

Job

by Ross Callaghan

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- Author:** Unknown. The author was probably an Israelite (as he often uses God's name, Yahweh). Much of the story records discourses between Job and his friends. The author may have had access to oral or written records of these discourses or may have composed them as a story to communicate his message.
- Date:** May have been written during the period between Solomon's reign as King over Judah, and the exile in Babylon. Possibly around 1900BC.
- Job:** The character Job possibly lived late in the second millennium before Christ. Job came from the land of Uz which may have been in Edom (in modern day Jordan. Lamentations 4:21), or may have been a fictitious place. He was a rich farmer who measured his wealth in cattle; acted as a priest to his family, and lived for over 100 years.
- Type:** Wisdom literature. This type of literature uses stories to teach about God and provide wisdom for life. The story in Job was written to teach about human suffering and so may not have been a historical event. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are other Old Testament books classified as wisdom literature.
- Language:** The words of Job and his friends were translated from their original languages into Hebrew (and later into Aramaic, Greek, Latin etc., then into English for the translations of the Bible that we use today). In many places the original languages were unusual in their words and style, so the translators have come up with differences in translation and meaning in parts of the book, and in some places, have left sections out. (The Greek Septuagint version, for example, is 400 lines short of the Hebrew version). That's why parts of Job may be quite different in various translations.
- Purpose:** The Book of Job explores *theodicy* - ie. God's justice in an evil world. It asks questions like *What causes suffering? Why do righteous people suffer? Is God responsible for suffering? How can God be all powerful when there is so much suffering in the world? Can God really be loving and just when righteous people suffer?*

Many possible answers can be given for these questions. eg.

- *The righteous aren't really righteous at all. Through their sinfulness they bring suffering on themselves. Suffering is a direct consequence of peoples' sin.*
- *God isn't loving at all. He doesn't care whether people suffer. He is detached from peoples' experiences.*
- *God is a harsh judge. His judgement is based on punishing peoples' sin, rather than on justice.*
- *God causes suffering arbitrarily. eg. through storms, earthquakes, diseases, disasters and other 'acts of God'.*

These are pretty widely-held views! The Book of Job uses different characters to reflect some of these prevailing views (which are not very helpful for the sufferer!) and then uses Job to present the views of the one who is suffering. Out of this comes a personal and encouraging message for those who are suffering and who can't seem to understand how God fits into the situation they find themselves in.

- The introduction to the book suggests that God uses suffering to test us. In Chapter 1 Satan was permitted to afflict Job and test his righteousness, faith and loyalty to God. Job did not understand what was happening to him and, perhaps, was not meant to understand. He was being tested on whether he would remain true to God regardless of what happened to him.

- Job's three friends state that suffering is God's punishment on us for the wrong we have done. While it is true that there would be no suffering in the world if Adam and Eve had not sinned, it is not valid or fair to use this to say that because someone is suffering they must have sinned, and that the sin led directly to their suffering (although it may!).
- Elihu says that suffering is a way of restraining us so that we don't become self-righteous, and thus helps prevent us from getting into sin. Again there is some truth in this view because suffering does result in development of character. See Romans 5:3-5.
- Suffering is part of the universal human experience and results in a better knowledge of God and of yourself. Job certainly learnt this from the experiences he went through. See Job 42:1-6, Philippians 3:10.
- Suffering enabled Job to experience God's purposes for his life. For us the way to blessing is often through difficulties, trials and tribulations. The cross comes before the crown! See Romans 8:17-28, Philippians 2:5-11.
- Job finally recognised God's sovereignty and repented. He had learned much through his suffering and came out of it a better person and much better off materially. See Job 42:7-16. In the end Job did not need an answer to the question on why the righteous suffer. Through his suffering he had learnt that God is sovereign over all creation and that God is truly loving and just in His dealings with people.

Key verses:

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. 1:21,22

Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him; I will surely defend my ways to His face. 13:15

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes -I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! 19:25-27

But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold. My feet have closely followed His steps; I have kept to His way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread. 23:10-12

God comes in awesome majesty. The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in His justice and great righteousness, He does not oppress. Therefore, men revere him. 37:22-24

I know that You can do all things; no plan of Yours can be thwarted. 42:2

Prologue 1:1-5

The introductory verses show that Job was *blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil*. 1:1 He even burnt sacrifices for his seven sons and three daughters, just in case they had sinned!

