Job
Scripture: Job
Code: MSB18

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; 1 Cor. 3:19), plus Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and James 5:11 show Job was a real person.

Author and Date

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 Talmudic tradition suggests Moses as author since the land of Uz (1:1) was adjacent to Midian where Moses lived for 40 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 Pss. 72; 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, but without support.

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. The events of Job's odyssey appear to be patriarchal. Job, on the other hand, seemed to know about Adam (31:33) and the Noahic 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 contemporaneous with

Abraham (Gen. 11:27ff.).

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 never knew that, nor did any of his friends, so they all struggled to explain suffering from the perspective of their ignorance, until 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. When there are no rational, or even theological, explanations for disaster and pain, trust God.

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.

The book treats two major themes and many other minor ones, both in the narrative framework of the prologue (chaps. 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 3 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). Satan tried to do the same to Peter (see Luke 22:31–34) and was unsuccessful in destroying Peter's faith (see John 21:15–19). When Satan has unleashed all that he can do to destroy saving faith, it stands firm (cf. Rom. 8:31–39). 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.

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 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. Ex. 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:

1) There are matters going on in heaven with God that believers know nothing about; yet, they affect their lives;

2) Even the best effort at explaining the issues of life can be useless;

3) 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;

4) Even though God seems far away, perseverance in faith is a most noble virtue since God is good and one can safely leave his life in His hands;

5) The believer in the midst of suffering should not abandon God, but draw near to Him, so out of the fellowship can come the comfor—without the explanation; and

6) Suffering may be intense, but it will ultimately end for the righteous and God will bless abundantly.

Interpretive Challenges

The most critical interpretive challenge involves the book's primary message. Although often thought to be the pressing issue of the book, the question of why Job suffers is never revealed to Job, though the reader knows that it involves God's proving a point to Satan—a matter which completely transcends Job's ability to understand. James' commentary on Job's case (5:11) draws the conclusion that it was to show God's compassion and mercy, but without apology, offers no explanation for Job's specific ordeal. Readers find themselves, putting their proverbial hands over their mouths, with no right to question or accuse the allwise and all-powerful Creator, who will do as He pleases, and in so doing, both proves His points in the spiritual realm to angels and demons and defines His compassion and mercy. Engaging in "theodicy," i.e., man's attempt to defend God's involvement in calamity and suffering, is shown to be appropriate in these circumstances, though in the end, it is apparent that God does not need nor want a human advocate. The book of Job poignantly illustrates Deut. 29:29, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God … "

The nature of Job's guilt and innocence raises perplexing questions. God declared Job perfect, upright, fearing God, and shunning evil (Job 1:1). But Job's comforters raised a critical question based on Job's ordeal: Had not Job sinned? On several occasions Job readily admitted to having sinned (7:21; 13:26). But Job questioned the extent of his sin as compared to the severity of his suffering. God rebuked Job in the end for his demands to be vindicated of the comforters' accusations (Job 38–41). But He also declared that what Job said was correct and what the comforters said was wrong (42:7).

Another challenge comes in keeping separate the pre-understandings that Job and his comforters brought to Job's ordeal. At the outset, all agreed that God punishes evil, rewards obedience, and no exceptions are possible. Job, due to his suffering innocently, was forced to conclude that exceptions are possible in that the righteous also suffer. He also observed that the wicked prosper. These are more than small exceptions to the rule, thus forcing Job to rethink his simple understanding about God's sovereign interaction with His people. The type of wisdom Job comes to embrace was not dependent merely on the promise of reward or punishment. The long, peevish, disputes between Job and his accusers were attempts to reconcile the perceived inequities of God's retribution in Job's

experiences. Such an empirical method is dangerous. In the end, God offered no explanation to Job, but rather called all parties to a deeper level of trust in the Creator, who rules over a sin-confused world with power and authority directed by perfect wisdom and mercy.

