



Introduction to the Book of Job

Invitation to Study

Virtually everyone will experience grief and suffering in their lives sooner or later. And when it comes, it will almost certainly seem unreasonable and undeserved. “Most of our grief and pain does not come as a clear punishment for sins. Most of it comes out of nowhere and baffles our sense of justice” (John Piper, “Sermons on Job,” desirinGod.org). That is what makes the Book of Job so relevant. Job’s suffering seems to come out of nowhere and for no reason at all. Because of this, Job’s story has profound application in our lives. It gives us help in living through times of distress and suffering. It gives us great encouragement in humbly submitting to the sovereign goodness of God and trusting Him with all our hearts.

Besides being filled with spiritual insight and wisdom, the Book of Job is also a beautiful work of literature. Let us read what some well-known literary and theological minds have thought about the Book of Job.

Job is a Fascinating Book

The Rev. J. R. Dummelow, editor of [The One Volume Bible Commentary](#), believes that Job is a “brilliant” book which is not studied and read as it deserves to be. He calls it “a fascinating book, and one of the most valuable in the Old Testament, because it deals with the immemorial problem, the crux of theology and the darkest mystery of human life,” namely, the reason for human suffering in the lives of the righteous and innocent.

Job is a Masterpiece of Literature

The Book of Job is “acknowledged as one of the great literary masterpieces of world literature” (Merrill F. Unger, [Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 1](#)). Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, referred to the Book of Job as “magnificent” and “sublime.” Thomas Carlyle, Scottish essayist and critic, is quoted as saying, “There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit.” The poet Alfred Tennyson called it “the greatest poem of ancient or modern times.” French writer Victor Hugo called it “perhaps the greatest masterpiece of the human mind.”

The Book of Job is a unique mixture of prose and poetry. It is a dramatic poem framed by an epic story. The prologue (Chapters 1-2) and epilogue (42:7-17)

are narrative prose and all the material in between is poetry. The poetry is filled with rich vocabulary. For example, five different Hebrew words are used for lions in Job 4:10-11 and six synonyms are used for darkness in Job 3:4-6 and 10:21-22. The poetry is filled with similes and metaphors, many from nature.

Introductory Comments on Job

Job is a Wisdom Book

The Book of Job was part of the “Wisdom” literature of the Hebrew people, along with Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. It is placed just prior to these three wisdom books in our Bible today. Besides dealing with practical, moral, and spiritual problems of life, as the “wisdom” books do, Job is also a “doctrinal” book. It teaches us about the character of God, His ways, and His expectations of His people. “Being doctrinal, it is proper that Job precede and introduce the book of Psalms, which is devotional, and the book of Proverbs, which is practical; for how shall we worship or obey a God whom we know not?” (Matthew Henry, [The Matthew Henry Commentary](#)).

Job is a Study of the Justice of God

The Book of Job deals with the branch of theology known as “theodicy,” the defense of God’s goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil. The book presents the story of Job, a pious and prosperous gentleman who was a faithful husband and devoted father. Suddenly, without warning, he became the victim of a series of catastrophes. One day Job was praising God, enjoying his sprawling ranch, and praying for his ten children. The next day all his children were dead, his wealth destroyed, and his health deteriorated. Soon he found that his friends were mercilessly judgmental, his wife opposed him, and God was silent. Almost overnight, a vibrant, righteous, faithful, and generous man became a soul in agony, a suffering saint.

The reason for the dramatic reversal is revealed to the reader, but Job and his friends had no idea of the cause behind Job’s suffering. The conjecture, accusations, and judgments of Job’s friends and Job’s laments and self-defense are the unfolding story, until God speaks up and sets all things straight.

Job is a Personal Book

The majority of the books of the Old Testament deal

with Israel as the covenant nation of God. The Book of Job, however, is a personal book. Job stands alone, as an individual, not as representative of a race or nation. In Job's story, we see God's righteousness in dealing with a single human being. This makes the story of Job even more applicable to our own lives.

Job is a Study of Real Life

Job was a real person, and this is corroborated in Scripture. Ezekiel 14:14 mentions Job along with two real people, Noah and Daniel. In the New Testament, James 5:11 confirms Job as a real person in referring to his perseverance. Because Job was a real person, his story is a vivid picture of real life. Job and his friends had real problems, real feelings, and real opinions -- just like you and me. As you read the Book of Job, you will probably identify with many of Job's thoughts and feelings. Job was a great sufferer, and suffering is the common lot of human life. If you have not experienced suffering in your life, you are a rare person! As you study, you may be amazed to find that Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, have some of the same traits as your friends and you may come to empathize with Job. Then again, you may see yourself in Job's friends and identify with their strong opinions, impatience with those who seem to prolong their grief, and insistence upon standing firmly for the honor of God. Whatever you find yourself thinking as you read and study, the important thing is that the Book of Job will make you think -- about life, about God, about suffering, and justice. As you consider Job, his plight, his friends, and their beliefs, God will have much to teach you. You will never be the same after studying the Book of Job!

