

## Pandemic: *Interruption or Intervention?*

A Look Back to God's Word and Ahead to Where He is Taking us From Here!

### ALL NEW Paragraph Bible Study on the Book of Job

**Send out by e-mail or postcard to reach every member with hope and help from the Lord.**

WEEK ONE: Job 1: The Covid 19 Pandemic has interrupted many lives. In this study, we will see that the life of God's servant Job was also interrupted. People lost their livelihood in the Pandemic. Job lost thousands of animals and all of his beloved children. So, the Pandemic and Job have much in common. Yet, it is only as we hear the main character in this story, God, speaking that we will learn what the Pandemic can teach us about our own suffering. The theologies of Job and his friends have flaws. God will straighten them out in the end. But first, we need to get to know Job. In Job 1:8, God tells Satan there is none like Job on earth, a blameless man who turns away from evil. In Ezekiel 14:14, 20, Job is given a place of honor beside Noah and Daniel. James 5:11 honors Job's steadfastness. Such a man of God like Job cannot be moved, *or can he? Can we be moved? What will move us?* In Job 1:21, when God allowed Satan to take everything way from Job except his life and wife, Job blessed God **How many of us have praised God for the Pandemic?** These are the questions the Book of Job will help us ask, and that God Himself, through His Word, will help us answer. In the end, each of us will answer the question of whether the Pandemic has been one of life's interruptions or God's intervention in our own faith and lives.

WEEK TWO: Job 2-3: To Satan's dismay, after having lost what was dear to him outside of his body, Job blessed God (Job 1:21). Satan tried harder to make Job fall, and God allowed it. Job's body was covered with painful sores (Job 2:4-7). Still, Job refused to sin and curse God (Job 2:9-10). His friends came and could hardly recognize Job (Job 2:12). They sat with him for seven days and seven nights, the required period for mourning at that time. Then, Job, God's faithful servant, cursed, not God, but the day he was born (Job 3). This side of Job - the "I can't take it anymore" side - is easier to relate to as we face troubles in our lives. Satan could not take Job's life (Job 2:6), and if you are reading this, your life has also been spared. But, *spared for what? What is God trying to tell us - tell you? What can we learn from the Pandemic for our own suffering and life? Has it been just one of life's interruptions or is it God's intervention in our life?* The Book of Job holds these answers as we first hear Job talking with his three friends and, finally, hear God speaking to Job and to us. For now, what we need to remember is that Satan cannot harm Job or us without God providing a way of escape, so we can endure (1 Corinthians 10:13). This is good news for us as we suffer through a pandemic that just doesn't seem to have an end and so need the Lord to help us.

WEEK THREE: Job 4-7: As if losing his animals and children and having his body covered in boils wasn't enough, in the Book of Job, chapters 4-26, Job's friends accuse him of doing something to cause his own suffering. His first friend, Eliphaz, tried to comfort Job, but only added to his misery by telling him not to despise the discipline of the Almighty (Job 5:17). Job did not know God was testing him. He only knew he needed his friends to understand that he was suffering, and comfort him. Today, some see the Pandemic as punishment. While God does discipline and test us, the pandemic is not God's punishment or Christ would have died in vain. As sinners we certainly deserve God's punishment, but Christ took our punishment on Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13). Job's story is about God extending His grace to the suffering, and this study is a lesson in understanding suffering, making it through suffering, and even helping others through their suffering. As we bear with one another (Galatians 6:2) and carry each other's burdens (Colossians 3:23) we can lead others to Christ, and certainly our sufferings can be diminished as we look to the needs of others and as others look to our needs. However, this study of God's Word in the Book of Job helps us look past all the suffering to see and understand what God does out of great love for us and to save all people.

WEEK FOUR: Job 8-10: Because his pain was immense and no one seemed to understand it, Job moved into hopelessness and cried to God, “Leave me alone” (Job 7:16), translated “Just let me die!” Today we would call this depression. To make matters worse, Job’s friend, Bilidad, though well-intentioned, was cruel to say the death of Job’s children was proof they had sinned and deserved death. (Job 8:4). Because Job knew he and all sinners deserve death, he despairingly believed there was nothing he could do to get out of the mess his life was in. And he was absolutely correct. But lest we forget, God desires all sinners to realize there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. So, God had Job exactly where he needed to be. The Pandemic has bred hopelessness like Job’s. *BUT, are things hopeless enough for people to return or turn to the Lord?* We’ll save this discussion for later. For now, we must understand that hopelessness is never God’s purpose. It is Satan’s purpose. God’s purpose is always and only to give hope through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. God’s desire is for us to *in confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* Hebrews 4:16. **Does this mean suffering can actually be God’s intervention?** It can be, if it turns people to the Lord, and this thankfully even includes the suffering we bring upon ourselves.