Understanding this book requires 1) understanding the nature of wisdom, particularly the difference between man's wisdom and God's, and 2) admitting that Job and his friends lacked the divine wisdom to interpret Job's circumstances accurately, though his friends kept trying while Job learned to be content in God's sovereignty and mercy. The turning point or resolution for this matter is found in Job 28 where the character of divine wisdom is explained: divine wisdom is rare and priceless; man cannot hope to purchase it; and God possesses it all. We may not know what is going on in heaven or what God's purposes are, but we must trust Him. Because of this, the matter of believers suffering takes a back seat to the matter of divine wisdom.

Outline

I. The Dilemma (1:1–2:13)

A. Introduction of Job (1:1–5)

B. Divine Debates with Satan (1:6–2:10)

C. Arrival of Friends (2:11–13)

II. The Debates (3:1–37:24)

A. The First Cycle (3:1–14:22)

1. Job's first speech expresses despair (3:1–26)

2. Eliphaz's first speech kindly protests and urges humility and repentance (4:1–5:27)

3. Job's reply to Eliphaz expresses anguish and questions the trials, asking for sympathy in his pain (6:1–7:21)

4. Bildad's first speech accuses Job of impugning God (8:1–22)

5. Job's response to Bildad admits he is not perfect, but may protest what seems unfair (9:1–10:22)

6. Zophar's first speech tells Job to get right with God (11:1–20)

7. Job’s response to Zophar tells his friends they are wrong and only God knows and will, hopefully, speak to him (12:1–14:22)

B. The Second Cycle (15:1–21:34)

1. Eliphaz’s second speech accuses Job of presumption and disregarding the wisdom of the ancients (15:1–35)

2. Job’s response to Eliphaz appeals to God against his unjust accusers (16:1–17:16)

3. Bildad’s second speech tells Job he is suffering just what he deserves (18:1–21)

4. Job’s response to Bildad cries out to God for pity (19:1–29)

5. Zophar’s second speech accuses Job of rejecting God by questioning His justice (20:1–29)

6. Job’s response to Zophar says he is out of touch with reality (21:1–34)

C. The Third Cycle (22:1–26:14)

1. Eliphaz’s third speech denounces Job’s criticism of God’s justice (22:1–30)

2. Job’s response to Eliphaz is that God knows he is without guilt, and yet in His providence and refining purpose He permits temporary success for the wicked (23:1–24:25)

3. Bildad’s third speech scoffs at Job’s direct appeal to God (25:1–6)

4. Job’s response to Bildad that God is indeed perfectly wise and absolutely sovereign, but not simplistic as they thought (26:1–14)

D. The Final Defense of Job (27:1–31:40)

1. Job’s first monologue affirms his righteousness and that man can’t discover God’s wisdom (27:1–28:28)

2. Job’s second monologue remembers his past, describes his present, defends his innocence, and asks for God to defend him (29:1–31:40)

E. The Speeches of Elihu (32:1–37:24)

1. Elihu enters into the debate to break the impasse (32:1–22)

2. Elihu charges Job with presumption in criticizing God, not recognizing that God may have a loving purpose, even in allowing Job to suffer (33:1–33)

3. Elihu declares that Job has impugned God's integrity by claiming that it does not pay to lead a godly life (34:1–37)

4. Elihu urges Job to wait patiently for the Lord (35:1–16)

5. Elihu believes that God is disciplining Job (36:1–21)

6. Elihu argues that human observers can hardly expect to understand adequately God's dealings in administering justice and mercy (36:22–37:24)

III. The Deliverance (38:1–42:17)

A. God Interrogates Job (38:1–41:34)

1. God's first response to Job (38:1–40:2)

2. Job's answer to God (40:3–5)

3. God's second response to Job (40:6–41:34)

B. Job Confesses, Worships, and Is Vindicated (42:1–17)

1. Job passes judgment upon himself (42:1–6)

2. God rebukes Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (42:7–9)

3. God restores Job's family, wealth, and long life (42:10–17)

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