestions for Group Study

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and threesomes. Get together with a friend/s and work through them at your own

pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don't need the formal structure of a 'group' to gain maximum benefit.

- It is *vital* that group members work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how side-tracked you get!), but only if all the members have done the work and are familiar with the material.
- **Spend most of the group time discussing the 'interactive' sections—*Investigate* and *Think it Through*.** Reading all the text together will take too long and should be unnecessary if the group members have done their preparation. You may wish to underline and read aloud particular paragraphs or sections of text that you think are important.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining important sections of text to emphasize, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of Job not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you. (Additional tips for group leaders can be found in 'Tips for Leaders' on page 55.)

1

Job 1-2

Good times, bad times

Workers dropped a crate containing a 75 million-year-old dinosaur skeleton outside a museum in the The Hague, Netherlands, breaking it into 188 pieces. “The two Canadian scientists who had spent two years gluing together the skeleton had tears in their eyes”, a spokesman told a *De Telegraph* reporter.

The Bulletin, October 7, 1997.

Most of us know what it’s like to have one of *those* days. A day where nothing goes right and everything goes wrong. Sometimes those sorts of days are nothing more than a nuisance, and given time we can think back and laugh. Sometimes those days are far more tragic. The day the biopsy test comes back positive. The day the knock at the door is the police to tell you about a fatal accident. The day you discover a terrible secret within a relationship. These are days which can be the start of unimaginable grieving and suffering.

The Old Testament book of *Job* takes us into the life of a man who virtually loses everything in a single day. Job’s possessions, livelihood, children and health are all ripped away in tragic circumstances. And Job is crippled by mind-numbing anguish.

On one level, therefore, the book of *Job* is all about suffering. It offers certain insights into why bad things happen. However, it is important to note from the outset that this is *not* the main focus of the book. As we’ll discover, *Job* isn’t really about *why* suffering happens. It’s more about how we should act towards God *when* suffering happens.

In this respect, *Job* is much more practical than it is theoretical. It’s a bit like a first aid manual. A first aid manual doesn’t really go into great detail about all the different reasons why you might

break your arm. It's more interested in explaining how to act when your arm is broken. That's like *Job*. It doesn't give us an exhaustive catalogue of reasons as to *why* suffering happens. It's more concerned to explain how to act towards God *when* suffering happens.

Job is a book about whether God is worth following even when we are suffering. It's about whether God is worth trusting even when he seems to be making our life a misery.

But first things first. Let's meet the man Job and discover a bit about him.



Investigate

Read Job 1:1-5.

1. What are Job's physical circumstances like?
2. What is Job's character like?
3. Read Proverbs 3:1-8. According to the Proverbs, how are a person's wealth and blamelessness linked?

Job the man

In these opening verses, we are left in no doubt that Job is a godly man. We especially see it in the way that Job is concerned not just for his own relationship with God, but also for his family. He even makes sacrifices just in case his children have done something silly (Job 1:5). This man is a model of loving concern. He is presented as the perfect example of a godly, wise man.

Job is also astronomically wealthy. He owned 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen and 500 donkeys. Job is the Bill Gates of ancient Edom.

All of this is exactly what we would expect from the Proverbs. As we've discovered in the above questions, *Proverbs* predicts that if you "fear the Lord and shun evil" you will be healthy, wealthy and wise. Job feared the Lord and shunned evil, and he was wealthy, healthy and wise. So far everything fits perfectly. Everything is as it should be. Everything is as we would want it. A good man enjoying a good life.

But all that is about to change. Some bad things are about to happen to this good man.



Investigate

Read Job 1:6-22.

1. What is Satan's accusation against Job?
2. How does God respond?

3. What do we learn about God and Satan in these verses?

4. What does Satan cause to happen to Job? What different types of events does Satan use to bring suffering to Job?

5. How does Job respond?

Job's first test

In the space of a few minutes, Job loses everything. His wealth, his oxen, his sheep, his camels, his servants, his precious children whom he worried over so much; they are all gone. Ripped away from him by both natural disasters and human violence.

The reason for Job's suffering is revealed to us, the readers, if not to Job. Satan has come before God and questioned Job's righteousness. Satan argues that Job only follows God for what Job can get out of it. According to Satan, Job is not really interested in God at all. Job just likes the gifts that God gives, and so if the gifts suddenly disappear, he will curse God.

In one sense, it is a slur against Job's character, but it is also a

slur against God. Satan is suggesting that God can only win friends for himself by giving them things. He is suggesting that God has to buy followers with bribes and prizes.

The story progresses with God accepting Satan's challenge, and it would seem by the end of chapter 1 that Satan has been proved wrong. After losing his prosperity and family, Job does not do what Satan predicted. Just the opposite—rather than curse God, Job praises him.

Satan, however, remains unconvinced.



Investigate

Read Job 2.

1. In this chapter, what further things do we discover about God, Satan and Job?

a. God

b. Satan

c. Job

2. To what extent does Job understand why he is suffering?

Job's second test

By the end of chapter 2, Job has gone from prosperity to poverty, from great comfort to crippling pain, from being the greatest man among all the people of the East to sitting on a rubbish tip scratching his scabs with a broken piece of pottery.

In all this, it is crucial to notice that Job has not been privy to the discussion between Satan and God. Job knows nothing about what has happened in heaven. Job only knows suffering. Indeed, much of the remainder of the book is taken up with Job arguing with his friends and struggling with God over why these terrible things have happened to him.

For the reader though, the issue is slightly different. Unlike Job, we do know why he is suffering. We are told in the first eleven verses! Job is suffering as a test of his righteousness. For us, the readers, the real tension of the book is whether or not Job will remain faithful. Will Job's despair cause him to curse God? Will Satan be proved right?

In the studies which follow we will discover how Job handles his sufferings. As we do so, the question which will pop up time and time again is: How should *we* respond to God when bad things happen to us and we don't understand why?



Think it through

1. When we suffer, do you think it is usually for the same reasons as Job?

2. Satan accuses Job of being more interested in God's gifts than God himself. To what extent could this be true for you? What are some ways that we could ensure we don't fall into that trap?

3. In what ways is God's sovereignty revealed in these opening chapters?

4. When is it hard to believe that God is in control?

5. When we are suffering, how can it be comforting to remember that God is in control?