

Introduction to the Book of Job

- I. The Place of Job in the Old Testament
 - A. Job is the first of five books commonly referred to as "The Books of Poetry" - these include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.
 1. These books are written in poetic style in contrast to the narrative style of most other books.
 2. "Hebrew poetry did not have meter or rhyme like English poetry. It was made up of thought rhythm, and many times of synonymous or antithetical couplets. The sentiment of one line echoed in the next.' Sometimes a single thought is carried through as many as eight lines" (George Dehoff, Dehoff's Commentary. "Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Vol. III, p. 9).
 3. The Book of Job is recognized by scholars as one of the greatest dramatic poems ever written.
 - a. Alfred Tennyson, the British poet, called the book of Job "the greatest poem whether of ancient or modern literature."
 - b. Daniel Webster, the American statesman, called the book of Job "one of the most wonderful productions of any age or of any language."
 - B. These inspired books are identified as "Wisdom Literature" - especially Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes; with certain psalms (notably 19, 37, 104, 107, 147, 148).
 1. Oswald Chambers (1894-1917) offered this concise summary of the five books:
 - a. Job - How to suffer
 - b. Psalms - How to pray
 - c. Proverbs - How to act
 - d. Ecclesiastes - How to enjoy
 - e. Song of Solomon - How to love
 - C. For our purposes, the message of Job is much more important than the form.
 1. It is amazing that people three or four thousand years ago had the same problems as we do.
 2. The conclusion is especially helpful because it was reached with God's help - Job's experience emphasizes the futility of seeking solutions to our problems without God.
- II. Author and Date of Writing.
 - A. Both who wrote the book of Job and the date of writing are unknown.
 - B. Wayne Jackson notes that "the historical events of the book are quite obviously from the patriarchal age [i.e., between the creation and the beginning of the Mosaic economy]" (Wayne Jackson, The Book of Job. p. 10) - this is verified by the following factors:
 1. There are no allusions to the Law of Moses in the book, but there is a mention of a flood (22:16).
 - a. Many of the discourses in the book center on questions of right and wrong, sin and judgment, reward and punishment, but nothing is placed in the context of the Ten Commandments or Law of Moses.

- b. Divine laws were given to people before Moses.
 - (1) Abraham was guided by such laws (Gen. 26:5), as were Job and his friends (Job 22:22; 23:12).
- 2. Job functions as a priest in offering sacrifices for his family (1:5), as did his three friends (42:7-9); similar to what we read concerning Noah and Abraham (cf. Gen. 8:20; 12:7; 22:13).
- 3. Job's longevity is typical of the patriarchs: he lived 140 years after the recorded events (42:16) and was older than his friends (30:1; 32:7) – notice that at the time of his suffering Job was old enough to have 10 grown children.
- 4. The use of the term *kesitah*, translated "piece of money" (42:11), is elsewhere used only of patriarchal times (cf. Gen. 33:19; Josh. 24:32 – which is referring to Gen. 33).
- 5. Job's family-clan is more reminiscent of Abraham's era than of later times (e.g., the post-Exodus period).
- 6. The tribes of Job, his three friends, and Elihu all believed in the true God of creation; whereas after the dispersion at Babel pantheistic idolatry has spread into every nation by a short time after Abraham (Henry M. Morris, The Remarkable Record of Job, p. 13).
- 7. A number of ancient tribes and places mentioned in Job such as the Sabaeans, the Chaldeans, and Ophir tie into the table of nations (Gen. 10) or other early sections of Genesis, but none that characterized later periods (*Ibid.* p. 13).
- C. Ancient Jewish tradition attributes the Book of Job to Moses.
 - 1. Moses was in the wilderness of Midian (Exo. 2:15) which bordered Edom.
 - 2. He could have learned the story of Job from Job's immediate descendants, or from Job himself.
 - 3. Modern criticism has assigned a much later date for the Book of Job.
 - a. There is no reason, whatsoever, for this, except the everlasting effort of some critics to destroy faith in God and His word.
 - b. Evidence shows that Job was a real person and that the book was written by inspiration.
- D. The uncertainty of the author and date does not nullify the book's inspiration.
 - 1. Paul quotes from it on several occasions in his writings (cf. 1 Cor. 3:19 with Job 5:13; and Rom. 11:35 with Job 4:11).
 - 2. Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 3:19 implies inspiration: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'" (1 Cor 3:18-19).
 - a. The expression "For it is written" is one used in the New Testament in reference to those things written in the Old Testament Scriptures.
- III. The Historicity of the Book of Job.
 - A. The style of the opening and close of Job certainly conform to other biblical narratives that are historical (cf. Job 1:1 with 1 Sam. 1:1 and Luke 1:5).
 - B. In the book of Ezekiel, Job is mentioned along with Noah and Daniel, two other figures of history (14:14).