Before embarking on this study, it is good to look into the background of the book to establish a foundation for what we will learn.

I. Dating of Job

The Book of Job may have been written before the Book of Genesis. Indeed, Job may be the oldest complete book, not only in the Bible, but in the world. Many facts point to the probability that Job lived during the time of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2100 to 1900 B.C.).

- 1) Fragments of the Book of Job were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- 2) Job's lifestyle as a wealthy herdsman is similar to what is portrayed in Genesis.
- 3) The fact that Job ministered as a priest for his family shows that he definitely lived before the giving of the Mosaic law.
- 4) The length of Job's life fits in with that of patriarchal times.
- 5) The roving bands of Sabaeans and Chaldeans

mentioned in Job 1:15 and 17 fit in with those early years.

6) The primary name of God used in the Book of Job is the ancient "Shaddai" (the Almighty), the name familiar to the patriarchs (Genesis 17:1).

Although the events of the Book of Job probably occurred during patriarchal times, it is possible that the book itself was not written until centuries later. Some scholars believe that the story of Job was handed down through oral tradition and not written until the time of the Babylonian captivity (6th century B.C.). There is no adequate way to date the book. But as the authors of A Survey of the Old Testament (Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton) point out, "The timeless nature of the message makes the dating of the book a moot point."

II. Author of Job

Because the Book of Job is contained in the Bible, we know the author to be the Holy Spirit. The human writer of Job is unknown. Some suggestions have been Moses (according to Jewish tradition), Solomon, Hezekiah, Isaiah, or Ezra. The careful detail of the dialogues suggest that the book was written by an eyewitness. Perhaps Job, himself, compiled the work during the 140 years he lived after being restored to health and wealth. Or possibly, a later writer may have used Job's writings to create the finished product.

III. The Purpose of Job

The primary purpose of the Book of Job is to impart true wisdom. This grand work of literature makes it clear that the wisdom of the world is not the wisdom of God. Human wisdom falls far short of divine wisdom! The Book of Job gives amazing insights into the infinite wisdom of God. It encourages its readers, fulfilling the prayer of the apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, *that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe* (Ephesians 1:18-19 NASB).

God's wisdom far exceeds all human wisdom because He is sovereign, meaning that God controls and maintains all things. The Book of Job expounds God's omnipotence (He is all-powerful) and His omniscience (He is all-knowing), two crucial aspects of his sovereignty. From the beginning of Job until the end, the sovereignty of God is proclaimed and illustrated. God knows our human predicament. But most importantly, He has the answer.

God's answer is grace. Job's friends and family showed him no grace at all, as we shall see in his story. It was unmerited favor from God that freed Job from his

dismal circumstances and lifted him to carry on. And so it is with you and me. It is futile to look to those around us for things that only God can supply. This is a fundamental lesson of wisdom. These are the truths we will be learning in the study of Job.

IV. The Message of Job

The Book of Job deals with some very difficult and profound questions -- questions concerning wisdom and grace. Job addresses the reason for suffering as he searches to find answers for the misery in his life. The mystery of Job's suffering is the main problem of the book and the topic of discussion in Chapters three through thirty-seven. Neither Job nor his friends realize that his predicament has been activated by incidents beyond the bounds of the physical world. But as readers of Job's story, you and I are given insights which help us understand suffering and make our own suffering more bearable.

Near despair, Job called out to God, but received no answer. He searched his heart and mind, but could find no way to reach God. He longed for a mediator who would speak for him and win his case before God. If you have such longings, be encouraged because there is good news here in the Book of Job.

A. The Question of Suffering

In the world of Job's day, the wisdom of the Israelites and their neighbors centered around the principle of retribution: if a person was righteous, he would prosper and if a person was wicked he would suffer. Even though this theory did not always mesh with experience (see Psalm 73), people could not conceive of it being inadequate. The Hebrew people believed in One God who was sovereign over all things. Therefore, He was sovereign over suffering, making Him the source of all suffering. Because they also believed God to be absolutely just, they concluded that suffering must be due to wickedness. And what's more, suffering must be in proportion to wickedness.

The Book of Job affirms that God delights in prospering the righteous and guarantees that the wicked will be punished. But in our study, we will also find that God's wisdom goes much deeper than that. It is impossible to discern what a person is really like based on his or her degree of suffering. We are not God. Only God is, and our wisdom must rely upon and rest in His. *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith with no doubting, for he who doubts is like the wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind* (James 1:5-6).

On this earth, we see that many people who live godly

lives experience severe trials. Perhaps you are one of those people. Asking "Why?" does not help. Trusting God does. Job teaches that trials are to be accepted and endured. This is the perseverance of the saints. See Hebrews 10:35-39. Every trial which comes your way has first passed through the hand of God. He is sovereign and thus the primary cause of all things. All that Job lost was restored over and above what he had before his loss. If you persevere in faith, God will bless you also; perhaps not on this earth, but surely in eternity!

