



# JOB

## Survey of the Old Testament: The Writings

Fall 2006

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### Introduction

#### Name

The book is titled *Job* in both the original Hebrew bible and our English bible. It is named after the main character. There is no consensus over the meaning of Job's name. Some scholars consider Job to be a fictional or mythical character. However, the book presents Job as a real person.

Job is said to live in the "land of Uz," (1:1). There are several people names Uz in the bible, but most likely it is referring to the descendent of Esau (Genesis 36:28), meaning Job lived in the land of Edom, which was located south east of Israel. Job is described as "the greatest of all the men of the east" (1:3b).

#### Date & Textual Observations

Most scholars believe Job lived during the time of the patriarchs. The few historical and family allusions in the book show connections to names and places found in the book of Israel. However, there is considerable debate as to when the book itself was actually written.

Some scholars would point to a late date for the writing of the book, with some saying it was written during the time of Solomon, and others as late as the post-exilic period. The chief evidence for a late date is the well-developed theology. Job and his "friends" are monotheistic and Job at least believes in the resurrection of the dead. Some scholars believe that these two characteristics of Judaism were not developed until late in the history of the Jewish people.

Other scholars debate that these two characteristics were late in development, and further point out that Job and his friends were not Israelites at all, but Edomites who still understood and worshipped God. This gives us significant evidence that the worship of Yahweh was in no way limited to the nation of Israel during the time of the patriarchs.

Furthermore, the language of Job is very unique in the bible. The Hebrew in Job appears to be a very ancient form of the language, with strong influences from ancient Aramaic and Arabic. Job contains numerous Hebrew words that are found nowhere else in the bible. This has presented scholars with much difficulty when translating the book, and other languages of the region must be consulted to determine the meaning of words and grammatical structures.

Furthermore, there are many discrepancies between the oldest Hebrew text (the Masoretic text), dated around AD 800, and the earlier Greek translations of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) dated around 200 BC. Most notably, some of the Septuagint manuscripts are missing large sections from the book.

While this makes the book difficult for scholars to do an accurate textual criticism of the book and provide us with a good translation, it does suggest that this is one of the oldest books written in the bible. Job, therefore, is probably among the very first books of the bible written.

#### Nature & Author of the Book

Job is one of the world's greatest literary masterpieces ever written. The poetry of Job is recognized by both biblical and secular scholars as among the most beautiful and elegant ever written. Unfortunately, we lose much of the brilliance of Job's poetry in our translation.

While the preface and epilogue are written in prose, the arguments throughout the book are all poetic, using Hebrew parallelism throughout. However, the parallelism is not just in subject matter, but also in cadence. Each line in the parallel contains same number of syllables in the Hebrew. This

pattern is maintained throughout nearly 40 chapters of poetry. The construction of such work would take the work of a literary genius.

Unfortunately, we have no idea who this genius was. Some early Jewish scholars attribute the book to Moses, although there is no evidence whatsoever of that. We must consider the author of the book to be anonymous.

## Theme

The book of Job addresses the universal question, “why do bad things happen to good people.” This question is still being asked today, and Job provides an answer which many people find uncomfortable. Bad things happen to good people because God allows it to happen. If you take issue with this, then God’s response is simple (Job 39:2-4):

*"Who is this that darkens counsel  
By words without knowledge?  
Now gird up your loins like a man  
And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!  
Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?  
Tell Me, if you have understanding."*

## Structure

The structure of Job is laid out simply through the change in speakers throughout the book. The book begins with a prose *preface* that explains the circumstances that the speakers are debating. In a parallel form, the book then also ends with a prose *epilogue* that explains the events that follow the debate.

In between these prose book ends are a series of speeches given by Job, his three “friends” Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, a young philosopher named Elihu, and finally Yahweh himself. The first half of these speeches are made in a series of three dialogues. Each round of dialogue contains speeches by one of Job’s friends followed by Job’s response. The second half contain monologues, first by Job, then Elihu, and finally by Yahweh himself.

Preface	The Dialogues			The Monologues			Epilogue
	Round One	Round Two	Round Three	Job's Righteousness	Elihu's Reprimand	Yahweh's Response	
1-3	4-14	15-21	22-26	27-31	32-37	38-41	42

## Preface (Chapters 1-3)

### The Setting (1:1-12)

The book opens with a description of Job. We learn that he had 10 children, 7 sons and 3 daughters (1:2). He was a very wealthy man, with thousands of sheep, camels and other animals, as well as servants (1:3). Job was also a very pious man who would continually offer sacrifices for himself and his children just in case they had sinned against God (1:5).