Job's first test 1:6-22

The angels ((literally 'sons of God') came before God with Satan (literally 'accuser') as they were roaming to and fro throughout the earth. God asked if they had considered Job. *There is no-one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil*. 1:8 Satan said that Job could only be like that because God had protected him. If God would strike down everything he has, Job would *surely curse you to your face*. 1:11. God allowed Satan to harm all of Job's possessions, *but on the man himself do not lay a finger*. 1:12.

Job's sons, daughters, animals and servants were destroyed. Job's response was to say *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing*. 1:21,22

Job's second test 2:1- 13

The angels and Satan came before God a second time. God said that Job had maintained his integrity *though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.* 2:3 Satan said that Job would surely curse God if his flesh and bones were harmed. God allowed Satan to harm Job's body *but you must spare his life.* 2:6. Satan afflicted Job with sores so much so that Job's wife said he should curse God and die. But Job replied *"Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" In all this Job did not sin in what he said.* 2:10.

Three of Job's friends heard about his troubles and *came to sympathise with him and comfort him.* 2:11
The three friends were:

Eliphaz the Temanite Eliphaz was a spiritual man. He was a poet, and saw visions and dreams. Eliphaz provided Job with the voice of personal experience and inner illumination.

Bildad the Shuhite Bildad was a man who relied on his own authority. He provided Job with the voice of religious tradition and orthodoxy.

Zophar the Naamathite Zophar was a man with lots of worldly wisdom and common sense. He provided Job with the voice of human assumption and dogmatism.

Initially the three friends did not say anything to Job *because they saw how great his suffering was.* 2:13

(Later Job was also visited by **Elihu, the son of Barakel, the Buzite.** Elihu was an inspired teacher. He was brash and conceited but this was acceptable for teachers in the culture of the day).

Job's despair 3:1-26

Job cursed the day of his birth, effectively wishing that he hadn't been born. *Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?* 3:11 He then asks the questions that are considered in the rest of the book: *Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave/ Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?* 3:20-23 In other words "Why do the righteous suffer"? (But he still didn't curse God).



Debates between Job and his friends

Round 1. Chapters 4-14

- **Eliphaz speaks; Job replies. Chapters 4-7**

Eliphaz says that Job troubles are caused by his sin. *Those who plough evil and those who sow trouble reap it.* 4:8. He counsels Job to call on God because *Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For He wounds, but He also binds up; He injures but His hands also heal.* 5:17,18. Job, in despair, rejects the advice of his friend and wants to know what he has done wrong. *Teach me and I will be quiet; show me where I have been wrong. How painful are honest words! But what do your arguments prove?* 6:25,26. He despises his current life and says to God *If I have sinned, what have I done to You? Why do You not pardon my offences and forgive my sins?* 7:20,21.

- **Bildad speaks; Job replies. Chapters 8-10**

Bildad also says that Job's suffering is a result of his sin. *When your children sinned against Him, He gave them over to the penalty of their sin. But if you look to God and plead with the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, even now He will rouse Himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place.* 8:4-6. Job replies that he knows mortal human beings can't be righteous before God. But he also knows God is all powerful. *He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed; miracles that cannot be counted.* 9:10. Because of this *How can I dispute with Him? How can I find words to argue with Him? Though I were innocent, I could not answer Him; I could only plead with my Judge for mercy.* 9:14,15. Because he

knows he is guilty Job asks God not to condemn him but rather *tell me what charges You have against me.* 10:2. *Your hands shaped me and made me. Will You now turn and destroy me?* 10:8. He wishes that he had never been born!

- **Zophar speaks; Job replies. Chapters 11,12**

Zophar says that Job is suffering because he is self-righteous. He encourages Job to devote himself to God and put away the sin that is in his life. Then his life will be brighter and he will lose his fear. Job replies that God is all knowing and all powerful: *To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are His.* 12:13. He builds up and He pulls down and *in His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.* 12:10.

- **Job states his resentment for the advice his friends have given. Chapters 13,14.**

Job understands the way that God works and, based on this understanding, turns on his friends for giving him worthless advice. Job says that his trust is in God. *Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him.* 13:15. God's ways for mankind include troubles. *Man born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure. Man's days are determined; You have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.* 14:1,2,5 Job then looks forward to the day he will die, when these troubles will finally be over.