C. James refers to Job as an example of perseverance (5:11).

IV. The Purpose of the book of Job.

- A. The book's overall purpose seems to be to answer the question: "How should the righteous suffer?"
 - 1. Many have suggested that the purpose is to answer the question "Why do the righteous suffer?"
 - 2. By the fact that the book never answer the question of why suffering comes to the righteous, it is not logical to attach that theme to it.
- B. The book demonstrates that suffering is not merely the result of sin.
 - 1. The book deals with the perpetual misunderstanding that bad things happen only to bad people and good things happen only to good people.
- C. The book uses the suffering of the righteous to illustrate the meaning of true faith.
 - 1. Although the reader knows why Job is suffering, Job does not.
 - 2. God appeared, not to debate with Job, but to show him that God is with him.
 - 3. In the climax – the final words (42:6) – restoration come only after Job placed complete trust in God.
- D. The book justifies the wisdom and goodness of God in matters of human suffering and especially to show that all suffering is not punitive, and there occasions when suffering may be allowed by God as a compliment to one's own spirituality.
- E. Also the book shows that although man cannot understand fully the purpose of God, he can and must trustingly submit to His care and protection - trust God no matter what our circumstances (Job 23:10; Rom. 8:28, 38-39; 2 Cor. 5:7).
- F. Consider the parallels of Job's suffering to Christ's:
 - 1. Extreme suffering.
 - 2. Smitten of God (19:21; Isa. 53:4).
 - 3. Deserted (13:24; 19:13-14; 29:8; 42:1; Psalm 22:1).
 - 4. Mediated for others (42:10; 1 Tim. 2:5).
 - 5. Falsely accused 15:5-8; Matt. 26:65-66).
 - 6. Gaping mouths and facial slaps (16:10; Psalm 22:13; Micah 5:1; John 19:3).[Notice that Christ's suffering illustrates that the righteous do suffer and that the why of suffering can be beyond man's comprehension]
- G. "No matter what we face in this life, no matter how intense our suffering and hardship may become, when we genuinely shift our attention to who God is, we are enabled to cope with our suffering and survive the onslaughts of life" (Dave Miller).
- H. In addition, the book also demonstrates the value of patience (James 5:11).
 - 1. "Patience" is that trait which enables one to abide under the weight of trials.
 - 2. "It is the spirit which can bear things, not simply with resignation, but with blazing hope; it is not the spirit which sits statically enduring in the one place, but the spirit which bears things because it knows that these things are leading to a goal of glory; it is not the patience which grimly waits for the end, but the patience which radiantly hopes for the dawn" (William Barclay. *New Testament Words*, p. 144).
- I. Finally, the book reveals trust in a Redeemer who is to come.

1. Christ, our Redeemer, is looked for in several ways.
2. Job longs for a mediator between him and God (9:33; 33:23), and Jesus is one (1 Tim. 2:5).
3. Job confessed his faith in a Redeemer who would one day come (19:25); Christ is that Redeemer (Eph. 1:7).

V. The Literary Structure of Job.

- A. 1:1-2:13 – Narrative Prologue.
- B. 3:1-31:40 – Three cycles of poetic speeches. Each of Job's friends speak three times except Zophar (who speaks only twice).
- C. 32:1-5 – Narrative Interlude. Introduces Elihu.
- D. 32:6-37:24 – The poetic speeches of Elihu. Does not add much to argumentation of three friends.
- E. 38:1-41:34 – Speeches of Yahweh. Demonstrates to Job that God is in complete control. Poetic.
- F. 42:1-6 – Job's humble response to God's speeches.
- G. 42:7-17 – Narrative Epilogue. Shows the blessings of repentance and trusting in God.

