

Background

The book of Job belongs to the group of writings called the Wisdom Literature. These writings include the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. Job differs slightly from the other books because while the other books may be classified as the “wisdom of kings,” having been authored at least in large part by the kings of Israel like David and Solomon, evidence suggests that the book of Job predates the monarchy. Because of this Job has been dubbed “God’s wisdom *for* kings” by some commentators.

Although most of Job consists of the conversation between Job and his friends the book was neither written by him nor his friends. The author of Job is unknown but was most likely an Israelite because of his use of the Israelite covenant name for God (Yahweh or “the LORD”). This is significant because both Job and his friends were non-Israelites.

The date of the composition of Job is difficult to determine. There are some glimpses of doctrine in Job that aren’t fully fleshed out and that would only be revisited in more depth in later books. One observation that commentators have made in suggesting an early date of composition for Job is the lack of mention of significant historical events such as the call of Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, the conquest of the Promised Land, or the exile; nor is there any reference to major Israelite institutions such as the monarchy, the temple, or the prophets.

There are some clues within Job that suggest the events of the book took place within or before the period of the patriarchs. One of these is the fact that Job’s wealth was measured by his possessions, specifically his livestock (1:3). Another indicator is that Job acted as a priest for his family (1:5). Early on, fathers served as priests for their households (Genesis 22:2 – God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice) but this would’ve been unacceptable after the Law of Moses was given and the Levitical priesthood was established. Finally, there’s Job’s age. From the time of Noah after God had flooded the earth the life spans of men decreased drastically (Genesis 11:10-25, Genesis 25:7 – Abraham lived 175 years). Job bore seven sons and three daughters before his period of testing and after he was restored he lived another 140 years (42:16).

Outline

Job is a book about suffering. It tells the story of a righteous man who was brought to a crisis of faith by the prolonged and bitter suffering that he was subjected to. Job inexplicably lost everything in his life and was left with a sense of abandonment by God. The book reveals the fallout of his ordeal in his cries to God and his struggle to make sense of what happened to him in light of his understanding of God.

The book of Job has a sandwich structure of a prose preamble, a series of speeches, and a prose conclusion. The prologue introduces the characters and the setting and the epilogue concludes the account with Job’s restoration and the latter part of his life. In between there are three cycles of speeches between Job and his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (chapters 3-27), a poem on divine wisdom (chapter 28), and a series of monologues from Job (chapters 29-31), a fourth speaker, Elihu (chapters 32-37), and God (38:1-42:6).

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Eliphaz	4-5	15	22
Job	6-7	16-17	23-24
Bildad	8	18	25
Job	9-10	19	26
Zophar	11	20	N/A
Job	12-14	21	27

Job is one of the most difficult books in the Old Testament to translate. It contains linguistic mysteries as well as many unusual words that aren’t found anywhere else in the Bible (~100 of them, see the footnotes in Job with alternate translations and disclaimers of uncertain meanings). The structure of Job is also peculiar

because though the speeches are presented as dialogues between Job and his friends, they're written in a poetic style that's unlike the way people speak to one another. The speeches also don't necessarily follow one another in the sense that they don't always address the points made in the immediately preceding one. A speech may address a point that was made several speeches prior.

Prologue (1:1-2:13)

Job's Happiness (1:1-5)

Job was a Gentile who lived in the land of Uz. He's described as a man who was "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (1:1, 8; 2:3; 29:14, 17) and was greatest among all the people of the East. Job was blessed materially with livestock and servants (1:3), with offspring (1:2, see Ruth 4:15 – completeness of blessing), with wisdom and standing among men (29:7-11, 21-25), and in his relationship with God (29:1-5).

Job's Testing (1:6-2:13)

Job's first test (1:6-22)

-One day when Satan came with the angels, who presented themselves before the Lord, God commended Job to Satan. Satan accused Job of being pious for the sake of personal gain and challenged that if God removed his material blessings Job would be revealed to be a phony. God gave all of Job's possessions into Satan's hands but prevented him from afflicting Job directly. So Satan went out and took all of Job's property and children. For two of the disasters, Satan used raiders from other nations but for the other two he worked through acts of nature.

1. Job's oxen and donkeys were taken by the Sabeans, the servants were killed.
2. Job's sheep and servants were burned up by the fire of God.
3. Job's camels were taken by the Chaldeans, the servants were killed.
4. Job's sons and daughters were killed when a desert wind collapsed their house.