Job’s upright character has caught the attention of the Lord, for one day when the Adversary<sup>1</sup> wanders into heaven, God boasts in the righteousness of Job. The Adversary suggests that the only reasons Job is so faithful to God is because of the blessings God has poured out on him. If he were

<sup>1</sup> According to Kidner (58), throughout the Old Testament, the Hebrew term, Satan, is used with the definite article (i.e. “the Satan,” or “the adversary”), suggesting it is a title rather than a proper name.

cursed rather than blessed, Job would not be found faithful. God therefore, permits the Adversary to take from Job all those blessings.

There is both literary and theological significance to this supernatural wager between God and the Adversary. First, from a literary standpoint, it gives the reader the answer to the debate between Job and his “comforters.” His friends will argue his suffering is a result of some hidden sin in his life. Job, however, will maintain his innocence before God. For Job’s friends, the answer to the question, “why do bad things happen to good people,” is that they don’t. Instead, if something bad has happened, then that person must not be good. But the preface informs the reader that Job is not some hidden sinner who deserves the suffering he receives. Instead, he it is his very innocence before God<sup>2</sup> which has made him a pawn in some heavenly wager. Job’s his suffering is allowed or, more controversially, indirectly caused by God.

From a theological standpoint, there are two significant observations that can be made from this interaction between God and the Adversary. First, God is clearly in charge. Satan is not God’s equal in any way. Job denies any dualistic understanding of the universe. There is no ying and yang, no good and evil, battling for sovereignty or maintaining balance in the universe. Even the Adversary must come to ask permission of God to afflict his servant Job. This leads to the second observation. If the Adversary must come to God for permission, this affirms God’s sovereignty. If, therefore, God is sovereign, then we cannot say that suffering is something that God does not cause or will for us. Suffering is part of God’s plan and God allows or even causes suffering for his saints. This is a difficult theological teaching, but one which brings us to the ultimate conclusion of the book.

### **Job’s Suffering (1:13-3:26)**

The Adversary then attacks Job. First he takes away his family and his possessions. When this doesn’t evoke the proper response in Job, he then obtains permission from God to afflict Job’s health. Job has lost absolutely everything he holds dear.

Job’s response is not stoic. He doesn’t just maintain a stiff upper lip and bear through it. Job grieves mightily. If you have ever experienced the loss of a loved one, or have watched someone who has lost a child to death, the grief and the pain is unbearable. Job has not just lost one child, but ten, and his grief is ten-fold. He tore his robe, shaved his head and grieved (1:20). It is not a sin to grieve and express sorrow, even in the most dynamic of ways. Grief is a natural and righteous response to suffering.

Chapter 3 presents the depths of Job’s lament. He curses the very day on which he was born (3:1). He maintains that he would be better off is he had been aborted from his mother’s womb (3:11, 16). He is afraid, full of dread, and is ill at ease (3:25). Job has not accepted his situation, but is grieving deeply (3:26).

Job, however, maintains his faith in God. While it may grieve him, he recognizes that God is sovereign and is deserving of praise even when he takes his family and his wealth from him. Job 1:21:

*Naked I came from my mother’s womb  
And naked I shall return there.  
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away  
Blessed be the name of the Lord.*

### **The Dialogues (Chapters 4-26)**

Job’s friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, have gathered around him to grieve with him. There immediate response to Job is one that serves as an example. For seven days they just sit and grieve with him in silence (2:13). For most who are suffering, what is not needed are platitudes or

<sup>2</sup> Derek Kidner. *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes: An Introduction to Wisdom Literature*. (Downers Grove IL: Intervarsity Press, 1985), 57.

explanations, but just a silent presence. Unfortunately, after seven days Job's friends grow impatient with Job's grief and they open their mouth to try to offer an explanation as to why he is suffering.

## Round One (Chapters 4-14)

### Eliphaz (Chapters 4-5)

Eliphaz the Temanite begins. His explanation for Job's suffering is that it is a result of some hidden sin. He believes in the doctrine of karma. You reap what you sow. God doesn't punish the innocent (4:7). Instead those who plow iniquity will sow suffering (3:8). Clearly Job suffers because he has sinned against God. Therefore, Job should not be upset with God. Instead, he should see God's discipline as an act of love from God (5:17). This is certainly a biblical concept. Does not the Lord discipline those whom he loves (Hebrews 12:6, Proverbs 3:11)?

