

A Study of the Book of Job: When Bad Things Happen to God's People

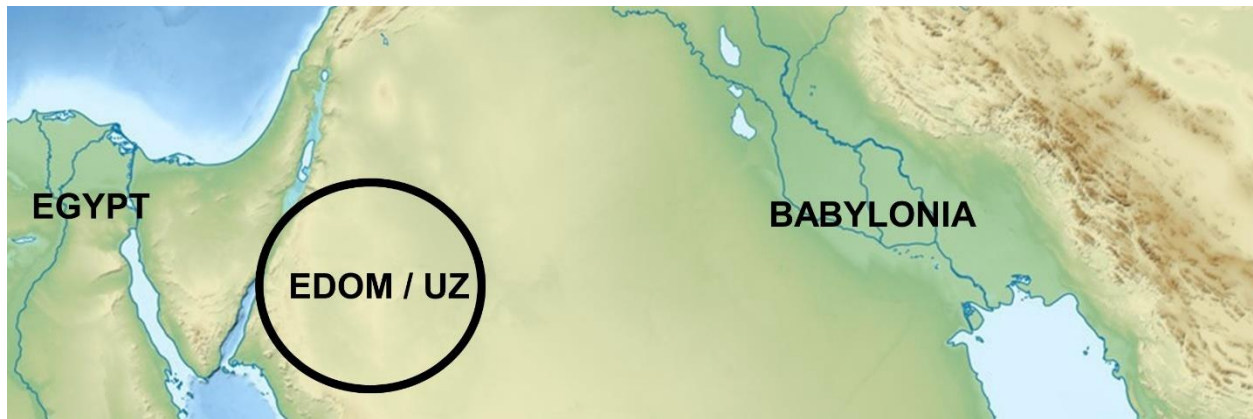
Lesson 1: Introduction to Job

TITLE & AUTHOR

- The book's title comes from its primary character, Job. Although of uncertain etymology the name Job could come from Arabic meaning "one who turns back [to God]/one who repents" or the Hebrew verb "to hate/be an enemy of" (which could signify "the assailed one, an object of enmity").
- As with several books of the Bible, the human author of Job is unknown (cf. the compilers of the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles; the book of Hebrews). As those who are convinced that the Bible is God's Spirit-inspired Word, we too consider this book to have been composed under his direct guidance for a number of reasons: 1.) The book reveals spiritual realities and conversations that no human could naturally know. 2.) The book has numerous Messianic parallels and references. 3.) The unparalleled quality of its composition.
- Some best guesses on authorship: Like the book of Ruth, it is clear that Job was not the author of the book that bears his name. Given the likely (early) time period in which it was set and the linguistic parallels with the Pentateuch, some claim Moses as the author. Other conservative commentators see similarities with the poetic/wisdom literature (cf. particularly Proverbs 1, 8, 9) of the Solomonic age and afterwards.

HISTORICAL SETTING

- The prologue and epilogue of the book clearly present Job as a real person living in a specific place and time with human relationships and worldly interactions. Job is mentioned in Ezekiel 14:14-20 along with Daniel (a living contemporary of Ezekiel!) and Noah. Likewise, James 5:11 encourages us to look to Job's perseverance and the blessed results that followed—such would be of precious little comfort if purely symbolical or fictional.
- Time Period: It is generally assumed that the events described in Job took place during the Patriarchal Age or earlier, which means these events may have taken place centuries or more before this composition was inspired. The evidence that points to this likelihood are: 1.) The length of Job's lifespan—conservatively around 200 years—which is more than Abraham and the other Patriarchs and most closely resembles the lifespans of those immediately after the Flood (cf. Gen 11). 2.) There is no mention of Israel as a nation. 3.) In chapter 1 Job acts as the priest for his family, which was also the practice of Abraham and other believers before the Levitical priesthood was established at Sinai. 4.) Job's wealth is measured in livestock, rather than gold, etc. However, conditions in more nomadic portions of Arabia may have retained such standards of wealth much later than elsewhere. In the end we cannot be too certain or dogmatic about this.
- Place: While commentators debate the exact location of the land of Uz, the most conclusive evidence comes from the Scripture itself. Job 1:3 says he was "the greatest man among all the peoples of the East," and Lamentations 4:21 uses poetic parallelism to equate Edom (where Esau's descendants would settle) to the south east of Israel with the land of Uz, "Rejoice and be glad, O Daughter of Edom, you who live in the land of Uz."



PRINCIPLE PERSONS

Job

- Without any references at all to Abraham, Israel, the covenant(s), etc. and no direct references to the written word of God, it is safe to assume that Job was not a Hebrew. How exactly this Gentile had come to know and believe in the true God remains unanswered by Scripture (while rare such persons are not unheard of—i.e. Melchizedek and the wise men).
- He was devout in his faith, relied on God's grace, and trusted in the Savior/Redeemer to come.
- He was a man of great wealth and means, abundantly blessed by God with ten children and property.

The LORD

- While the Tetragrammaton (יהוה - Yahweh) is used almost exclusively in the prologue and epilogue, it is used only sparingly (2x) in the poetic middle of the text.
- *What is the meaning and significance of this name?*

Exodus 3:13-14 Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' "

Exodus 34:54-7 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

- *What then is God's will for all people? (cf. also 1 Tim. 2:4)*

Satan / The Devil

- *Who is he?*

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made.