-Job's response when he learned of everything was to mourn but it was also to worship (1:20-21). Job saw God's hand at work in his suffering and he also recognized His prerogative to give and to take away so he was able to praise God even in this. Job didn't cling to the things of the world. In all that he did Job didn't malign the character of God or charge Him with wrongdoing. So Satan was proved wrong and Job and God were vindicated.

Job's second test (2:1-13)

-On another day when Satan came with the angels, who presented themselves before the Lord, God commended Job to Satan again. Satan accused Job of caring only for himself and his own health and challenged that if God removed his health Job would then be shown to have been acting only in his own self-interest and didn't truly love God. God gave Satan the power to afflict Job but restrained him from taking Job's life. So Satan went out and afflicted Job with a mysterious sickness that affected his whole body.

-Job's response was to mourn while sitting among the ashes. Even Job's wife told him to curse God but he rebuked her.

-When Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar came to comfort him they were unable to recognize him. Job's appearance was so wretched that it moved them to tear their clothes and sit in the dust with him in mourning. No one said anything to him for a week until he spoke up.

-Job and his friends were unaware of all that had taken place between God and Satan.

Satan the Accuser – Satan's role in the account of Job was the accuser (Zechariah 3:1; Revelation 12:9-10). He accused Job before God of having a godliness that lacked integrity and was self-serving, and that was ultimately evil. Satan attacked the godly righteousness of Job and distorted what was good in order to condemn him. His accusation was also an accusation against God that He was foolish for accepting the supposedly insincere piety from someone who was only acting out of self-interest.

-For all his power, Satan could do no more than present his argument to God and act within the limits that God set for him. He was incapable of contending with God directly so he tried to destroy the one in whom God took delight by pitting one against the other. Either Job's devotion would be shown to be false or God would alienate him in the process of proving Satan wrong.

Dialogue-Dispute (3:1-27:23)

-After a week of sitting in silence with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar Job finally makes his opening lament. From there, three cycles of dialogues take place with Job expressing his extreme sorrow and perplexity over his circumstances and his friends taking up the cause of defending God's sovereignty and justice and trying to bring Job to repentance for a sin that he hadn't committed.

-Through the cycles of dialogues there is a repetition of ideas as the conversation becomes more heated and personal. Despite the variety of arguments and the different lines of reasoning employed, the underlying stance of each side remained firm. Job's friends maintained that his suffering was the result of some sin on his part while Job ardently defended his innocence in the face of all of his suffering. Job's refusal to confess and denounce his imaginary sin is seen by his friends as arrogance and stubbornness, while the friends' insistence that Job was somehow a contributor to his own suffering further grieved Job. This results in progressively shortening discourses and ultimately the dialogues end in a stalemate (32:1).

Job's Friends' Logic – Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar weren't pagans who came to advise Job from a worldview that was entirely different from his own. They were God-fearing men who, for the most part, had orthodox theology regarding God's sovereignty and His justice. They were trying to make sense of Job's suffering through the lens of God's character but had to contend with the reality of Job's suffering as well as his insistence on his innocence. Job's friends represented retribution theology: God always blesses the righteous and curses the wicked. They confidently assumed that the logic of their theology was able to account for all of God's ways. However, they went beyond the generally true proposition that sin leads to suffering and inferred that suffering implied the presence of sin. To them Job's suffering was an indication that he was in need of repentance (4:7-11; 11:13-20). This view wasn't only held by Job's friends, Jesus' disciples also held a similar view that suffering was explained by sin (John 9:1-3). According to the friends' reasoning, if sin was the cause of loss and suffering then the path back to prosperity would be for Job to forsake his sins and to turn again to God. Any god that's so simple and so easily manipulated is no God at all.

Job's Opening Lament (3:1-26)

In Job's opening lament he longs for death. He curses the day of his birth and calls for that day to be blotted out. In death, Job sought peace, rest, and release (3:13, 17-19) compared to the turmoil he was experiencing (3:26). Whereas Satan described God's blessing as a hedge around Job in 1:10, Job now saw himself hedged in and trapped in his misery (3:23). Life became intolerable to him yet even in the depth of his despair he didn't curse God.

The First Cycle of Speeches (4:1-14:22)

Eliphaz (4:1-5:27)

Eliphaz appealed to God's justice in arguing that those who are truly innocent wouldn't be destroyed (4:7). He also pointed out that all mortals are sinful and are deserving of punishment (4:17-21). In 5:1 Eliphaz talked of Job calling on a mediator to plead his case with God. The notion of an arbitrator between God and Job is a motif that will be seen again in later speeches. In 5:8 he advised Job to appeal to God and affirmed that God was able to work wonders to restore a person. Eliphaz implicitly expressed his belief that Job's condition was a result of sin and that he should be grateful for the Lord's correction (5:17).