### Job (Chapters 6-7)

Job responds, first by wishing that God would just be done with him and kill him (6:8-9). But in the midst of his grief he denies Eliphaz's contention that the suffering is a result of some sin. Job believes that suffering is universal. We are all condemned to a life of hard labor (7:1), and we are all condemned to die (7:7). Good or bad, righteous or evil, all will suffer labor and death. Furthermore, if he is guilty, he asks Eliphaz to show him where how he has sinned (6:24, 7:20-21).

### Bildad (Chapter 8)

Bildad responds to Job by proclaiming that Job is being blasphemous towards God. If God allows the innocent to suffer, that makes God out to be unfair and unjust (8:4). No, God does not reject the innocent, nor does his support the guilty (8:20).

### Job (Chapter 9-10)

Job affirms that God is just and that we cannot argue with God's righteous judgments (9:2-4, 15). God is all-powerful, making the stars of the heavens (9:9), and we cannot fathom the greatness of God (9:10). Nonetheless, Job maintains his innocence (9:21, 10:7).

### Zophar (Chapter 11)

Zophar responds that if nothing else, Job is guilty of being boastful and arrogant (11:1-4). Indeed, all Job needs to do is repent and God would forgive him and cause his suffering to become a distant memory (11:13-16).

### Job (Chapter 12-14)

Job responds by telling his would be comforters that they aren't the only smart people around, and that he too has some intelligence (12:1-3, 13:2). Job knows that God is in control of all things and he gives and takes away according to his purposes. Indeed he makes nations great and weakens kings (12:23-24). He is struggling with God, and their platitudes are of no help (13:3-5). Indeed, Job calls their maxims as "proverbs of ashes" (13:12). While he does not understand why God has done this to him, nonetheless he does not lose faith in God. Indeed, even if God kills him, he will not lose his hope in God (13:15). Nonetheless, he is still in a debate and dispute with God (13:15).

No one, even the righteous, escape suffering. All people end up dying (14:1-2). When you die, that is it. There is no healing or restoration (14:7, 10, 12). Therefore you cannot say that only the guilty suffer, for all must go through the suffering of death.

## Round Two (Chapters 15-21)

### Eliphaz (Chapter 15)

Round two starts in chapter 15 as Eliphaz responds to Job's final speech in round one. Like Bildad and Zophar, Eliphaz contends that such a belief is blasphemous and that Job is guilty of arrogance to think that he doesn't deserve what he has received from God. (15:1-6). Who does Job think he is? Is he the only one who can hear God (15:7-8)? After all, everyone knows that it is only the wicked that receive tribulation (15:17-20).

### Job (Chapter 16-17)

Job calls his friend "sorry comforters" with "no limit to windy words" (16:1-3). God has shattered him and caused his suffering (16:11-12). His friends don't believe his innocence, and so he appeals to God as a witness to his innocence (16:19-21), but God cannot respond. Job wonders, then who will be his advocate (17:3)? Since God will not stand up for him, he is ready to die (17:15-16).

### Bildad (Chapter 18)

Bildad is offended. Does Job think that they are all stupid (18:3)? Clearly it is only the wicked who are punished (18:5ff).

### Job (Chapter 19)

Bildad's words torture and insult Job (19:1-3). If the wicked are the ones who are punished, then why is there so much injustice in the world (19:7)? Nobody wants to believe that the innocent suffer, and so Job has become an embarrassment to his friends and family (19:13-14). Even his wife is offended by him (19:17).

While his friends have abandoned him, Job knows where to place his trust: in the Lord. He declares:

*As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,  
And at last He will take His stand on the earth  
Even after my skin is destroyed  
Yet from my flesh I shall see God (Job 19:25-26).*

There may be no justice in the current life, but his redeemer will come and raise him from the dead. While the wicked may prosper in this life and the innocent suffer in the here and now, justice and judgment are coming (19:29).

### Zophar (Chapter 20)

Zophar counter Job that it may seem that the wicked prosper in this life, but such prosperity is short lived (20:5). In time their iniquity will be revealed and their prosperity will be taken from them (20:27-28). He is implying that Job, who was prosperous for a time, is just now getting what he deserves from God.

### Job (Chapter 21)

Job counters that experience shows that the wicked often remain powerful throughout their lifetime and even the descendents of the wicked remain well off (21:7-8). It is rare for us to see the wicked punished in this lifetime (21:17). No, true justice will only come on judgment day (21:30).

## Round Three (Chapters 22-26)

### Eliphaz (Chapter 22)

Eliphaz takes up the argument again as we begin round three. If Job is innocent, then is God punishing him for being righteous (22:4)? Come on, Job, don't you realize that it is because of your

great and unending wickedness (22:5)? Eliphaz lists off an imaginary list of Job's sins. So convinced is Eliphaz that God only allows the wicked to suffer, that he ignores the righteous life of Job and invents sins for him! Job needs to stop denying his sin, for he can't hide his in from God (22:12-15). If only Job would give up and yield to God, then he would be at peace (22:21-23).

