

The Book of Job Introduction



The Book of Job has long been praised as a masterpiece of literature. Consider these quotes:

“Tomorrow, if all literature was to be destroyed and it was left to me to retain one work only, I should save the Book of Job.” (Victor Hugo, 1802-1885, French poet, novelist, and playwright. Among his novels: *Les Miserable*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.)

“...the greatest poem, whether of ancient or modern literature.” (Alfred Lord Tennyson, 1809-1892, English poet, one of the great representative figures of the Victorian Age. He wrote “The Charge of the Light Brigade” and “The Lady of Shalot”)

“The Book of Job, taken as a mere work of literary genius, is one of the most wonderful productions of any age or of any language.” (Daniel Webster, 1782-1852, American statesman, famed for his oratorical skills)

We’re going to learn what prompts that kind of praise. Many *modern* Christians know very little about the Book of Job. Perhaps it’s because many tend to neglect the Old Testament altogether. Why is that? Yet, St. Paul wrote of the value of the Old Testament scriptures:

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. (Rom. 15:4)

Note that the Old Testament was written for our learning, that it provides patience and comfort, and as such can be a source of hope. This is especially true with the story of Job.

The Place of Job in the Old Testament

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. They are given this title because they are written mostly in *poetic* style in contrast to the *narrative* style of other books. They are also often referred to as “Wisdom Literature” (especially Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes).

The 19th century evangelist Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) offered this concise summary of the five books:

- **Job - How to suffer**
- **Psalms - How to pray**
- **Proverbs - How to act (behave)**
- **Ecclesiastes - How to enjoy**
- **Song of Solomon - How to love**

Author and Date of Writing

Who wrote the book, and when? No one knows with certainty. Jewish tradition attributes the book to Moses, and other authors have been suggested (Job, Elihu, Solomon, Isaiah, Hezekiah; and Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe). One commentary has said, "*All that can be said with certainty is that the author was a loyal Hebrew who was not strictly bound by the popular belief that assumed suffering was always the direct result of sin*" (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown).

Because the author is unknown, its date has been hotly debated among scholars. Most conservative scholars think it was written before Moses (pre 1500 BC), making it one of the oldest books of the Bible

The book's divine inspiration was accepted by the Jews and affirmed in the New Testament. Paul quotes from it in his writings:

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness" (1 Cor. 3:19 with Job 5:13).

Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? (Rom. 11:35 with Job 4:11).

The Historicity of the Book

Even though inspired, are we to take the events described in it as historically accurate? There are several reasons for believing that they are:

- The style of the opening and close of the book certainly conform to other Biblical narratives that are historical (ref. 1:1 with 1 Sam. 1:1 and Luke 1:5).
- In Ezekiel 14:13-14, Job is mentioned along with Noah and Daniel, two other figures of history.

“Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness,” declares the Lord GOD.”

- James, the Lord’s brother, refers to Job as an example of perseverance:
“Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.” (James 5:11)

The Setting of the Book

The historical events appear to be set in the “Patriarchal” period (i.e., sometime between Noah and Moses). There are no allusions to the Law of Moses in the book, but there is a mention of a flood (22:16). Job functions as a priest in offering sacrifices for his family (1:5), similar to what we find with Abraham (ref. Gen. 12:7). His longevity is typical of the patriarchs:

After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation (Job 42:16). Job was 70 years old at the start of the book, thus he died at the age of 210.

When Serug had lived 30 years, he became the father of Nahor. And after he became the father of Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and had other sons and daughters. When Nahor had lived 29 years, he became the father of Terah. And after he became the father of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and daughters. After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran... Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran (Gen. 11:22-26,32).

For such reasons, we would place him somewhat contemporary with Abraham (i.e., about 2000 BC).

The Purpose of the Book

It is common to suggest that the purpose of the book is to answer the age-old question, “Why does God allow the righteous to suffer?” That is certainly the question Job raises, but it is worthy to note that he himself never receives a direct answer.

Nor is one given by the author, other than to answer Satan’s challenge, “Does Job fear God for nothing?” The readers of the book are privileged to know of the challenge of Satan, and that God allows Job to suffer in answer to that challenge, but Job himself is never told of this. Therefore, the book doesn’t answer the question, “*Why do the righteous suffer,*” but rather “*How should the righteous suffer?*”

While Job’s questions and complaints often come close to charging God with wrong; he never crosses the line, and humbly submits to God when told that the answers to his questions are beyond his ability to understand. Thus the book shows us how the righteous should bear up under suffering. As St. James wrote, “*You have heard of the steadfastness of Job*” (James 5:11).

Some Lessons from the Book

- Man isn’t always able to subject the painful experiences of human existence to a meaningful analysis—God’s workings are beyond man’s ability to fathom. Man simply cannot tie all the “loose ends” of the Lord’s purposes together. We must learn to trust in God, no matter the circumstances.
- Suffering is not always the result of personal sin. The erroneous conclusion drawn by Job’s friends is that suffering is *always* a consequence of sin. Job proves that this is not the case.
- Suffering may be allowed as a strengthening and demonstration of one’s spirituality—God allowed Job to suffer to prove to Satan what kind of man Job really was. What confidence God had in Job!

The book paints a beautiful picture of “patience”—Patience describes the trait of one who is able to abide under the weight of trials. From the “patience of Job”, we learn what it means to maintain faithfulness to God, even under great trials in which we do not understand what is happening.

The book also prepares the way for the coming of Jesus Christ!

His coming is anticipated in several ways:

- Job longs for a mediator between himself and God: “*If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both,*” (Job 9:33). “*Yet if there is an angel on his side as a mediator, one out of a thousand, to tell a man what is right for him...*” (Job 33:23). Jesus is that mediator: “*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 2:5).

- Job confessed his faith in the Redeemer who would one day come: *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth”* (Job 19:25).
- Christ is that Redeemer: *“In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace”* (Eph. 1:7).

Brief Outline

I. Job's Distress (1-3)

- A. His Prosperity (1:1-5)
- B. His Adversity (1:6-2:13)
- C. His Perplexity (3)

II. Job's Defense (4-37)

- A. The First Round (4-14)
 - 1. Eliphaz (4-5)_ Job's reply (6-7)
 - 2. Bildad (8)_ Job's reply (9-10)
 - 3. Zophar (11)_ Job's reply (12-14)
- B. The Second Round (15-21)
 - 1. Eliphaz (15)_ Job's reply (16-17)
 - 2. Bildad (18)_ Job's reply (19)
 - 3. Zophar (20)_ Job's reply (21)
- C. The Third Round (22-37)
 - 1. Eliphaz (22)_ Job's reply (23-24)
 - 2. Bildad (25)_ Job's reply (26-31)
- D. Young Elihu Speaks (32-37)
 - 1. Contradicting Job's friends (32)
 - 2. Contradicting Job himself (33)
 - 3. Proclaiming God's justice, goodness, and majesty (34-37)

III. Job's Deliverance (38-42)

- A. God Humbles Job (38:1-42:6)
 - 1. Through questions too great to answer (38:1-41:34)
 - 2. Job acknowledges his inability to understand (42:1-6)
- B. God Honors Job (42:7-17)
 - 1. God rebukes Job's critics (42:7-10)
 - 2. God restores Job's wealth (42:11-17)