"Suffering fulfills a Divine purpose and exercises a gracious ministry in the godly. Behind all the suffering of the godly is a high purpose of God, and beyond it all is an "afterwards" of glorious enrichment." (J. Sidlow Baxter, Explore the Book).

B. The Unseen World

Chapter 1 of Job introduces us to "the satan," (HAA-Sah Tahn). Every time the term "satan," (Sah Tahn) is used, it is preceded by the definite article, "the" (HAA). Thus, in the context of Job, the term is not a proper name but the description of a function. Sah Tahn is a verb which means "to be an adversary," "to accuse," or "to resist." In this case, the "adversary" steps forth to "resist" Job. In the first chapter of Job, the reader is given a peek into the unseen world of spiritual warfare. Job's story is about the pain and suffering HAA-Sah Tahn, the adversary, inflicted upon him with permission from God.

We need to be aware that we also have a very real enemy whom we cannot see but who *walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8). To be sure, not all suffering is caused by satan and so should not be indiscriminately blamed on him. However, the Book of Job is a reminder that the unseen world does exist and that in it is an enemy primed for battle. *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:12).

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF JOB

- I. Job Maintains His Integrity - Job 1 - 2**
- II. Job Defends His Righteousness - Job 3-31**
- III. Job Receives Rebuke - Job 32-41**
- IV. Job Repents and is Restored - Job 42**

I. Job Maintains His Integrity - Job 1-2

In the first two chapters, we are introduced to the main character of the book, Job, for whom the book is named. The curtains of heaven are parted and we are allowed to

eavesdrop on a conversation between satan and God, culminating in satan receiving permission to test Job's integrity. As a consequence, Job loses his children, his wealth, his health, and the support of his wife.

II. Job Defends His Righteousness - Job 3 - 31

As Job sits among the ashes, seemingly rejected by the world and suffering acutely, three friends, Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad, come to mourn with him and to give comfort. These chapters record the dialogues between each of the three friends and Job. Here we discover the doctrine of the three friends and the desperation of Job. The three friends all insist that Job's suffering is caused by his sin. Job eloquently defends himself and cries out in complaint to God.

III. Job Receives Rebuke - Job 32-41

Finally the three friends exhaust their compassionless arguments, unable to prove their theory that Job is a sinful man. Then a younger man, who must have been listening to the entire diatribe, speaks up, reproving Job and vindicating God's justice. After this final speaker has rambled on for six chapters, God speaks directly to Job. Reminding Job of His mighty power, God lovingly but firmly opens Job's eyes to the sin of self-righteous pride which has been lurking in his heart.

IV. Job Repents and is Restored - Job 42

Job humbly repents. God rebukes the three friends and restores Job's fortunes twofold.

Challenge to Study the Book of Job

Having read this brief introduction to the Book of Job, will you now commit to fifteen weeks of reading and studying this magnificent work of the Holy Spirit? Will you come with an open heart and mind asking God to prepare you for the deep and satisfying lessons He will teach you?

QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

Day One: Read all notes and references.

1. After reading the introductory notes, what makes you want to study the Book of Job?
2. What did you learn from the introductory notes which was new or interesting to you?

Day Two: Read Job 1:1-5.

3. What do you learn about Job in these verses?
4. What more do you learn about Job from James 5:11?
5. a. From all the things you have learned about Job thus far, what do you think is most important? Why?
b. ♥(Heart Question) In what way(s) would you like to be like Job?

Day Three: Read Job 1:6-12.

6. Who do you think are the “sons of God” in verse 6? (Job 38:7 may help with your answer.)
7. a. Who was among the “sons of God” when they presented themselves before the Lord?
b. Where had he been and what had he been doing? Give verse.
c. What further information does the apostle Peter give us about him in 1 Peter 5:8?
8. a. Who was the topic of the conversation between the Lord and satan?
b. What was the Lord’s evaluation of him?
c. What was satan’s evaluation of him?
9. a. What did the Lord give satan permission to do?
b. From Job 1:11 and 2:3, what were satan’s motives?

16. a. How did Job's wife react to his affliction?
- b. ♥(Heart Question) How do you react when your spouse or another family member is suffering?
- c. How did Job respond to to his wife?
17. What statement shows that satan lost his wager with God? Give verse.

Day Six: Read Job 2:11-13.

18. a. Name Job's three friends.
- b. What did they do when they heard about Job's adversity?
- c. What was their purpose in doing this?
19. a. How did the three friends react when they first saw Job? Why?
- b. How did they attempt to comfort Job?
- c. Do you think there is anything more they could have done that they did not do?
20. What lessons of friendship and compassion do you learn from this passage?