

## **Job**

Job is attributed to Job, the principal character of the book. Biblical scholars have dated the book variously from Mosaic to postexilic times. The time presently favored by most scholars, however, is the later postexilic period, or from 500 to 250 bc. The author, who is unknown, is thought to have used an Israelite or Edomite folktale or epic dating perhaps from the beginning of the Israelite monarchy as a framework for his poetic dialogue. Later, another writer (or editor) added the speeches of a youthful fourth friend (chap. 32-37). The book is part of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, which includes Ecclesiastes and Proverbs.

The Book of Job consists of five distinct sections: a prose prologue (chap. 1-2); a series of dramatic discourses between Job and three of his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (chap. 3-31); a discourse between Job and Elihu, a fourth friend (chap. 32-37); God's speeches from the whirlwind (38:1-42:6); and a prose epilogue (42:7-17).

Job is a “man . . . blameless and upright . . . one who feared God, and turned away from evil”. He is pious, rich, and the head of a large, contented family. Then on a day “when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord”, God asks Satan what he thinks of Job's piety and righteousness. Satan proposes that Job would curse God if he were to lose all his wealth; so God and Satan agree to test Job. Satan proceeds to take away Job's possessions, even his sons, and finally to afflict Job with extremely painful boils. Job refuses, however, to curse God. Three of his friends, having heard of his misfortunes, now arrive to comfort him, but they are dumbfounded at their first sight of Job.

The second section, after Job's first complaint, consists of three cycles of speeches. During each cycle each one of his three friends speaks once and Job, directly replying to each in turn, answers three times. The gist of the speeches of the three friends is that Job's misfortunes and suffering must result from some wickedness on the part of Job and therefore he is justly served. Job, steadfastly proclaiming his innocence, soon becomes irritated, then angry, with his friends for their apparently unwarranted, superficial judgments; still he continues to seek an explanation for his sufferings: “Oh that I had one to hear me! Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me” .

The third section consists of the speeches of Elihu. His wrath is kindled against Job “because he justified himself rather than God” and against “his three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong”. Elihu contends that Job has added “rebellion to his sin” by questioning God's judgment. His support for this contention is the belief that “the Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power and justice”.

In the fourth section, God speaks from out of a whirlwind. He seems to ignore completely Job's desire for an explanation or justification of his suffering; instead, he humbles Job by challenging him to explain how the universe was created and how it is ordered. Job's “error,” apparently, is his presumption that God's ways and his omnipotence are humanly comprehensible. In seemingly irrelevant questions, God both rebukes Job and makes his

most direct reply to Job's earlier question: "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him?" . Recognizing at last that he has spoken out of ignorance and that he may come no closer to God than his vision of him, Job now repents.

In the last section, God rebukes Job's three friends (Elihu does not appear) because they "have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has". He gives to Job twice the wealth and possessions he formerly owned, seven sons and three beautiful daughters, and a contented old age. The epilogue, like the prologue, is in prose, and it most clearly reflects the probable folktale origins of the poetic discourses.

**Author:** The Book of Job does not specifically name its author. The most likely candidates are Job, Elihu, Moses and Solomon.

**Date of Writing:** The date of the authorship of the Book of Job would go in connection with the author of the Book of Job. If Moses was the author, the date would be around 1440 BC. If Solomon was the author, the date would be around 950 BC.

**Purpose of Writing:** The Book of Job helps us to understand it is beyond our human ability to understand the "why's" behind all the suffering in the world. The wicked will receive their just dues. We cannot always blame our suffering and sin on our lifestyles. Suffering may sometimes be allowed in our lives to purify, test, teach or strengthen the soul. God remains enough, deserves and requests our love and praise in all circumstances of life.

**Key Verses:** Job 1:1, "In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil."

Job 1:21, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

Job 38:1-2, "Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said, 'Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?'"

Job 42:5-6, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

**Brief Summary:** Why do the righteous suffer? This is the question raised after Job loses his family, his wealth, and his health. Job's 3 friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, come to comfort him and to discuss his crushing series of tragedies. They insist his suffering is punishment for sin in his life. Job, though, remains devoted to God through all of this and contends that his life has not been one of sin. A fourth man, Elihu, tells Job he needs to humble himself and submit to God's use of trials to purify his life. Finally, Job questions God Himself and learns valuable lessons about the sovereignty of God and his need to totally trust in the Lord. Job is then restored to health, happiness and prosperity beyond his earlier state.