

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Adult Bible Equipping Class
Anchorage Grace Church
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OLD TESTAMENT FLYOVER:

This important book has challenged and blessed its readers for centuries. People today resonate with the problem of "unjust" suffering that Job faced because they have either faced similar circumstances or have seen others experience something similar. Also anyone who reads the book of Job expecting a model of how to respond to suffering is in for a surprise. However, the heart of the book is not to be found in the cutting arguments between Job and his three friends or even in Elihu's speeches. The crescendo of the book is found in the Lord's presentation of His absolute power and self-sufficiency and in Job's recognition of God's ability to do everything that needs to be done, with justice and equity. Job had to realize that God did not have to submit His plans to Job for approval, from the perspective of human fairness. This is as if God had said this to Job: "I am God, you are mortal man; trust me to do what is right, regardless of how things might appear to you."

Michael A. Grisanti, "The Book of Job," in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2011), 510.

Job

I. Introduction

The book of Job is one of the most well-known books of the Bible. It is a marvel of a book. Grisanti calls it "a masterpiece of literature."¹ Carlyle notes that "there is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of the it of equal literary merit."² It is, therefore, one of the books of the Bible most likely to be read by a non-Christian and used when they are studying Bible literature. The depth of literary ingenuity displayed throughout its pages has produced some of the best commentaries available on any OT book.

Yet Job's literary value is eclipsed by its theological and spiritual value. Its themes explore the questions that every individual asks at one time or another. Strange, then, that Job is so rarely preached in churches. Perhaps it's the length of the book and its various monologues that lend to this vacuum. Or perhaps the answers it gives to the reasons for human suffering

¹ Michael A. Grisanti, "The Book of Job," in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2011), 500.

² T. Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1894), 45.

are not wholly satisfying to the average listener. Whatever the case, the church needs to hear and understand its message.

A. *Authorship & Date*

The topic of authorship and the date of the book of Job necessarily bisect into two distinct questions:

- When did the events of the book occur?
- When was the book itself composed?

Job offers little to know help in answering these questions. Like so many other books of the OT, it does not identify an author or provide any kind of explicit information on when it was written or when the events depicted in it transpired. Quite naturally, this has garnered quite a large span of suggestions.

1) *Date of Events*

Despite the opinions of some who dismiss the book's events as wholly fictitious, we must concede that the events depicted in the book actually took place. References to the life of Job and his struggles and sufferings in other books of Scripture (Ezek 14:14, 20; Jas 5:11) more than demonstrate the historicity of the events.

Yet questions still remain about when the events actually occurred in human history. While suggested dates range anywhere from 2000 B.C. to 200 B.C., certain internal clues narrow down the dates to somewhere between 2000 B.C. and 900 B.C., but most likely in the early 2nd millennium. In fact, all the details within the book point to patriarchal times:

- Longevity of life:** Job lived 140 years (42:16), a lifespan that was longer than that of individuals in later periods yet consistent with the lifespan of individuals during the patriarchal period (cf. Gen 25:7; 35:28; 47:28).
- Patriarchal life:** Job is described as a man of great wealth, but his wealth was measured according to patriarchal measurements—herds, flocks, and servants (1:3; 42:12).
- Pre-Mosaic Life:** Additionally, Job appears to act as a priest for his family by offering sacrifices to Yahweh (1:5), a practice consistent with patriarchal times yet outlawed under the Mosaic law. In fact, an utter lack of reference to the Mosaic law suggests that the events must have occurred prior to the establishment of the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai.
- Sabeans and Chaldeans:** The text references bands of roving Sabeans and Chaldeans, a scenario that was present during the early 2nd millennium B.C. but slowly quieted down until the Chaldeans finally settled down in a land around 1000 B.C.
- The Land of Uz:** The location of the events is difficult to pinpoint. Job is said to live in the land of Uz. Genesis 10:23 names Uz as one of the sons of Aram, a group who later became the Arameans. Lamentations 4:21 locates the land of Uz as the land of Edom. All this is consistent with a certain Aramaic flair in the lan-

guage and style of the book, making it likely that the events occurred somewhere within Aramaic influence.

- f) **Divine Names:** The narrator uses the divine name (Yahweh) numerous times in his narrative material, but rarely do Job and his friends refer to God using the divine name. This suggests a date before the name was closely associated with covenant relationship.
- g) **Job's Ethnicity:** Job appears to be a non-Israelite living in the ancient land of Uz (somewhere in Edom). Grisanti writes, "Since these events seem to focus on a non-Israelite, it seems best to date them before the Abrahamic covenant narrowed God's primary dealings to a particular family."³

2) *Date of Composition*

A host of authors have been suggested for the book. The Talmud claims that Moses authored the book, but there is no way to substantiate it. Other suggested authors include Job, Elihu, Solomon (because of its connection to wisdom literature), Hezekiah, Isaiah, and Ezra.⁴

Others, evangelical and liberal, suggest the possibility that the book may be the work of composite authorship. Liberal scholars, of course, gravitate toward the theory of a gradual aggregation of material which underwent a heavy amount of evolution, editing, and redacting before it came to its final form. Smick, an evangelical, concedes to the possibility of parts of Job existing outside of the book as oral traditions until "an unknown Israelite author under divine inspiration gave it its present literary form."⁵ He goes on to say that it is "neither prudent nor necessary" to insist on single authorship for the book.⁶ Yet he goes on to note that "any attempt to know exactly what [the compositional process] was is sheer guesswork."⁷ Smick seems to land on the position that there is just as much reason to hold to single authorship of Job as there is to hold to a more complex compositional process.

