

NOTE: *The following introductory material to the Book of Job is taken from The MacArthur Bible Handbook and is used with permission.*

TITLE

As with other books of the Bible, Job bears the name of the narrative's primary character. This name might have been derived from the Hebrew word for "persecution," thus meaning *persecuted one*, or from an Arabic word meaning "repent," thus bearing the name *repentant one*. The author recounts an era in the life of Job in which he was tested and the character of God was revealed. New Testament writers directly quote Job two times (Rom. 11:35; I Cor. 3:19), plus Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and James 5:11 show Job was a real person.

AUTHOR

The book does not name its author. Job is an unlikely candidate because the book's message rests on Job's ignorance of the events that occurred in heaven as they related to his ordeal. One Jewish tradition suggests Moses as author, since the land of Uz (1:1) was adjacent to Midian where Moses lived for forty years, and he could have obtained a record of the story there. Solomon is also a good possibility due to the similarity of content with parts of the Book of Ecclesiastes, as well as the fact that Solomon wrote the other Wisdom books (except Psalms, and he did author Psalms 72 and 127). Though he lived long after Job, Solomon could have written about events that occurred long before his own time, in much the same manner as Moses was inspired to write about Adam and Eve. Elihu, Isaiah, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, and Ezra have also been suggested as possible authors.

DATE

The date of the book's writing may be much later than the events recorded therein. This conclusion is based on: (1) Job's age (42:16); (2) his life span of nearly 200 years (42:16), which fits the patriarchal period (Abraham lived 175 years; Gen. 25:7); (3) the social unit being the patriarchal family; (4) the Chaldeans who murdered Job's servants (1:17) were nomads and had not yet become city dwellers; (5) Job's wealth being measured in livestock rather than gold and silver (1:3; 42:12); (6) Job's priestly functions within his family (1:4, 5); and (7) a basic silence on matters such as the covenant of Abraham, Israel, the Exodus, and the law of Moses. Job, on the other hand, seemed to know about Adam (31:33) and Noah and the Flood (12:15). These cultural/historical features found in the book appear to place the events chronologically at a time probably after Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) but before or during the period of Abraham (Gen. 11:27ff), around 1500 B.C. to 2000 B.C., making it the most ancient book in the Bible.

BACKGROUND AND SETTING

This book begins with a scene in heaven that explains everything to the reader (1:6-2:10). Job was suffering because God was contesting with Satan. Job was not aware of this big picture, nor were his friends, so they all struggled to explain suffering from the perspective of their ignorance. Finally, Job rested in nothing but faith in God's goodness and the hope of His

redemption. That God vindicated his trust is the culminating message of the book. Where there are no rational, or even theological, explanations for disaster and pain, trust God.

KEY PEOPLE IN JOB

Job—patient under suffering; his faith was tested by God but he did not sin by blaming God (1:1-42:16)

Eliphaz the Temanite—a friend of Job; believed Job was suffering because of his sin (2:11; 4:1-5:27; 15:1-35; 22:1-30; 42:7-9)

Bildad the Shuhite—another friend of Job; believed Job had not repented of his sin and therefore suffered (2:11; 8:1-22; 18:1-21; 25:1-6; 42:9)

Zophar the Naamathite—a third friend of Job; believed Job deserved to suffer even more for his sins (2:11; 11:1-20; 20:1-29; 42:9)

Elihu the Buzite—stood up against Job's three friends; believed God was using suffering to mold Job's character (32:1-37:24)

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL THEMES

The occasion and events that follow Job's sufferings present significant questions for the faith of believers in all ages. "Why does Job serve God?" Job is heralded for his righteousness, being compared with Noah and Daniel (Ezek. 14:14-20), and for his spiritual endurance (James 5:11). Several other questions are alluded to throughout Job's ordeal, for instance, "Why do the righteous suffer?" Though an answer to that question may seem important, the book does not set forth such an answer. Job never knew the reasons for his suffering and neither did his friends. The righteous sufferer does not appear to learn about any of the heavenly court debates between God and Satan that precipitated his pain. In fact, when finally confronted by the Lord of the universe, Job put his hand over his mouth and said nothing. Job's silent response in no way trivialized the intense pain and loss he had endured. It merely underscored the importance of trusting God's purposes in the midst of suffering because suffering, like all other human experiences, is directed by perfect divine wisdom. In the end, the lesson learned was that one may never know the specific reason for his suffering; but one must trust in Sovereign God. That is the real answer to suffering.

God and Satan

The book treats two major themes and many other minor ones, both in the narrative framework of the prologue (chps. 1, 2) and epilogue (42:7-17), and in the poetic account of Job's torment that lies in between (3:1-42:6). A key to understanding the first theme of the book is to notice the debate between God and Satan in heaven and how it connects with the three cycles of earthly debates between Job and his friends. God wanted to prove the character of believers to Satan and to all demons, angels, and people. The accusations are by Satan, who indicted God's claims of Job's righteousness as being untested, if not questionable. Satan accused the righteous of being faithful to God only for what they could get. Since Job did not serve God with pure motives, according to Satan, the whole

relationship between him and God was a sham. Satan's confidence that he could turn Job against God came, no doubt, from the fact that he had led the holy angels to rebel with him. Satan thought he could destroy Job's faith in God by inflicting suffering on him, thus showing in principle that saving faith could be shattered. God released Satan to make his point if he could, but he failed, as true faith in God proved unbreakable. Even Job's wife told him to curse God (2:9), but he refused; his faith in God never failed (see 13:15). In the end, God proved His point with Satan that saving faith can't be destroyed no matter how much trouble a saint suffers, or how incomprehensible and undeserved it seems.