Job's reply (6:1-7:21)

Job still longed for death (6:9; 7:15-15). He had no strength left and felt helpless (6:11-13). He expressed his disappointment over the undependability and unhelpfulness of his friends as he had looked to them in his time of need but found them to be of no help (6:14-17). Job maintained his innocence and stated that it was his integrity was his concern (6:24, 28-30). He saw life as futility (7:2-4) and questioned the reason for his treatment (7:20). He confessed to being a sinner but didn't understand why he was seemingly not being forgiven (7:21).

Bildad (8:1-22)

Bildad in his speech defended God's justice but was injurious to Job, attributing the death of his children to just punishment (8:4). He accused Job of wrongful behaviour and forgetting God (8:13) and counselled him to repent with a promise that God would restore him to even greater prosperity if he would turn back to Him (8:5-7). He also affirmed the futility of putting one's hope in things aside from God (8:13-15).

Job's reply (9:1-10:22)

Job recognized the impossibility of being righteous before God in 9:2, echoing what Eliphaz said in 4:17. He affirmed the greatness and might of God as the Creator (9:5-10). Though Job wanted to argue his innocence before God he recognized his only recourse was to throw himself on God's mercy (9:3-4, 14-15). In 9:19 Job declared God's might and justice. He also continued to maintain his innocence (9:15, 21; 10:2, 7) and sought an arbitrator, someone to approach God to testify on his behalf and to remove God's rod of punishment from him (9:33-34).

Zophar (11:1-20)

Zophar condemned Job for his reaction to his suffering (11:2-3) and rebuked him for his lack of understanding of God (11:7-8). He also urged Job to reach out to God and turn from his sin with a promise of restoration from God (11:13-19).

Job's reply (12:1-14:22)

Job recognized God's lordship over every life on earth (12:10) as well as His power (12:13-16) and His right to bring down the mighty and depose the wise and the established (12:17-25). He still desired to speak with God to defend himself (13:3, 15, 22) because he was convinced of his innocence (13:16-19, 23) and charged his friends with failing to be impartial (13:4-13). Job once again longed for death but now showed a hope that death would not be permanent and that his sins would be covered and not counted against him (14:13-17).

The Second Cycle of Speeches (15:1-21:34)

Eliphaz (15:1-35)

Eliphaz continued to accuse Job of sin both directly (15:5-6) and indirectly (15:20-35) in his discourse on the fate of the wicked. The wicked can't escape their fate, which is God's justice. In his response, Eliphaz insulted Job for his "useless words" and lack of sense (15:2-3).

Job's reply (16:1-17:15)

Job saw himself as the target of God's savage treatment (16:12-14) but continued to maintain his innocence (16:17-18). Once again he put his hope in his advocate and intercessor in heaven who would plead his case before God (16:19-21).

Bildad (18:1-21)

Bildad continued to accuse Job of wrongdoing in his discourse on the wicked (18:5-21).

Job's reply (19:1-29)

Job became an outcast among his friends and family (19:13-19). His friends' words as adding to the misery that had been inflicted on him (19:2-3, 21-22) but he had confidence that God would be his Redeemer and would vindicate him. Job also makes a bold statement that there is an existence after death and that he would see God with his own eyes in the midst of the decay that afflicted his body (19:26-27). This is a glimpse of what is yet to come in the Scriptures on the afterlife and the resurrection of the body.

Zophar (20:1-29)

Zophar gave another discourse on the fate of the wicked in which he equates prosperity and the absence of suffering with righteousness before God.

Job's reply (21:1-34)

Job saw the wicked in the world prospering and noted the injustice of them not getting what they deserved in life. Their reward seemed better than that of the righteous (21:7-33).

The Third Cycle of Speeches (22:1-26:14)

Eliphaz (22:1-30)

Eliphaz made false accusations about Job in mistreating and neglecting the weary, the needy, the fatherless, and the widows (22:5-11, 15). Once again, he urged Job to repent in order to receive restoration.

Job's reply (23:1-24:25)

Job continued to seek an audience with God (23:3-5) and maintained his innocence (23:6-7, 10-12). He desired God's judgment against evildoers (24:1, 12) and bemoaned the plight of the poor at the hands of the wicked (24:1-17).