Ezekiel 28:14-15 You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.

Matthew 12:24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."

Isaiah 14:12 How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn!

- *What is his desire/goal?*

John 8:44 "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Job's Three Friends

- **Eliphaz:** a native of Teman, in Edom (2:11), which was famous for its wise men (Jer. 49:7). He acts as the leading spokesman for the three friends. He is the "scientist" of the group; his speeches show clearer reasoning and more considerate criticism. Two of his main contentions are that God is pure and righteous (4:17) and man brings trouble on himself (5:7).
- **Bildad:** from Shuah (Babylonia?); a "traditionalist," who is more argumentative.
- **Zophar:** a native of Naamah (northern Arabia?), perhaps the oldest of the three as he is given the courtesy of speaking first. He is blunt moralist and often displays a "holier-than-thou" attitude. One of his main points is that God knows evil when he sees it (11:11).

Elihu: from Buz (Arabia?), the youngest of the four men and not a companion of the other three. Possibly a distant relative of Abraham whose brother Nahor, had a son named Buz (Gen. 22:21). The only one of those present who addresses Job by name. He contends that God is good and uses suffering to refine the righteous for their good.

THEME

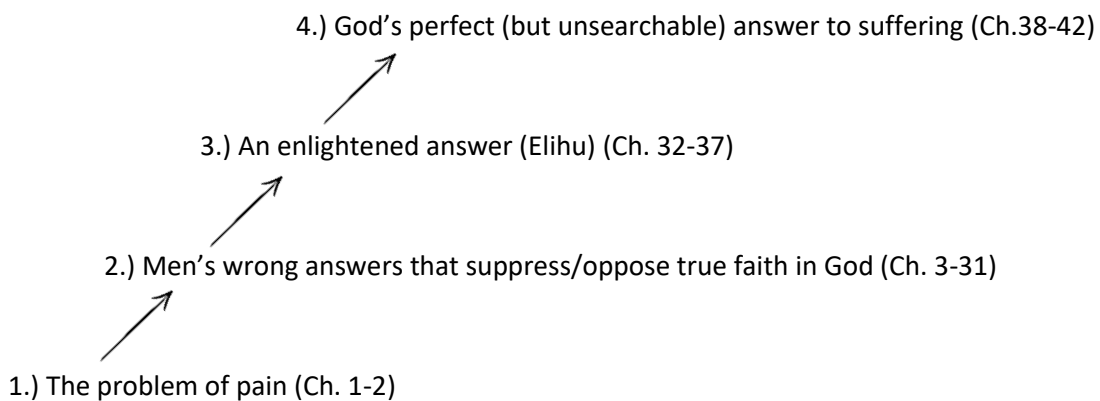
The book of Job revolves around the question of how the suffering of the righteous can be reconciled with the existence of a loving and almighty God (that is theodicy).

LITERARY STYLE

- The prologue (Ch. 1-2) and Epilogue (Ch. 41) are written in prose. The intervening chapters are written in very dense and compact Hebrew poetry that uses parallelism of thought to convey meaning. The text of Job also has many unique words and constructions.
- It has been said that these poetic chapters in particular are one of the greatest and most beautiful literary productions found in any language of all time. At the same time it must be granted that the text of Job does not read like an ordinary conversation (especially given the circumstances), rather the inspired author captured the content of their real conversation and chose to convey it in poetic form, which does not detract from its historicity.
- Thus, the reader needs to proceed slowly in Job to ensure that the poetic pictures used not only make sense but also fit the flow of thought of the speaker.
- Because Job's friends do not speak from a perspective of those made righteous by faith (for which they are later rebuked by God in 42:7), their statements are of limited value and should not be taken wholesale as divine truth (as with other statements of unbelievers recorded in Scripture).

OUTLINE / STRUCTURE

Prologue (Ch. 1-2)
First Cycle of Speeches (Ch. 3-14)
Second Cycle of Speeches (Ch. 15-21)
Third Cycle of Speeches (Ch. 22-31)
Elihu's Speeches (Ch. 32-37)
The LORD's Speeches (Ch. 38-42:6)
Epilogue (Ch. 42:7ff)



DOCTRINES & MESSIANIC CONTENT

Besides addressing the central problem of rectifying pain with God's existence, the book of Job also provides insight on several other key Bible doctrines: God; man; Satan; faith; righteousness; discipline; nature/creation.

Throughout his discourses Job struggles to cling to the promises of forgiveness, righteousness, and a final bodily resurrection, all of which are made possible by a Mediator/Redeemer. While

Job does not possess all the details that we now enjoy about the Messiah's work, Jesus is clearly in view.

While there are obvious parallels between Job's suffering and that of the Messiah, the Bible nowhere explicitly declares him a type of Christ. Instead the cross that Jesus bore to love and rescue fallen humanity and each sinner personally is the solution to the crosses that Job (and all the righteous) bear as we follow the LORD in faith.

Next Time: Lesson 2: Job's First Trials (Chapter 1)