What is the answer? *We can't know for sure who wrote the book or how long after the events transpired did the book come into form.*

B. *Genre*

The book of Job seems to exist in a literary genre of its own. It employs a wide variety of literary forms, and thus the book as a whole defies classification. Of the various suggested classifications, the two most significant identify Job either as a lawsuit or a dramatized

³ Ibid., 501.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Elmer B. Smick, "Job," in *EBC*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 4:851.

⁶ Ibid., 4:847.

⁷ Ibid.

lament.⁸ There are other ANE works which seem to parallel the ideas and themes of the book. Both Sumarian and Babylonian literature contain texts with similar scenarios that "share literary structures and lament languages in common with Job but deal with the meaning of suffering in a way that expresses their own social, ethical, and cultic standards—all polytheistic."⁹ Smick goes on to write, "While Job shares literary genre and format with the ANE world, there is really nothing extant that compares with the biblical book in its philosophical and theological profundity."¹⁰

Likewise, LaSor notes that Job "must not fit into any preconceived mold. It does weep with complaint, argue with disputation, teach with didactic authority, excite with comedy, sting with irony, and relate human experience with epic majesty. But above all, Job is unique—the literary gift of an inspired genius."¹¹

II. Major Themes

A. *The "Righteous" Man Job becomes the Suffering Servant of Yahweh*

The opening verse provides the key for interpreting everything that proceeds throughout the book. In it, Job is described using four pertinent characteristics, all based on Yahweh's assessment of Job (1:1, 8; 2:3).

- (1) Blameless
- (2) Upright
- (3) Fearing of God
- (4) Turing from evil

The first two constitute his moral character before God and man, and the second deal with the outworking of his character before God and man. The effect of this thrice-repeated divine assessment of Job is to crystallize the spiritual status of Job in the reader's mind. He was holy and blameless. He kept the law before there was a law to keep. He offered sacrifices for his sins and the sins of his family—meaning, he recognized his spiritual condition and the need for a mediator and a substitute.

The narrator has given his readers insight into the divine counsel—a look into the decisions and conversations that led to Job's horrible sufferings. The reader knows that Job's suffering is not in response to his sin. As Job maintains his integrity, his friends insist that he must repent, but he denies his need to repent of anything. Never is there given a reason why he suffers. Though the reader understands the backdrop, Job and his friends do not. He suffers, but does not know why.

⁸ Grisanti, "The Book of Job," 502.

⁹ Smick, "Job," 4:844.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ W. S. LaSor, D. A. Hubbard, and F. W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 487.

So when God's man (1:1), who is blameless, upright, fears God, and turns from evil, is finally vindicated before his counselors, God refers to Job as "my Servant" (42:7, 8). He becomes a picture of the believer—the innocent sufferer who responds to God in suffering with faith. As important as the opening verse is for establishing Job's character, the closing chapter is equally important, for it demonstrates that God's assessment of Job was accurate. *Never* does Satan's prediction of Job come true. Job maintains his righteous standing. While his wife calls for him to "curse God and die" (2:9), Job persists as blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning from evil.

B. The Attacks against Job

Job faces a series of attacks and confrontations throughout the book. First and foremost, he is attacked by Satan in an attempt to demonstrate that Job's faith and fear of God was based on his circumstances. From the perspective of the narrator and the reader, the attack came from Satan by allowance of God.

But from the perspective of Job and his friends, the attack came from God himself. His friends maintain that God's judgment has fallen on Job because of some unrepentant sin. And from a theological perspective, much of what they say is sound—in the abstract. "It is not so much what they say," Smick writes, "but what they leave out that makes their counsel so shallow."¹²

It must be conceded that the OT does support their view that the wicked suffer because of their sin, while the righteous are protected, cared for, and delivered from trouble (cf. Ps 1:3; 37:25). And yet there is a real tension when one considers the sufferings of righteous men like Abel, Uriah, Naboth, and Joseph. Yet it must also be recognized that such psalms that speak of divine protection and deliverance speak axiomatically. They do not establish an unbreakable promise that applies to every believer.

And so amidst Job's suffering under the attacks from Satan, he also suffers from the unwarranted attacks of his friends, who insist he repents in order to cease his suffering. Job maintains his innocence, however, and questions the justice of God for bringing this suffering upon him without cause.

