

Job

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Job: Introduction, Part 2



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- In the 4th century when the Christian Bible was set in place, the book of Job was placed as the first of the books of poetry: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. Many biblical scholars argue that Job is the greatest of poetry books, even greater than Psalms due to its singular structure and storyline.
- Essentially the poem of Job breaks down into five parts: 1) a prologue in prose, 1:1 – 2:13, where we meet Job and his misfortunes and also his friends who come to comfort him 2) a poetic conversation, 3:1 – 31:40, which goes back and forth between Job and his friends 3) a poetic rebuke and advice given by a fourth friend, 32:1 – 37:24, who is mostly ignored 4) a series of poetic challenges and questions from God to Job, 38:1 – 42:6, leading to Job's repentance 5) an epilogue in prose, 42:7-17, that tells us of Job's restoration and return to happiness.
- As we mentioned last week in Part 1 of our Introduction, the story of a man unjustly suffering is older than the story we have, but clearly the story was taken and prayed over to convey the Truth of God. As to a date when a brilliant unnamed poet sat down to write the story of Job, scholars debate it a lot, but at the very least the book is probably 8th or 9th century BC. Such scholars look at clues like the word "Satan" and that it was capitalized and looking at the time and way the Hebrew language developed.
- Another factor as to why scholars date the book so old is that both Jeremiah and Isaiah seemed to be strongly impacted by Job. Jeremiah 20's long lament has a number of parallels to Job. For instance, Jeremiah 20:14-15 says, "Cursed be the day when I was born! May the day when my mother gave birth to me not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, saying, 'A boy has been born to you!'", which sounds a lot like Job 3:3, "May the day on which I was to be born perish, as well as the night which said, 'A boy is conceived.'". And there are a good many passages in Isaiah 40-53 that echo Job as well. Job 21:22 asks, "Can anyone teach God knowledge, in that He judges those on high?", while Isaiah 40:14 expands the thought to, "With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding?"
- The reason Job has such an impact on Jeremiah and Isaiah as well as other books of the Bible (James 5:11, 1 Corinthians 3:19, Romans 11:35, etc.), is that it is not merely a story on why the righteous suffer (Psalm 34:19, Ecclesiastes 7), but rather it is Job's emphasis on integrity and faithfulness in the face of adversity. Samuel Terrien, in his commentary on Job, offers that as Job

was “Traveling into the theological unknown, he was led unwittingly to imply the necessity of a Christ, learned the sufficiency of grace, and was brought to the threshold of pure religion/faith”.

- Indeed, the story begins and ends with an understanding of Job’s faith fueled integrity. And throughout the story we see that his ethics and morality always match his faith. Job is met with pain and suffering of epic proportions and while he is knocked to his knees and even wishes he had never been born, and as Satan’s battle to destroy him rages, he discovers that when all else is lost, faith is all he has left and in the end faith is not defeated and in the aftermath has the power to restore.
- Even more surprising is the inner conflict with his faith. On the one hand, Job totally blames God for his troubles. Either God Himself is doing this or God is standing idly by allowing him to suffer unjustly. On the other hand, Job is still convinced that God is loving and just and that he will be vindicated.
- Towards the end of the story, in 31:35, Job out of his frustration, demands, “Let the Almighty answer me!”. That is the human response. We want to know Why? We want to understand. We feel that we have a right to demand that God explain Himself. But the reply from Heaven never comes to us as we would like. The still, small voice comes to us with questions, not explanations. The Lord does not give us the mysteries of the universe and life, nor does He willingly solve the problem of evil. What God does offer is His hand and His constant and untiring presence, no matter our condition or outside circumstance. And God promises to walk with us even through the darkest corners of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. But as we walk hand in hand with Him, we will always walk by faith and never by sight.