VI. The Arguments of Job.

- A. It would have been better never to have been born (10:19)
 1. Death wish (6:8-9; 7:15).
 2. Shortness of life (7:6; 9:25).
- B. I am innocent (9:21; 10:7; 27:5-6).
 1. Suffering unjustly (19:6-7).
 2. Show me my sin (7:20; 10:2).
 - a. Show me my sin and I will be quiet (13:19).
 - b. I have not departed from God's commands (23:11-12).
 3. If I did sin, why doesn't God forgive? (7:21).
 4. I am determined not to sin. Why?
 - a. Known God's goodness in past (10:8; 12-13; 16:12; 29:2f).
 - b. Will not betray own conscience (8:3; 13:15).
 - c. Faith that God is really on his side (23:3-6).
- C. Why do the wicked prosper? (10:3; 21:7-33)
 1. The prosperity of wicked is temporary.
 2. God destroys both the wicked and the righteous (9:22).
- D. I want to plead my case before God.
 1. Job has two requests:
 - a. Please take away my suffering (13:21; cf. 6:8-9).
 - b. Let me speak and You reply (13:22-24).
 2. What more can I do than complain? (9:32ff; 10:1).
 3. I recognize the greatness of God (9:1-20; 12:10).

Note: Job is not challenging authority of God, he just wants answers
- E. You friends are not helping me.
 1. Worthless words and friends.
 - a. Sayings are "proverbs of ashes" (13:12).
 - b. You are miserable comforters (16:2-4).

- VII. Did Job sin during his discussions with the friends? – No, because:
- A. He is said to “have spoken of Me what is right” two times (42:7-8).
 - B. The strong emphasis on Job being “blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil” in the book (1:1, 8; 2:3).
 - C. The book says “in all this Job did not sin with his lips” (2:10).
 - D. Job insists he has kept his integrity (2:3, 9; 8:20; 27:1-6; 31:6).
 - E. Job insists he has not sinned (6:10, 24, 29, 30; 7:20; 9:20–22; 13:18; 16:17; 17:19; 19:1-6; 23:10-12; 31:29-37).
 - F. Job 42 repeats the phrase “my servant Job,” indicating God’s continued approval of Job three times (42:7-8).
 - G. Job was not required to offer a sacrifice as his friends were (42:8).
 - H. Job is nowhere asked to repent or to abandon his claim of being in the right.
 - I. The New Testament (Jas. 5:11) lauds Job as an example of endurance “steadfastness, conviction, holding out”). How was he steadfast, if he sinned?
- VIII. What lessons did Job learn?
- A. Job learned that man alone is insufficient (Job 10:8-17).
 - 1. Cf. 2 Cor. 3:5; 1 Cor. 15:10; Rom 12:3; 14:7-8.
 - 2. Man must learn that he needs God.
 - B. Job learned that material things do not really matter (Job 1:21; 2:10).
 - 1. We do not learn this at the top.
 - 2. Cf. Matt. 6:24; 1 Jn. 2:15; 1 Tim. 6:7, 17.
 - C. Job learned that man’s knowledge is incomplete (Job 40:1-9; 42:1-6).
 - 1. What men discern on their own is not sufficient.
 - 2. Cf. Hab. 2:20; Ps. 46:10; 2 Pet. 3:18.
 - D. Job learned to always be concerned for others (42:10).
 - 1. Job realized that his friends’ theology was incorrect (Job 13:7-12).
 - 2. Cf. Phil. 2:3,4; Gal. 6:10; Rom. 15:1-2.
 - E. Job learned to completely trust the ways and wisdom of God.
 - 1. Note the speeches of God, chapters 38-41.
 - 2. Cf. Isa. 55:8-9; Prov. 3:5-7.
- IX. The Problem of Righteous Suffering
- A. The Argument: “If God is all powerful and loving then suffering should not exist. Therefore, God is either not all powerful or not loving or both.”
 - B. Possible Explanations:
 - 1. Sin causes suffering (most common explanation).
 - a. Basic argument of Job’s friends (4:7-9; 8:20; 22:4f).
 - b. Some suffering is the result of sin: flood, hell, imprisonment, crime, etc.
 - c. Not all suffering can be attributed to sin.
 - (1) Baby suffers abuse.
 - (2) Suffering of Jesus (Isa. 53:4, 8 12; John 9:2).
 - (3) What about when the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? (Job’s argument; cf. Ps. 73).
 - 2. Suffering is Probationary.
 - a. Designed to test genuineness of faith (as with Job).
 - b. Faith built through overcoming trials (Jas. 1:2-4).