Round 2. Chapters 15-21

- **Eliphaz speaks; Job replies. Chapters 15-17**

Eliphaz says that Job's sinfulness is causing him to speak as he does. *What is man that he could be pure, or one born of woman that he could be righteous? Man is vile and corrupt, and drinks up evil like water.* 15:14,15. Job is deceiving himself if he thinks otherwise, and is reaping the benefits of his sinfulness. Job replies that his friends are *miserable comforters.* 16:2. He recognises that God has dealt harshly with him *yet my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure.* 16:17 He knows his life is short *nevertheless the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger.* 17:9. This gives him hope.

- **Bildad speaks; Job replies. Chapters 18-19**

Bildad attacks Job saying that he is not being sensible. Wicked people like Job always have problems. *Surely such is the dwelling of an evil man; such is the place of one who knows not God.* 18:21. Job replies by saying *if it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone.* 19:4. In his current condition he says *I am skin and bones; I have escaped by only the skin of my teeth.* 19:20. He asks his friends to have pity on him rather than pull him down. Job then gives one of the great declarations in the whole Bible: *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes - I and not another. How my heart yearns within me!* 19:25-27.

- **Zophar speaks; Job replies. Chapters 20-21**

Zophar describes what will happen to the wicked. They will not enjoy the fruits of their lives and distress will overtake them. God will pour His anger upon them and they *will perish forever.* 20:7. Job replies that the righteous and the wicked are both under God's hand. Even though it may seem that the wicked are not judged for their actions, God knows. *Can anyone teach knowledge to God, since He judges even the highest?* 21:22.

Round 3. Chapters 22-31

- **Eliphaz speaks; Job replies. Chapters 22-24**

Eliphaz now charges Job directly: *Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?* 22:5. He then offers Job a number of great remedies that would bring him back into relationship with God, and restore his situation. *Submit to God and be at peace with Him.... Accept instruction from His mouth and lay up His words in your mouth... Return to the Almighty...* 22:21-23. Unfortunately the remedies don't apply to Job as his predicament was not caused by his sin. Job replies by re-stating his trust in God: *He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. My feet have closely*

followed His steps; I have kept to His way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread. 23:10-12. He recognises that God can do what He pleases in peoples' lives and that this means difficult things may happen, regardless of whether they are good or evil. His eyes are on their ways. For a little while they are exalted, and then they are gone; they are brought low and gathered up like all the others. 24:23,24.

- **Bildad speaks; Job replies. Chapters 25-27:6**

Bildad says that no-one can be righteous before God. Job replies by describing God's greatness and power and reiterates that *as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit. ... I will not deny my integrity. 27:3-5.*

- **Zophar speaks Chapters 27:7-31**

(It is possible that Zophar speaks in 27:7-23 and that Job replies in Chapters 29-31 although this is not recorded in the text or its headings. Alternatively Chapters 27 and 29-31 are all Job's reply to Bildad). Godless people will always suffer because *this is the fate God allots to the wicked. 27:13.* The suffering will affect all aspects of their lives including their families.

- **Job's hymn to wisdom. Chapter 28.**

For 25 chapters Job and his friends have been locked in an increasingly unfruitful conversation about the cause of Job's suffering. In Chapter 28 Job interrupts the debate by showing that wisdom is elusive and that only God knows the way to it. He shows that wisdom is a precious jewel; it can't be bought and it is not found in major forces like the Sea, Destruction and Death. Only God knows the fullness of wisdom. *God understands the way to it and He alone knows where it dwells. 28:23.*

So wisdom will be the way that Job's problems will be resolved. *The fear of the Lord - that is wisdom. 28:28.* Chapter 28 thus provides a 'time out' from the fruitless debate, and leads in to the longer, more fruitful (and wise) speeches of Elihu and God in Chapters 32-41.

- **Job replies. Chapters 29-31**

Job remembers the days before his suffering when he was *in my prime and God's intimate friendship blessed my house. 29:4.* Now others mock him and he feels his life is ebbing away. He cries out to God, but God doesn't answer. *When I looked for good evil came; when I looked for light, then came darkness. 30:26.* Yet Job still maintains his innocence: *If I have walked in falsehood or my foot has hurried after deceit - let God weigh me in honest scales and He will know that I am blameless. 31:5,6.* He has not been immoral; been just and generous; has not trusted in money; has not been idolatrous, and has been hospitable and faithful in his relationships. Neither God or his accusers can challenge this.

