

# PSALMS AND WISDOM

Session 4

## The Suffering of Job

### FOCUS

The first wisdom book to appear chronologically in the Bible is *Job*. His story helps us confront unfairness we find in the world. Students should be able to tell the story of Job and discuss his relationship with God.

### GETTING READY

The story of Job has been a source of comfort for countless generations of suffering believers who question the justice of a loving God. Some scholars maintain that Job's tale was a response to a crisis in Israel's wisdom movement: Blessings do not always come to the righteous even when they follow wisdom's teachings.

Ancient Israel's wisdom movement lifted the original plot of Job from a Babylonian story about their chief god Marduk, who allowed one of his heavenly adversaries to inflict suffering on an innocent man, resulting in unnecessary suffering and property loss. The god is put on trial and questioned by the innocent sufferer.

The same fate befalls righteous Job when God allows the Adversary (the proper name "Satan" does not enter Israel's vocabulary until later) to remove Job's property, family, and health. His friends attempt to explain the mystery of undeserved pain by applying traditional Old Testament ideas that Job cannot accept, alerting the reader that wisdom's traditions do not offer easy solutions.

Job responds by putting God on trial. His speeches are painful examples of traditional Israelite laments laced with anger and frustration. With an attorney's dogged perseverance, Job asks what kind of God allows the righteous to suffer unfairly.

In the end, the story tells us that God can not be put on trial. An exhausted Job finally understands that God is not judged by the same standards that apply to human beings. Job is right to be outraged, but even the most righteous human being cannot fathom the depths of God's own standards because they have not been revealed. Job's questions remain unresolved, as do ours. God restores his fortunes, punishes the friends, and Job gains a new vision of God.

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Proper 29

*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 236

### TEACHING TIP

Intermediate-age students are aware of suffering in the world from first-hand experience or through the media. They are beginning to ask questions such as, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" This is a question that has no easy answer. Assure them of God's promise to always be with us in

whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Emphasize both God's love and God's unending power of forgiveness.

## GATHERING

Display Poster No. 4 from the Teacher's Packet, a depiction of Job with his friends. On a piece of newsprint or on a chalkboard, write the word "Job" on one side and "Friends" on the other.

As class members arrive, ask them to look at the poster. Tell them it is a picture of a man who is ill with his friends. Invite them to add their names under the heading "Job" and list the names of one to three of their closest friends under the heading "Friends."

When everyone is present, the teacher says:

Let us pray. (Use Proper 29, above, or a prayer of your own choosing.)

The chosen student lector leads in a reading from the wisdom book of *Job*.

*A Reading from the Book of Job, chapter 19, verses 25 through 27.*

For I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;  
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,  
then in my flesh I shall see God,  
whom I shall see on my side,  
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.  
My heart faints within me!

## INTRODUCING THE STORY (*Time: 10-20 minutes*)

Tell the story of Job in your own words (see Getting Ready). You may want to refer to the article on page 1 of the student newspaper, **Church Times** (Unit I, Issue 4), for ideas. Include the basic story of how the Adversary is allowed to take everything from Job, a righteous and good man. Job lost his property, his children, his home, and his health.

Alone and in poverty, Job is joined by three friends who come to console him. For seven days and nights they sit with him without speaking, sharing his suffering. Then they lecture him about why he has met such sorrow, drawing on their opinions about divine justice.

One notes that God treats the just justly, while punishing the unjust. Therefore, Job must accept his suffering as God's judgment. Job answers that he has done all that a righteous person should do.

Another says that Job is suffering from the sins of his children. But Job had earlier offered sacrifices in case his children had sinned. The third says that Job is being punished for his guilt.

In exasperation, Job calls for an audience with God. He finally understands that even the most righteous human beings cannot fathom the depths of God. In a possible addition to the *Book of Job*, God restores Job's fortunes.

Refer back to the Gathering exercise. Ask: Have your friends ever comforted you when you were down? How did they do that? Did they always say the right thing? Have you ever been in a situation where you could help a friend?

Invite the students to reread the scripture passage, *Job 19:25-27*. Compare it to the middle paragraph of the opening of the Burial II service in *The Book of Common Prayer*. How are they similar? Who do you think the “Redeemer” is?

## EXPLORING (Time: 15-20 minutes)

### Option 1. Rap Song

Point out to the students that most of the *Book of Job* is written in the form of poetry (see the article on page 2 of *Church Times*). Invite them to write their own rap song of the story of Job, using the names of the three friends.

On a chalkboard, write the names of the friends next to their advice to Job.

**Eliphaz the Temanite:** suffering is the punishment of God (*Job 4:8-9*)

**Bildad the Shuhite:** Job suffers for the sin of his children (*Job 8:4-6*)

**Zophar the Naamathite:** Job is punished for his guilt (*Job 11:5-6*)

Encourage the students to read some of the verses in Job for ideas. Point out imagery that you find interesting and encourage them to find others. Be ready to help them pronounce the names. If the group is large, divide into three smaller groups and assign each a name.

When the rap song has been written, perform it with percussion instruments or clap along with the beat. You may wish to share your song with another group in the church.

### Option 2. God in the Whirlwind

After Job repeatedly asks God to give Job an audience, God appears as a voice in a whirlwind. The poet of the *Book of Job* chose this image to illustrate the mystery and majesty of God.