God and Job

A second and related theme concerns proving the character of God to men. Does this sort of ordeal, in which God and His opponent Satan square off, with righteous Job as the test case, suggest that God is lacking in compassion and mercy toward Job? Not at all. As James says, "You have heard of the perseverance of Job and have seen the end *intended* by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (James 5:11). It was to prove the very opposite (42:10-17). Job says, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (2:10). God's servant does not deny that he has suffered. He does deny that his suffering is a result of sin. Nor does he understand why he suffers. Job simply commits his ordeal with a devout heart of worship and humility (42:5, 6) to a sovereign and perfectly wise Creator—and that was what God wanted him to learn in this conflict with Satan. In the end, God flooded Job with more blessings than he had ever known.

The Mystery of Suffering

The major reality of the book is the inscrutable mystery of innocent suffering. God ordains that His children walk in sorrow and pain, sometimes because of sin (cf. Num. 12:10-12), sometimes for chastening (cf. Heb 12:5-12), sometimes for strengthening (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7-10; 1 Pet. 5:10), and sometimes to give opportunity to reveal His comfort and grace (2 Cor. 1:3-7). But there are times when the compelling issue in the suffering of the saints is unknowable because it is for a heavenly purpose that those on earth can't discern (cf. Exod. 4:11; John 9:1-3).

Job and his friends wanted to analyze the suffering and look for causes and solutions. Using all of their sound theology and insight into the situation, they searched for answers, but found only useless and wrong ideas, for which God rebuked them in the end (42:7). They couldn't know why Job suffered because what happened in heaven between God and Satan was unknown to them. They thought they knew all the answers, but they only intensified the dilemma by their insistent ignorance.

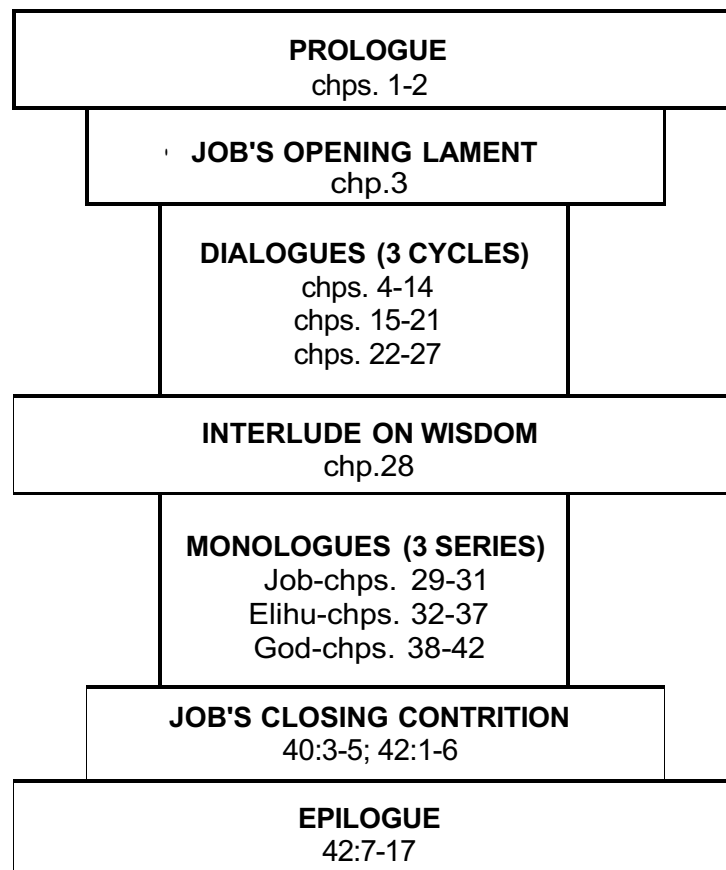
By spreading out some of the elements of this great theme, we can see the following truths in Job's experience:

- There are matters going on in heaven with God that believers know nothing about; yet, they affect our lives.
- Even the best effort at explaining the issues of life can be useless.

- God's people do suffer. Bad things happen all the time to good people, so one cannot judge a person's spirituality by his painful circumstances or successes.
- Even though God seems far away, perseverance in faith is the most noble virtue since God is good and one can safely leave his life in His hands.
- The believer in the midst of suffering should not abandon God, but draw near to Him, so out of the fellowship can come the comfort—even without the explanation.
- Suffering may be intense, but it will ultimately end for the righteous and God will bless abundantly.

NOTE: This concludes the materials taken from The MacArthur Bible Handbook.

OUTLINE



—The Expositor's Bible Commentary

LITERARY FORM AND STRUCTURE

Alfred Tennyson described the Book of Job as "... the greatest poem of ancient or modern time." The Book of Job has a sandwich literary structure: the prologue is written in prose, the main body written in poetry, and the epilogue again in prose. Job includes poetic genres such as laments, hymns, proverbs, and oracles. Instead of rhyming words, in Hebrew poetry parallelism is foremost—the balancing of similar or opposing ideas. The poet of Job created unique and intricate patterns of relationship between thought and form parallelism. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are examples in secular literature of this ancient literary form.