- c. Compare the testing of Abraham's faith (Gen. 22ff).
- 3. Suffering is Disciplinary.
 - a. Cf. Prov. 3:11,12; Job 5:17; 36:15.
 - b. Not merely punishment; but rather, contains the element of love (Heb. 12:5-11).
 - c. Compare the captivity of Israel and Judah.
- 4. Suffering is Meaningless and haphazard.
 - a. Compare Job's words - 21:23-26.
 - b. This is the Isolationist view of God.
 - c. Atheist hold to this concept; to them there is no guidance to the universe.
 - d. Considers the possibility that some things just happen (the natural scheme of things, the consequence of natural laws). Note Jesus's words in John 9:3-4.
- 5. Suffering is mysterious because God's purposes are hidden.
 - a. Therefore meaningless to man.
 - b. Would be an exercise in trust.
 - c. Zophar - Job 11:7; Job 42:3.
 - d. Cf. Isaiah 55:8-9.

A Brief Analysis of the Book of Job

- I. Job is tested (Job 1 - 2).
 - A. God challenged Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" (Job 1:8).
 - B. Satan responded that Job did not serve his Maker out of love and devotion, but because of being prospered by God.
 - 1. If his prosperity were removed, "he will surely curse You to Your face!" (Job 1:11).
 - C. And so, Satan was granted permission to test Job.
 - D. The range of Job's afflictions covers every facet of human endurance.
 - 1. All of his material possessions are lost: he is financially bankrupt [weaker men have committed suicide for less!]
 - 2. His children are killed in a series of disasters [consider what your grief would be if your child were killed, and multiply it by ten!]
 - 3. He is afflicted with a dreadful disease from head to foot and thus sat among the ashes of the city dump.
 - 4. His wife spiritually forsakes him and urges Job to "renounce God, and die" [this is Satan's fond hope].
 - 5. He becomes the utter contempt of his contemporaries
 - E. Yet through it all he does not renounce his Creator, but later says: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (13:15).
- II. The controversy – Job's three friends [Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar] having heard of his horrible plight, came to comfort him.

- A. They are totally speechless by the awesomeness of his appearance and sit for seven days in respectful silence.
 - B. The philosophy of Job's friends can simply be expressed in this fashion:
 - 1. Suffering is the direct result of personal sins [and in proportion thereto].
 - 2. Job is suffering greatly; therefore, Job has committed some great sin.
 - C. Their error was in the major premise of their argument – there is no basis for the assumption that suffering is always the consequence of personal wrongdoing.
 - D. Job responds that observation reveals that piety does not necessarily exempt one from suffering.
 - 1. In fact, it is frequently the case that "the tents of robbers prosper."
 - 2. Job thus defends his innocence - he does not claim that he is absolutely sinless, but he does believe that his misfortune is out of proportion with any transgression he might have committed.
- III. Elihu's position.
- A. Elihu, a fourth friend of Job's who enters the controversy later, is angry with Job's comforters because they condemned him and yet offered no solution.
 - B. He was further agitated with Job himself because he "justified himself rather than God."
 - 1. That is, he had been more concerned with his own honor than the Lord's.
 - 2. Also, Elihu contended that suffering is not necessarily penal - serves to teach, to strengthen, or it may be preventative in nature.
 - 3. Job listens in silence
- IV. God speaks to Job
- A. The Lord does not condescend to quibbling with Job; rather, He majestically overpowers him with a grand affirmation of His universal sovereignty as evidence by the unparalleled glories of the created world (Job 38 - 41).
 - B. This incomprehensible chronicle of divine power reduces Job to the proper level of humility.
 - C. Professor Newton Wray compares it to Peter's humiliation, "I am a sinful man," when he was so impressed with the awesome power of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 5:8-9).
 - D. Job thus confesses, "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (Job 42:3).
 - 1. Again, "I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).
- V. Job Is Blessed.
- A. Because Job maintained his integrity, he is commended and blessed by the Lord.
 - B. As to material prosperity, "Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).
 - C. He was again blessed with ten children.
 - D. The sterling character of this man of God is revealed by his prayer for his three pseudo-comforters.
 - E. Truly, he was a great man.