

Introduction to Job

Where is it in the Bible?

Job is the eighteenth book of the Old Testament, following Esther and preceding Psalms. It is the first book poetic book and is also classified as wisdom literature.. In Hebrew Bibles, Job is part of the last section, the Writings or Kethuvim. It follows Proverbs and precedes Song of Solomon.

Who wrote it?

The author of Job is unknown, and there are no hints in the book itself about who the author might have been. It was probably written by more than one person.

When was it written?

Dating this book is very complicated because there are no references to historical events in it. The Hebrew text of the book is very difficult with many words whose meanings are uncertain; this makes it problematic to use language as an indication of composition date. Most scholars date the book to the sixth century B.C., but suggestions ranging from the patriarchal period to the post-exilic period and even later have been made. It is also possible that different parts of Job were written at different times.

What is it about?

Job tells the story of a wealthy and righteous man whom God boasts about to Satan. Satan is then given permission to test Job's faithfulness by destroying his possessions, his family, and his health. Three of Job's friends come to comfort him and offer explanations for his situation, but they fail. A fourth friend arrives to help, but does no better. Finally, God speaks to Job. The book ends with Job's vindication and the restoration of what had been taken away.

How is it structured?

- I. Narrative Prologue (1:1-2:13)
- II. Job's Lament (3:1-26)
- III. Dialogues with the Friends (4:1-28:28)
 - a. First Cycle (4:1-14:22)
 1. Eliphaz and Job (4:1-7:21)
 2. Bildad and Job (8:1-10:22)
 3. Zophar and Job (11:1-14:22)
 - b. Second Cycle (15:1-21:34)
 1. Eliphaz and Job (15:1-17:16)
 2. Bildad and Job (18:1-19:29)
 3. Zophar and Job (20:1-21:34)
 - c. Third Cycle (22:1-27:23)
 1. Eliphaz and Job (22:1-24:15)
 2. Bildad and Job (25:1-27:23)
- IV. On Wisdom (28:1-28)
- V. Job's Final Monologue (29:1-31:40)

- VI. Elihu's Speeches (32:1-37:24)
- VII. The Lord Speaks (38:1-42:6)
 - a. God's First Discourse and Job's Response (38:1-40:5)
 - b. God's Second Discourse and Job's Response (40:6-42:6)
- VIII. Narrative Epilogue: Job's Reversal (42:7-17)

What are some things to look for?

- **God's Control:** Many of us, like Job and his friends, believe that everything that happens, whether good or evil, is the will of God. This is true even when human beings are the direct cause of suffering. This raises a number of questions:
 - Why are human beings allowed to act in defiance of God's will, even when their actions adversely affect God's people?
 - What does it mean to say that God is in control?
 - How can we trust God in the midst of terrible events?
 - Why does a loving, all-powerful God allow bad things to happen to good people?
- **Job's Character:** The popular picture we have of Job is that he is a patient and understanding person. Is that the image of Job that is presented in the book?
- **Offering Comfort:** Job's friends come to him with good intentions of comforting him by explaining what has happened to him. "The main answers they bring are that Job deserves his suffering, that all humans are sinners so even good people are not immune from suffering, and that God may use suffering to teach us something. All these are common answers, even in our day, to questions about suffering and may be helpful to some people. But they can be hurtful rather than helpful to others."¹
- **Suffering:** The undeserved suffering of "good" people is the obvious theme of the book. Unfortunately, it is not clear what the book is saying about this. The point might be that there is not necessarily a cause or reason for human suffering. Or it could be that God must play some role in suffering, although it is unclear exactly what that might be. Or perhaps it is that suffering pushes people to look for causes in the victim or God, but that may lead to oversimplification. Although God vindicates Job in the end, the reason for Job's tragedy is not explained to him. Is the author saying that from our human perspective there is no answer?

¹ Daniel Simundson at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=38>