

Job: Making Sense out of Suffering

By Reed Lessing (edited with additions/deletions by Pastor Mike)

Introduction

The book of Job has fascinated countless people ever since it was first written. Events in the book take place on two levels. On the earthly plane, the conflict is between Job and his three friends. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar claim that the righteous enjoy temporal blessings and prosperity during this life, while the wicked suffer. Their principle of retribution is so uniform that the converse conclusion may be drawn: those who prosper must therefore be righteous, while those who suffer, as Job does, must be overt, unrepentant sinners. At the same time there is a parallel conflict on the heavenly level between the LORD and Satan. (The Hebrew text literally means “the adversary,” indicating an early date of composition before the word became the proper name. However, since this figure is clearly the same one commonly called “Satan” in later Biblical texts, this study will employ the more familiar terminology.)

God is confident, contrary to the claims of Satan, that his servant Job serves him freely, in response to divine grace (Job 1:9; 2:3). Satan pushes back. He believes Job serves God only for the sake of earthly gain. Because every man has his price, Satan wagers that acute suffering and loss will cause Job to renounce the LORD.

The story that unfolds elicits a number of questions. Why did God provoke Satan in the first place, knowing that it would cause suffering for Job? To what extent do the divine speeches in Job 38–41 answer or resolve the problems raised earlier in the book? Who in the world are Behemoth and Leviathan in these chapters? Why does Job repent in chapter 42? Why does the book’s ending not return to the heavenly council and God’s wager with Satan? We will take up these questions and so much more. So let’s get started!

Laying the Foundation

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of Jesus who bore our sins in his body on the cross. May this cross be for us like the tree that sweetens our bitter suffering; like the rod that blossoms with life and beauty; like the bronze serpent that calls us to look to you when the pain of life overtakes us and we are surrounded with suffering. Teach us to bear our own cross and to believe that with it you send grace and mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Question 1: Read Ezek 14:14, 20 and James 5:11. What do these texts tell us about Job?

Ezek. 14:14 ESV even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 14:20 ESV even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither son nor daughter. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.

Jas. 5:11 ESV Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Question 2: When did the events in the book of Job take place?

Job 2:11 ESV Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him.

Job 32:2 ESV Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, burned with anger. He burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God.

Gen. 36:10-11 ESV These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Basemath the wife of Esau.¹¹ The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz.

1 Chr. 1:35-36 ESV The sons of Esau: Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.³⁶ The sons of Eliphaz: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, Kenaz, and of Timna, Amalek.

Gen. 25:1-2 ESV Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah.² She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.

1 Chr. 1:32 ESV The sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine: she bore Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. The sons of Jokshan: Sheba and Dedan.

Gen. 22:20-21 ESV Now after these things it was told to Abraham, "Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor:²¹ Uz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram,

Other pieces of evidence used to date the Book of Job

- Job functions as a priest for his family, but no mention of the Levitical priesthood
- No Tabernacle or Temple, no centralized worship (e.g. Jerusalem)
- Job's age (calculated to be 210 based on Job 42:16-17 (he lived 140 years after his affliction and 140 is twice his age before he suffered (70 + 140 = 210)) is about the age of Abraham (175 (Gen. 25:7)) and Isaac (180 (Gen. 35:28)), which is longer than those who lived later in Old Testament times, but not as old as those pre-Flood.
- The name Job occurs in Egyptian execration (curse) texts (from ca. 2000 B.C.) and in second millennium texts from Mari and Alakh (located near the Syrian/Turkey border) and other names in the Book of Job also fit this time period.
- Job receives money in the form of a *kesitah* (Job 42:11), which is a measure of silver mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament only in connection with Jacob (Gen. 33:19, Josh. 24:32).

Question 3: Where did the events in the book of Job take place?

Job 1:1 ESV There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

Jer. 25:20 ESV and all the mixed tribes among them; all the kings of the land of Uz and all the kings of the land of the Philistines (Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod);

Lam. 4:21 ESV Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz; but to you also the cup shall pass; you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare.

Gen. 36:28 ESV These are the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran.

1 Chr. 1:42 ESV The sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan. The sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran.

Gen. 36:11 ESV The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz.

Gen. 36:15 ESV These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: the chiefs Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz,

Gen. 36:42 ESV Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar,

Question 4: If the events in Job happened during Israel's sojourn in Egypt, then when was the book written?

Question 5: Can we say, then, that Job is a historical book? (See Judges 17:1 or 1 Sam. 1:1)

Question 6: What is the book's structure?

Question 7: What do you know about “theodicy”?

- God may be powerful and _____ if there is no _____.
- God may be _____ and there can be _____ if God is not _____
- God may be powerful and there can be _____ if God is not _____

Question 8: Does the book of Job address theodicy?

Question 9: What do you hope to get out of this study of Job?

Closing Prayer: [The closing prayers are from the hymn, *If Thou But Trust in God to Guide Thee* – LSB, 750]. Heavenly Father, hear us as we pray: “If thou but trust in God to guide thee, And hope in Him through all thy ways, He’ll give thee strength, whate’er betide thee, And bear thee through the evil days. Who trusts in God’s unchanging love, Builds on the rock that naught can move.” In Jesus’ holy name. Amen.

Assignment: Read Job 1–8 and answer these questions:

- 1) How do you account for the differences between Job’s confidence in chapters 1–2 and his great doubt and anguish in chapter 3?
- 2) How do Job’s friends help him? How do they throw gas on the fire?
- 3) Think of a time when you or someone you care for deeply had a Job-like experience? What brought about healing? What didn’t?