WEEK FIVE: Job 11-14: In perhaps the weakest point of Job’s life and faith, along comes Zophar, Job’s third friend, vehemently believing that Job does not think he is a sinner (Job 11:4) and calls for Job to prepare his heart to put away iniquity (Job 11:13-14). Job’s reply to Zophar is the longest. It covers three chapters showing us that Job’s concept of God is bigger and more awesome than that of his friends. He replies, “With God are wisdom and might. If God tears down, none can rebuild, etc. (Job 12:13-25). Job’s reply ends the first round of discussions with his three friends. Although Job does not mention it, his words show and we know that for those who love God, He works all things out for good (Romans 8:28). Still, on bad days like Job is having in this story, we may miss things like the good God has worked through the Pandemic; people turning to the Lord for help, people helping other people, etc. In the coming weeks, we will look at how God works good through suffering. For now, we need to hear Job declaring to his friends that even if God would slay him, Job would hope in Him (Job 13:15) because his absolute confidence assures us that even in our darkest hours our hope can remain in the Lord. And as we proclaim our hope in the Lord and share the good God has done to help us, people around us may turn and return to Him. **Could the people who come to Him as we share how He has helped us in our suffering be the purpose of God’s intervention?** If it is, our suffering has the greatest purpose of all!

WEEK SIX: Job 15-17: Eliphaz opens the second round of discussion with Job’s friends. He believes that Job, because he maintains his innocence, thinks too highly of himself and his own wisdom. We know Job is no stranger to seeking forgiveness. He even sacrificed for his children just in case they sinned (Job 1:5). Job’s misery increased as he listened to the aggravating words of his friend who completely misunderstood his circumstances. While Job was a sinner, he knew he was forgiven. Job replied that the Righteous One as his witness - testifies for me and will prove my innocence (Job 16:19) and holds to His way of *righteousness* (Job 17:9), the way Job clings to for his own righteousness. Yet, after Job’s bold confession of his faith, he examines his circumstances and deems them worse than ever (Job 17:10-17). His suffering has weakened his body and his soul. How many times do we believe God will help us, and then we grow weak and doubt what we believe? This is a dangerous sin God is strengthening and humbling Job and us to recognize and resist as we study the Book of Job. The wisdom and strength to recognize and resist sinful doubt is a blessing of the faith that comes to us through Christ whose suffering was God’s intervention to save us. **So, if God intervened to save us through Christ’s suffering, how much more likely is He to intervene to save us through our suffering?** It is hard to see suffering as a blessing. Yet, whenever our suffering strengthens and humbles us to recognize and resist sin, it certainly is a blessing.

WEEK SEVEN: Job 18-19. In the second round of discussions, Job's second friend Bildad demands Job must repent! For Bildad, there was a moral order that required repentance. There was simply no other way. Job warned that such thinking did not know God (Job 18:21). The Old Testament Scriptures, that Job would have known, teach of God's love ( Nehemiah 9:17; Jonah 3:8-10; and Isaiah 43:1-3), a love that is everlasting (Jeremiah 31:3). New Testament Scriptures take one more step and teach us God *is* love (1 John 4:8). Everything God does, He does out of love. He has no other motive or purpose or desire but to love. After the Pandemic inspired people to help each other, violence and hatred erupted and continue. Human love does not last. While violence and hatred can be seen on the outside, these emotions live on the inside. To heal them, we need to reach the heart, and only Christ is able to reach and restore hearts and souls through His love and forgiveness. While Job suffered painfully on the outside, on the inside he believed and proclaimed "I know that my Redeemer lives!"(Job 19:25). **Has God intervened through a Pandemic to remind us and our nation that our Redeemer lives?** The remaining weeks of this study will unveil the critical need to share our Redeemer lives with people in desperate need of His joy and strength.

WEEK EIGHT: Job 20-21: The final discussion in the second round comes as Zophar states that "*the exulting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless is for a moment*" (Job 20:5). These words can lead to the wrong assumption that the truly righteous have joy that exempts them from suffering. In reality, they have the joy of the Lord that helps them through suffering. Job's suffering that caused him to look beyond this life for his hope and righteousness points us to spiritual houses of faith, more valuable than gold ( 1 Peter 1:7). They last because they are built on Christ (1 Peter 2:4-8). Our spiritual houses will feed the hungry, bear each others burdens, and understand the struggles of believers like Job who are being tested. We will know God is always working for our good, to save us, not hurt us. We will become stronger because suffering produces endurance, character, and the hope we can all read about in Romans 5:3-5. Leaving all reasoning and judgment about suffering to the Lord, we can be the good and faithful servants whom Christ will bless on the Last Day (Matthew 25:40). **Could the Pandemic be God's intervention to help us be Christ's good and faithful servants?** As believers, we pray this will always be so for us.