### **Job (Chapter 23-24)**

Job can no longer plead his case to his friends, for they've lost all sense of reality. If only he could present his case to God (23:3-7). But unfortunately he cannot appeal to God, for God seems distant and unresponsive to him (23:8-9). Yet, nonetheless, he maintains his innocence of Eliphaz's charges (23:12).

It is a puzzle to Job that God should allow those who do not know Him would prosper (24:1). The only hope for justice is that someday they will die and be condemned to Sheol (23:19).

### **Bildad (Chapter 25)**

Bildad responds in abbreviated fashion. God is great, and man is sinful. Job just needs to acknowledge his proper place before the Lord.

### **Job (Chapter 26)**

Job responds with sarcasm. "What a help you are to the weak" (26:1). He does not deny the greatness or the justice of God. He only contends that this justice will come to the wicked after their spirits depart (26:5-6).

## **The Monologues (Chapters 27-41)**

### **Job's Righteousness (Chapters 27-31)**

#### **Job Continues: The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom (Chapter 27-28)**

The third round is abandoned before Zophar has a chance to speak. The text now moves from dialogue to monologue. Job begins with his discourse in chapter 27-28 as he expounds upon the nature of wisdom.

Job continues to declare his innocence (27:2, 6). The wicked will indeed get what he deserves (27:8-9). The wicked may prosper in this life, but after death, they will face terror (27:19-20).

Humans mine the earth for silver and gold (28:1-2). They can find precious metals and iron in the farthest depths of the earth. However, humans rarely seek wisdom with the same diligence. Yet, wisdom is far more precious than gold (12:12-15). The foundation of wisdom is to recognize the wrath of God on those who are wicked. Thus, "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom."

#### **Job Continues II (Chapter 29-31)**

Job again takes up his discourse, beginning longing for the good old days. However, the good old days are not when he had wealth. Instead, it was when God was with him and he had his family (29:2-4). Job recounts those days, and the righteous acts he performed (29:15-16).

But those days are over. Now he is mocked (30:1), taunted (30:9), and abhorred (30:10). God no longer is with him. Indeed, God does not answer him at all (30:20). Job then pleads with God to remember how much Job delighted in justice and took care of the suffering (30:25). Yet when he expected good things to happen, God sent him suffering (30:26).

Job is crying out to God, "I'm innocent!" He does this by listing off various sins, asking, "if I did this or that sin, then condemn me."

- If I walked in falsehood (31:5)
- If my heart has been enticed by a woman (31:9)
- If I have despised my slaves (31:13)

- If I failed the poor (31:16)
- If I put my confidence in gold (31:24)
- If I rejoiced in the extinction of my enemy (31:29)

But Job has not hidden his sins, as did Adam (31:33). But there is no one to hear him declare his innocence, and God does not answer him (31:35).

## Elihu's Reprimand (Chapters 32-37)

### Elihu (Chapter 32-33)

Upon hearing Job's boastfulness about his righteousness, the young man Elihu becomes angry. How could Job hope to justify himself this way before God (32:2)?

Elihu begins by acknowledging his youthfulness and he acts with proper deference to his elders (32:6). However, Elihu claims that just because someone is old means they are more wise (32:9). Therefore he needs to speak. Furthermore, as a young man, he is not afraid to give the straight scoop (32:17, 22).

Clearly, Job is not righteous (33:12), for he has complained against God, and that in and of itself is a sin (33:13). What Job must do is confess his sin and then he will be redeemed (33:26-28).

### Elihu Continues (Chapter 34)

Elihu continues his monologue in chapter 34, affirming again that Job is evil by stating that being righteous doesn't result in prosperity (34:7-9). Surely this is an affront to the justice of God. God does not do any wrong (34:10, 12). No, Job is answering this challenge with the same arguments a wicked person would make (34:36-37).

### Elihu Continues II (Chapter 35)

Elihu asks Job if he thinks he is better than God (35:2). Elihu explains to Job that God isn't speaking to him because God doesn't listen to the wicked (35:10, 15-16).

### Elihu Continues III (Chapter 36-37)

Elihu drones on with his fourth discourse. Elihu now will presume to defend God (36:2). God is mighty (36:5), just (36:6-7), exalted and unsearchable (36:26). God controls all of nature (37:1-13). No one can explain God's wonders (37:14-15). He is beyond us (37:23) and He will bring about all justice (37:24). God is ignoring Job because Job thinks he is smarter than God and that God owes him something (37:24).