Job's ignorant and presumptuous stance incites a third attack, this time from Yahweh. The attack comes in the form of over 100 rhetorical questions aimed solely at humbling Job and revealing to him the depths of his ignorance. Never does God give Job an answer. Rather, he continues to ask Job, "Where were you...?" "Job's emotional instability arose from his internal conflict over the fantasy that God was unjustly punishing him for sins he had not committed (9:21-24). So there are moments when he perceives God to be his enemy (7:20; 10:16-17; 16:9)."¹³

C. The Sovereignty of Yahweh

Perhaps the most vexing aspect of the book is that the theological and moral questions exposed in the book regarding the suffering of man and the righteousness, compassion,

¹² Smick, "Job," 4:859.

¹³ Ibid., 860.

and justice of God never are answered. The book offers no rational solution to the issue of theodicy. God is never put on trial. Job's questions are answered with questions, not answers, and the thrust of God's response emphasizes that "the sole basis for a proper relationship between God and man is the sovereign grace of God and man's response of faith and submissive trust."¹⁴

Understanding the distinctions in the narrative/character perspective is critical for capturing the thrust of the book. While we know the conversations that took place between Satan and the divine counsel, Job and his friends do not. They respond and converse based on what they *know*, which turns out to be ignorance at work. The "crescendo of the book is in the Lord's presentation of His absolute power and self-sufficiency and in Job's recognition of God's ability to do everything that needs to be done, with justice and equity. Job had to realize that God did not have to submit His plans to Job for approval, from the perspective of human fairness. This is as if God had said this to Job: 'I am God, you are mortal man; trust me to do what is right, regardless of how things might appear to you.'"¹⁵

As Smick put it, "Job thus realizes that God does not need man's advice to control the world and that no extreme of suffering gives man the right to question God's wisdom or justice, and on this he repents." He goes on to say,

The issues raised in the book are among the most profound and difficult of human existence. The answer was already on Job's lips in the Prologue when he said, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;/may the name of the LORD be praised" (1:21b); and "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" (2:10). The truth Job learned was that God must be God and that of all values and all existence only God and his glory must ultimately prevail.¹⁶

III. Purpose

The purpose of the book of Job is one of its most significant interpretive issues. The most popular lay approach seems to be that the book aims to show the quality of true faith. Job's faith, tested by both Satan and his friends, holds firm under suffering.

In reality, however, this approach tends to assume that Job had the same information as the reader—that his suffering was the result of Satan's attacks and God's desire to demonstrate Job's pure faith. But that information is kept from Job throughout the entirety of the book. Job never knows the full story.

At its core, what the book instructs the reader is that God's requirement of us is the same, whether one suffers as Job did or not. The wise man trusts the sovereign grace of his God, whether he suffers or he doesn't. As Grisanti puts it, "The suffering believer must learn to live by faith in the sovereign Creator and Ruler of the cosmos, for His rule is righteous and

¹⁴ Grisanti, "The Book of Job," 509.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 510.

¹⁶ Smick, "Job," 4:860-1.

wise."¹⁷ The wise man recognizes his ignorance. He recognizes God's sovereignty. And he recognizes God's goodness. He must rest in all of this and allow God to rule, trusting that God is good. He must trust that "God does not abandon the sufferer but communicates with him at the proper time."¹⁸

Thus, the purpose of Job is to show that *the response of the righteous man to suffering must be worship of and submission to Yahweh*. Or to put it another way, *to show that the proper relationship between God and man is based solely on the sovereign grace of God and man's response of faith and submissive trust*.

IV. Literary Structure

Grisanti insists that the structure of the book is essential for understanding its message. It begins and ends with a clear prologue (chs. 1-2) and epilogue (42:7-17), written in narrative prose, that establish the critical information needed for interpreting the rest of the work.

The intervening material is written in poetic discourse (3:1-42:6), yet even this is divided into clear sections. After a prologue narrating Job's experience, the first main section covers a series of disputes between Job and his friends (chs. 3-27). The book then inserts a poetic interlude expounding the wisdom of Job (ch. 28). It then continues with a series of poetic monologues from Job, Elihu, and God (chs. 29-42:6). The epilogue then narrates Job's restoration and ultimate vindication of Job before his friends and Satan.

STRUCTURE OF JOB

- I. **Prologue (chs. 1-2)**
 - A. Job's Character (1:1-5)
 - B. Job's Calamities (1:6-2:13)
- II. **Dialogues (between Job and Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) (chs. 3-27)**
 - A. Job's Opening Lament (ch. 3)
 - B. Cycle 1: Consolation (chs. 4-14)
 - C. Cycle 2: The Fate of the Wicked (chs. 15-21)
 - D. Cycle 3: Specific Accusations (chs. 22-27)
- III. **Interlude on Wisdom (ch. 28)**
- IV. **Monologues (29:1-42:6)**
 - A. Job's Call for Vindication (chs. 29-31)
 - B. Elihu's Speeches (chs. 32-37)
 - C. God's Response to Job (and Job's answer) (38:1-42:6)

¹⁷ Grisanti, "The Book of Job," 509.

¹⁸ Smick, "Job," 4:858.

- V. **Epilogue (42:7-17)**
 - A. God's Verdict (42:7-9)
 - B. Job's Restoration (42:10-17)