WEEK NINE: Job 22-24: 22-24: In the third round of discussion, Eliphaz continues to call Job to repentance because he does not understand that God was humbling Job to exalt him. This is, after all, the way of Christ (1 Peter 5:6). This does not mean Job does not need to repent or that Job is not willing to repent. It means Job's suffering does not come from lack of repentance. At the same time, Job's story is calling us to repentance. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Just like the Covid virus, we need the vaccine or cure for the virus of sin that our living Redeemer offers. God has used the Pandemic to awaken the need of many to Worship in His House by taking away Worship in His House. *Why would God do that?* Well, His ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9). For example, while God knew Job's problem was not repentance, He knows it is ours. Especially if God went to all of the trouble to close every church in the nation, and as He reopens them, we do not show up or bring our family and friends with us as it becomes safe to do so. **Could the Pandemic be God's intervention in our lives to help grow His Church?** What we do in the coming months in preparation for church growth in our faith and lives will answer this question for each one of us personally and spiritually.

WEEK TEN: Job 25-26: Job's friends have finally run out of arguments. However, Bildad's final speech condemning all humankind of sin should call us to throw ourselves on the mercy of the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth (Job 25:1-6). He towers above us (Job 26) and yet, allowed His Son to come down and become human like us to save us. We have no right to His hope and help. Yet, He gives Himself to suffer and die for our sins - out of love. It is hard to believe we have anything to give God in return - but we do. We have His love in us that we can return to Him and also show to others. Job's story, is our story. Job's sin was questioning God's motives and not trusting that God's ways are all about our good and His love. Job allowed suffering to interrupt his faith. We allow things to interrupt our faith and worship of Him. Consequently, we miss God's purpose, His test, His intervention, and most importantly His love for us. And, if weak faith can happen to Job, the man God called blameless (Job 1:8), it can happen to any believer, even a strong believer. **Has the Pandemic been life's interruption or God's intervention in your faith and life?** We pray that it has been both because whether God interrupts or intervenes in our lives, He always and only does so out of a great and loving desire to save us and all people.

WEEK ELEVEN: Job 27-37: In his final appeal, Job points us to the wisdom of God that *has loosed my cord and humbled me.* (Job 30:11). Job had lost the respect of people because he maintained his innocence. This had led Job to list sins he had not committed (Job 31) to prove he was upright. Elihu, Job's fourth friend, after hearing all that was said by Job and his three friends, burned with anger because no answer had been found for Job's suffering. (Job 32:1-5). Elihu begins by saying he has been redeemed (Job 33:28) just like Job to cushion his condemnations of Job's complaining or questioning God, which he saw as unbelief rather than the weak faith it was. (Job 34:35-36). And while his condemnations did not apply to Job's circumstances, his words can certainly set us on our toes about our own complaining to God rather than trusting in Him like the beasts and birds in Job 35:11. Whether we view suffering as an opportunity to receive God's grace or as storms of God's intervention that get our attention, the Book of Job teaches us to trust God to help and strengthen us in our faith and lives. **Is our trusting in the grace and mercy of God's deliverance the good God works through His intervention?** If we trust God to deliver us, the next storm in our life will allow us to answer this question with a resounding, "Yes!"

WEEK TWELVE: Job 38-42: In the end, God came to Job in a whirlwind that had the power to crush Job, and Job, weak in faith and frustrated actually accused the Lord of being unfair. The Lord mercifully proved He was fair by mildly reminding Job that He laid the foundation of the earth (Job 38:4) and continues to sustain it. As God hurled out one rhetorical question after another about His greatness (Job 38-40), Job remained silent. God brought Job to his knees. Humbled, Job realized his questioning God showed his lack of trust in God. He confessed and repented (Job 42:2-6), and God exalted him (James 4:10) by giving Job twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10). Job's repentant, exalted heart caused him to see sufferings as insignificant compared to the greatness of God. This same God lovingly shows us grace and mercy through Christ, and it is as we realize that *He is in control and we are not*, that we are exalted through every good and perfect gift from above (James 1:17). **So, is suffering a Pandemic necessary for our faith and lives?** The simplest answer is "yes" because as He humbles us and causes us to trust in Him, we will be exalted by Him in our faith and lives.