Bildad (25:1-6)

Bildad asserted that man cannot be righteous before God (25:4-6).

Job's reply (26:1-14)

Job spoke of the majesty of God's power as revealed in the created order (26:7-14); even death and destruction are uncovered before God (26:6).

Job's Closing Disclosure (27:1-23)

Job saw God as having denied him justice yet still resolved to remain true to Him (27:2-4). Once again Job defended his innocence (27:5-6).

Interlude on Wisdom (28:1-28)

Chapter 28 appears to be a break in Job's discourse. This chapter is a standalone poem on wisdom and is thought to have been inserted by the author of Job. The poem can be divided into three sections and addresses the failure of man to comprehend the hidden wisdom of God.

-In the first section (28:1-11) man brings out the hidden treasures of the earth, precious metals and gems. He goes to great lengths to reach the hidden places in search of the valuable materials.

-In the second section (28:12-19) the value of wisdom is addressed. Man is incapable of appraising wisdom's value. It can't be bought with the precious metals or gems that come out of the earth because it is not from the earth and is far more valuable than all of them.

-In the third section (28:20-28) it is revealed that God is the source of wisdom and He alone has it (28:23). For men the fear of the Lord is wisdom (28:28).

Monologues (29:1-42:6)

Job's Call for Vindication (29:1-31:40)

Job's monologue can be divided into three sections. In chapter 29 Job recounted his past honour and blessings, in chapter 30 he sums up his present dishonour and suffering, and in chapter 31 he further states his innocence and takes an oath to further support his claim.

-Job longed for God's companionship (29:2-5) and recounted his stewardship of the blessings he received from God (29:12-17). He recalled the blessings of the past but didn't focus on what he had lost materially (29:1-25).

-Job's enemies now triumphed over him and mocked him (30:1-31). Job mourned over God's affliction and the shift he experienced from complete achievement to complete loss as well as abandonment from his earthly relationships.

-Job took an oath in the form of negative confessions (if I am guilty of A then let B happen to me) as part of his claim of innocence (31:5-34, 38-40), calling judgment on himself if he was found guilty and hands his situation to God for vindication.

Elihu's Speeches (32:1-37:24)

After Job finished his monologues a new speaker, Elihu, gives four monologues. According to Elihu, he was with Job and his friends during their earlier conversation but had refrained from speaking. Now that they were finished he would have his say on the matter. In his speech Elihu rebukes Job and talks of the redemptive value of divine chastening (33:14-18). He also speaks of restoration by a mediator (33:23-28). Like Job's friends, Elihu also accused Job of wrongdoing in his defense of God's justice (34:7-12, 33-37; 35:12-16; 36:17-21, 37:23), arguing that God sees all the deeds of mankind and judges with full knowledge (34:21-25) so his verdicts are right. Elihu also subscribed to the belief that God punished the wicked and rewarded the righteous in a strictly mechanical way (36:6-12). He concluded his speeches with a discourse on the greatness of God in governing nature and the natural forces (36:22-37:21)

Divine Discourses (38:1-42:6)

God's first discourse and Job's response (38:1-40:5)

-When Elihu finished speaking, God appeared out of the storm and spoke to Job.

-God granted Job's request of an audience with Him but instead of allowing Job to present his case He questioned him instead. God challenged Job to answer Him after revealing His power by directing his attention to creation and nature. He further pointed Job to the animals of the earth and questioned what his involvement and oversight over them was (39:1-30).

-Job was awed by God and silenced himself because of his unworthiness to answer Him (40:4-5).

God's second discourse and Job's repentance (40:6-42:6)

-In God's second discourse with Job He challenged him to display his own glory and power and to dispense wrath on the wicked (40:10-13). He then focused on two mighty creatures from His creation, the behemoth (40:15-24) and the leviathan (41:1-34). Man was no match for the great strength of the behemoth or the fierceness of the leviathan but even these beasts are brought low before God.

-Job's response to God in 42:2 affirmed His sovereignty; the act of God revealing Himself to Job resulted in an attitude of repentance (42:5-6). Job never got the response he was looking for, he received no explanation for the suffering he faced but God's presence and the revelation of His character was enough to satisfy him.

Epilogue (42:7-17)

God's Verdict (42:7-9)

In the end, Job endured. God rebuked Job's friends and affirmed the truth of Job's words (42:7b, 8b). So Satan was proved wrong and Job and God were vindicated once more. God had Job take up his priestly

position again by commanding Job's friends to go to him to offer a sacrifice and to have him intercede in prayer on their behalf.