Invite the students to put themselves in the poet's place. How would they depict God's meeting with Job? Pass out paper, pencils, markers, and crayons. Ask the class members to illustrate their answers to that question in a drawing or through poetry. After everyone is finished, invite those who feel comfortable doing so to share their work. Talk about God's love for each person and how God is always near to help us.

### Option 3. Word Puzzle

Turn in the student newspaper, *Church Times*, Unit I, Issue 4, to the word puzzle titled “Job and His Friends.” Students may work individually, in pairs, or as a total group.

## MUSIC (Time: 10 minutes)

Introduce “O God, our help in ages past” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 680) by reading it or listening to the *Children Sing!* tape. Point out that this hymn is based on *Psalms 90:1-5*. Suggest that the students compare the hymn's stanzas to the psalm's verses. Then call their attention to *Psalms 90:12*. This is an example of “wisdom” writing (like *Job*). You may want to divide the class members into two groups so that they can sing the phrases of the hymn in an alternating pattern.

## CONNECTING/SPEAKING OUT *(Time: 15-20 minutes)*

### **Option 1. Group Discussion**

Talk about friends helping friends. Ask class members if they can describe a situation they have observed or may have seen on television about friends helping each other in a difficult situation.

As one student tells a story, ask the others to listen for answers to these questions:

What was the problem?

Did the person in trouble ask for help?

Did the friend respond without being asked?

Did the friend always know what to say or do?

How did the person in trouble know whether the friends gave good advice?

What was the outcome?

You may want to keep a tally of the answers at the end of each story. Then, as a group, go back over the questions. Figure out answers that would be most helpful in most situations. Compare your answers to the advice Job's friends gave him. Were they helpful at all?

### **Option 2. Current Events**

If possible, bring in pictures of people who are homeless or who have lost all they owned as a result of a natural disaster. Or, ask students to describe pictures they have seen in the media or from personal experience.

Ask: How are these people like Job? How do you feel about them? Do they make you feel uncomfortable? If you were their friend, what could you say or do to comfort them? Where is God in these pictures?

During the time of intercession at the dismissal, mention the places and people the group discussed during this exercise.

## REFLECTING *(Time: 10 minutes)*

Either orally or in writing, share the following possibilities for the students' personal reflections:

Imagine that your friend's home has just been destroyed by a fire. Your friend was not harmed, but a younger sibling is in the hospital. You see your friend sitting alone in the lunchroom looking sad. You are having a good time with others when you see your friend.

What would you do? What would you say to your friend? What words of comfort could you share?

Put down your thoughts by drawing or by writing a dialogue that might occur between you and your friend. Include a prayer.

If the students have prepared envelopes labeled "Psalms and Wisdom" (see Session 1), add the sheets from this session. Envelopes may be started at any time during the Unit.

## LEARNING SKILLS *(Time: 10-15 minutes)*

### **Option 1. Class Memory Challenge**

Note aloud that the Venite in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 82, is from a psalm of praise (*Psalms 95:1-7*). Review the portion memorized thus far. Then invite the students to form mental pictures of “hills” and “caverns” they may have seen or read about. Take time to allow individuals to share descriptions.

Introduce this portion of the second stanza: “In his hands are the caverns of the earth, and the heights of the hills are his also.” Repeat in unison three times, then say together the entire memorized text. Refer to the printed passage in the student newspaper, *Church Times*, Unit I, Issue 4.

### **Option 2. Learning Scripture**

Provide time for any students who have memorized verses suggested in previous sessions to recite these, either individually or in unison. (Be sure to include the psalm and verse numbers.) Add small Stars of David to verse cards attached to the ribbon markers of the simulated book, “Psalms and Wisdom,” as described in Session 1.

Remind the class members that any verse cited during this Unit may be memorized at any time. The complete list of passages for the Unit appears in the student newspaper, *Church Times*.

Invite students to learn one or both of the following before the next class session: *Psalms 148:13* or *Psalms 150:6*.

### **ONGOING PROJECT** (*Time: 5-10 minutes*)

Move on to Panel 4 of this project, titled “Psalms and Wisdom.” The theme is the passage, “I know that my Redeemer lives.” Label the panel, “God’s Love in Times of Sorrow.”

Supply crayons, markers, and pens. Suggest that the students devise creative ways to add selected lines from the *Book of Job* or the Prayer Book, p. 491.

Some class members may prefer to draw illustrations showing their images of God’s voice in the whirlwind (see Exploring, above).

### **SYMBOL CARD and TREASUREBOOK**

Card 4 contains a sparrow on a housetop, a verse of Scripture, and an explanation on the back.

Invite the student to explore the Cross Year Treasurebook, Part I, Section 8. What is wisdom literature? What does the writer of *Job* conclude?

### **GOING FORTH**

Gather the group for the dismissal. The teacher or a student will say:

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of him.

Pray that they may find and be found by him.

*Silence*

[Learners may add their petitions.]

Praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ has been honored especially those whom we remember today.

Pray that we may have grace to glorify Christ in our own day.

From The Prayers of the People

*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 386

Teacher: Let us go forth in the name of Christ.

Students: Thanks be to God.

## TEACHER'S ASSESSMENT

From your observations, are the class members able to state that God is with us at all times, even in the hard times? Did they seem to relate to the story of Job and his friends? Can they name at least one way they could be a better friend?

## LOOKING AHEAD

The next session is about the sayings in *Proverbs* that describe how to live the good life—the life that God approves. Consider words from scripture or other places that have inspired you to live responsibly. Why do these passages have meaning for you?