This section of the book closes with *The words of Job are ended. 31:40*

Elihu speaks. Chapters 32-37

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar stopped speaking to Job *because he was righteous in his own eyes. 32:1.*

Elihu was younger than them and had waited to speak. When he saw they had nothing more to say he became *angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. and angry with the three friends because they had found no way to refute Job. 32:2,3.*

Elihu was brash and conceited, but these qualities were acceptable in the culture of the day. Even though he was young he wanted Job to listen to him because he was speaking impartially, and his *words come from an upright heart. 33:3.* He accuses Job of seeing God as his enemy and says that *God is greater than man. 33:12.*

God speaks in many ways: through dreams, visions, warnings and chastening. He does this to *tell a man what is right for him. 33:23.* and so that he can be *restored by God to his righteous state. 33:26.* That's how he may be redeemed and *the light of life may shine on him. 33:30.*



Elihu then speaks to the other 'friends'. He says that God can't do evil, and that He *repays a man for what he has done; He brings upon him what his conduct deserves. It is unthinkable that God would do wrong; that the Almighty would pervert justice.* 34:11,12. God is in charge. He is just and impartial. He knows what men are doing; there is nothing hidden from Him and He will punish men for their wrongdoing.

And that includes Job! For *to his sin he adds rebellion; scornfully he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God.* 34:37. Job has called out "*Where is God my Maker?*" but *God does not answer when men cry out because of the arrogance of the wicked. Indeed God does not listen to their empty plea; the Almighty pays no attention to it.* 35:12,13.

Elihu continues to speak "*on God's behalf*". 36:2. If evil men will listen to Him; repent and accept His correction He will prosper them. *If they obey and serve Him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity, and their years in contentment. But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge.* 36:12 He is doing this for Job, even though Job may not understand it. *God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; He does great things beyond our understanding.* 37:5. Job should consider God's wonders and recognise that *God comes in awesome majesty. The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in His justice and great righteousness, He does not oppress. Therefore men revere Him, for does He not have regard for all the wise in heart?* 37:22-24

Much of what the three friends, and especially Elihu, have said is valid! But it is not true for Job, and it misrepresents God. So, in Chapters 38-41 God speaks to Job, and that is when Job finally makes sense of his situation!

God speaks; Job responds Chapters 38-42:6.

The Lord then spoke, asking Job a series of questions. The questions all help Job to see that God is sovereign over creation, the world, nature, wisdom, and life and death. God is central, not Job. *Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? Let him who accuses God answer Him!* 40:2.

Through this Job realises that he is unworthy and that his accusations against God were out of line. *I am unworthy - how can I reply to You. I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer - twice, but I will say no more.* 40:4,5.

God spoke again to Job revealing His great power, and compares this to Job's feebleness. *Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.* 41:10,11.

Job then realises that God truly is sovereign and can do what He wishes with those He has created. I know that you can do all things; no plan of Yours can be thwarted. 42:2. He responds by repenting before God: *My ears had heard of You but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.* 42:5,6.

So Job doesn't find the answer to His question on why he is suffering. In encountering God he loses the question he was asking, and comes face to face with the Sovereign Lord. He responds in worship and repentance. God is God and that is enough.

Epilogue: Job's restoration

The Lord was angry with Job's three friends because they had *not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.* 42:7. They offered a sacrifice and Job prayed for them, *and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.* 42:9. The Lord then made Job *prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.* 42:10. *The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first.* 42:12.

After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so he died, old and full of years. 42:16,17.

Discussion questions

The Book of Job is quite unlike any other book in the Bible. Why do you think that it is included in the Bible? What unique message does it give, that is not found elsewhere in the Bible?

Do you think that Job was a historical character, or that the Book of Job is just a story, written to illustrate an important message?

The Book of Job is concerned with the question *Why do the righteous suffer?* How do you answer this question? How does the Book of Job answer this question?

God is a God of love. How do you reconcile this with the fact that many fine Christians (who God loves) have to endure terrible suffering?

If someone you love was suffering greatly and was told that it was happening because God was judging them for their sinfulness. How would you react to this? What would you say in response?

Job's friends were probably well meaning, and were seeking to 'help God' in their interactions with Job. We know they were not helpful to Job, and were not genuinely representing God. What do you learn from this about ministering to people who are going through difficult times?

What have you learned from your study of the Book of Job? How will this help you serve others in the future? How will this help you endure suffering in the future?