Job's Restoration (42:10-17)

God restored Job's prosperity and gave him twice as much as he had before. He also restored Job to his family and friends and gave him seven more sons and three more daughters. Job lived another 140 years and saw children to the fourth generation.

Themes

Suffering

-Job's story centers on the theme of suffering. More than that, it deals with the unexplained suffering of a righteous man, which makes the suffering all the more difficult to accept.

-We don't always know the purpose of the suffering we face but just as Job was satisfied when he was given a glimpse of God, our focus ought to be on looking ahead to God and trusting in Him.

-Job's troubles were not provoked by any fault on his part. On the contrary, it was a consequence of his virtue and was intended to prove and enhance his righteousness (1 Peter 4:12-16, 19). This should not be a foreign experience for believers. The Beatitudes also declare blessings for those who suffer for the sake of Christ (Matthew 5:10-12).

-Suffering is not always punitive or corrective (see also Naomi) it can be instructive.

-There is value in enduring suffering with perseverance (James 5:11) as it can display the glory of God through our response to it, a response that defies the world's comprehension.

God's Absolute Sovereignty

-"God is completely sovereign over all the affairs of his universe for his own glory." He is the creator and Lord of the earth and all that is in it. The forces of nature and the beasts of the earth were created by God and are subject to His rule. His line of questioning to Job demonstrates His full knowledge and control over the natural order. He is also Lord of the heavenly realms, the angels and Satan all answer to Him.

-Satan needed permission from God to afflict Job (see also Luke 22:31). God used Satan to accomplish His purposes but set clear boundaries to the extent to which he could act in Job's life.

God's Justice.

-Job, his friends, Elihu, and God Himself affirmed the justice of God. Job's friends had a narrower view of God's justice as they only considered the immediate punishment of evil and evaluated a person's standing before God based on his external circumstances. However, outward appearances are not always reflective of a person's relationship with God. Consider the churches in Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) and Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22).

-God is able to see fully into the lives of men to make just judgments with all facts in full view (34:21-25).

-God's inescapable judgment on the wicked is repeatedly affirmed throughout Job.

Shadows of Christ

-God doesn't relate to us in a quid-pro-quo way as Job's friends supposed. He treats everyone better than they deserve, as evidenced by the fact that we continue to live, and bestows on humanity His common grace (Matthew 5:45). The greatest example of God's undeserved favour is in His gift of Christ.

-Christ is the mediator between God and man that Job's search ultimately pointed towards; one who approaches the Lord on our behalf and pleads our case before a holy and just God (1 Timothy 2:5).

-Compared to Job, Jesus is the true innocent sufferer who was completely faultless and yet submitted Himself to agony and death for the sake of others. Job's faithfulness amid his trials points to the genuinely perfect righteousness and wholly undeserved suffering of Christ on the cross.

-“...the greatest injustice ever perpetrated in the history of the universe: the murder of the innocent son of God, used for the greatest of good ever conceived: the glorification of God through the salvation of mankind from his sins.” – God’s sovereignty exercised to satisfy God’s justice.

Conclusion

Job’s friends, though well-intentioned, ended up injuring him and adding to his suffering. They approached counselling with a cold logical theology that ignored the reality of Job’s misery. They were more of a comfort when they sat with him in silence. As they spoke, their focus became to convince Job of their point of view and they lost sight of going to him in his suffering as they had initially done. Our goal in counselling then should be to “mourn with those who mourn” and to not be hasty with our words but to use them sparingly with wisdom and love to point others back to God.

Job question of the justice of God’s treatment was never ultimately addressed but it didn’t matter because he received satisfaction from his encounter with God. In the end, Job was able to have joy even without a full understanding of God’s purposes. His main concern was his relationship with God, not his property, his family, or his health. His understanding of the sovereignty of God as well as his recognition that his good life was a gift rather than a reward enabled him to rightly set his focus before God.

This ought to be a comfort and challenge to us because we also lack full insight into the circumstances of our lives. We don’t always see the purpose for the trials we face but we can always put our hope in God because He has revealed Himself to be in full control of His universe and fully good. We’ve been given an example in Job to trust in God rather than to be on a constant search for intellectual satisfaction, we’re to look forward in hope to God.

-“...true godly wisdom is to reverently love God more than all his gifts and to trust the wise goodness of God even though his ways are at times past the power of human wisdom to fathom.”

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