## Yahweh's Response (Chapters 38-41)

### Yahweh Speaks (38:1-40:2)

In chapter 38, then we see the response of God. It is almost as if he is fed up with everyone speaking on his behalf. Finally now here is this young punk, Elihu, who presumes to defend Him out of wisdom. Yahweh can no longer be silent. He comes forth in a whirlwind to defend himself.

God begins by wondering who it is that presumes to defend Him. "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge" (38:2). He tells us to get ready to defend ourselves, for he is about to challenge our understanding (38:3). After all:

*Job 38:4 NASB "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding,*

Do we understand the blueprints of the universe (38:6-7)? Are we able to command nature (38:12-18)? Do we understand the nature of light and energy (38:19-24)? Can we control the weather (39:25-30)? Can we control the stars (38:31-33)? Can we understand and control the animals (38:39-39:30)?

If we can't do any of these things, then what right do we have to question God?

*Job 40:1-2 NASB Then the LORD said to Job, (2) "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it."*

Who can find fault in how he treats us, even if he causes suffering as great as Job's. God is sovereign. God is the creator. He can cause and allow whatever he wants, and we, as his creatures, have no place to question the lot in life he has chosen for us.

### **Job (40:3-5)**

Job responds with humility before the Lord. He recognizes his own insignificance before God. He'll shut up now, for God has spoken (40:3-5).

### **Yahweh Continues (40:6-41:34)**

Yahweh continues then with a description of two amazing beasts, the behemoth and the leviathan. There is much conjecture as to what these beasts might be. The behemoth has been compared to the hippopotamus, a mammoth, or an elephant. The leviathan has been compared to a whale, a crocodile, or even a fire-breathing dragon. It is not clear from the original text exactly what these animals are. But it is not necessary to identify the animal to get the point.

The parallel between 38:3 and 40:7 tell us that the point is the same. We cannot condemn the judgment of God (40:8). We cannot match the strength of God (40:9). We cannot even save ourselves (40:14).

The God who created the great animals, the behemoth and the leviathan, is too complex and deep for us to understand. We cannot even understand why these animals do what they do. How can we hope to understand the God who created them?

## **Epilogue (Chapter 42)**

### **Job's Repentance(42:1-6)**

In chapter 42, Job states, "I have declared that which I do not understand" (42:3). He repents of his arrogance for presuming that he could understand why he was in his current state of suffering, let alone demand an explanation from God. The cause of his suffering was beyond his ability to understand. It had nothing to do with righteousness or wickedness, but was part of a grand cosmic design to bring glory to God and glory to Job. Job needed to trust in God's goodness and control, even when he had no way of seeing the ultimate cause of his suffering.

### **Job's Recompense (42:7-9)**

The Lord's rebuke for Job was mild compared to that which he gave to Job's friends. He is angry at their judgment of Job and their presumption of his sin. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, therefore, give an offering to the Lord to atone for their sins while Job prays for them.

### **Job's Restoration (42:10-17)**

Job is then restored. God returns to him his wealth, having twice as much livestock as before. He has ten more children. He lives to be 140 years old and is able to see he is great-great grandsons be born.

While Job is restored, the lesson of the book is not that if we are just patient enough through adversity, that God will restore us to prosperity. There are millions of Christian martyrs who suffered to the point of death without restoration. In fact, Jesus himself suffered the ultimate in tribulation on the cross. He even pleaded with God, asking for the cup to be removed from him (Matthew 26:39), and questioning, "my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

If Jesus experienced pain and suffering, to the point of death, why would we expect anything less? Is a disciple greater than his master (Matthew 10:24)?

We should not expect that we will ever find justice in this world. Just the opposite is true. Jesus tells us to expect suffering and tribulation.

*John 16:33 NASB "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."*

Job suffered and grieved. He wrestled with God. He questioned God. And yet he was a righteous man, for in the end he never gave up faith in the Almighty God. We may not like our suffering. It may wound and torment us. But we must never lose sight that God is sovereign. He can choose for us prosperity or poverty. He can choose for us health or sickness. He can choose for us martyrdom or glory.

We should not expect that the wicked will suffer while the righteous prosper. We should not expect justice in this world. Our hope lies not in justice that this world can offer, but only in that which God will eventually bring about. Just as Job saw that justice comes in the judgment, so also, it is in glory that we will find our hope.

*Romans 8:17-18 NASB and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

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