

***THE BOOK OF JOB***  
***Introduction***

***By***  
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With the drama of the Book of Job we are introduced to the first of the Wisdom books in our Bible. Wisdom literature had its beginnings in the ancient Near East. Biblical wisdom literature began to appear on the scene around 1,000 B.C.

Biblical wisdom writings were designed as proverbs, dialogues, and debates. They were for the most part lengthy discussions on life's major questions. In addition to the Book of Job, the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and some of the Psalms form the body of the biblical wisdom writings. The influence of the wisdom of the wise person is felt in the Song of Songs (Solomon) and the Book of Lamentations as well.

The wisdom literature was designed as poetry, and this is true of the Book of Job except for the prologue, Chapters 1 and 2, and the epilogue, Chapter 42:7-17. Another distinctive quality of the wisdom writings is their richness in the use of metaphors (symbols), parables, and riddles.

The setting for the Job adventure is ***“the land of Uz.”*** The location is somewhere along the trade routes between the Jordan River and the Euphrates River and north of Arabia. Because of the reference of the Lamentations writer, ***“Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz” (4:21)***, some early interpreters associated Uz with Edom, but this does not seem likely. It is possible that Uz was adjacent to Edom on the east or that at one time the Edomites had occupied Uz.

We are also uncertain as to when the Job drama was played out. Some Bible interpreters have questioned whether Job was an actual historical character. But setting the question aside, the power of the story is unquestionable. The setting for the drama, however, was quite likely timed before the Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai because early in the story, we are told that Job acted as a priest in offering his own burnt sacrifices.

Chapters 1 and 2, the prologue, set the stage for the action and the discussions which make up a major part of the drama. It is here we meet the wealthy family man who feared God and avoided evil. And it is here that we have the tragic tale of how he lost everything and was stricken with a disgusting disease. Finally, it is in the pro-

logue that we are introduced to Job's three friends who, having heard about his tragedy, traveled the trade routes to show sympathy with Job. And when they arrived, they grieved with him in silence for seven days.

Then follow the dramatic and lengthy discussions that took place. The central theme of these dialogues is one that has plagued people from that time until now, "*Why do good and upright people suffer?*" At the very outset we become aware of the fact that Job's three friends focus on the position held by even the advisers in that ancient time—that all suffering is the result of sin; a righteous person will not only be prosperous but will also not have to go through hard times of suffering.

And it is this idea that Job in his misery speaks out against. While he is an upright man who fears God, he does not boast of being without sin, but as he sees it, God is causing him to suffer way beyond what he might deserve. He insists again and again that the tragedies which has robbed him of everything but life itself is not the result of sin.

Yet, as we proceed along through the Job adventure, we cannot help but be moved by his loyalty to God even during his confusing hard times and unanswered questions. Yes, he asked questions. And, yes, he argued with God and at times came close to blasphemy. But through it all he remained steadfast in his faith.

As you will see, there are many practical lessons to be learned from the Job story. But there is one especially that we want to underline because it also speaks loudly to us today as we struggle through our Christian pilgrimage. When Job's three friends heard about the tragedies that ruined him, they traveled long, hard miles to be with him. Then they cared enough to sit in silence with him for seven days. As so often happens during times of suffering, there are not words to express the deepest feelings, but just being there is important.

But then when Job broke the silence and expressed the agony he felt, the three friends became judgmental and turned against him. He did not react according to their formula, and so in their own self-righteousness they lashed out at him and attempted to force him into their way of thinking. They failed him miserably in his moment of great need. At the very time Job needed friends to stand by and support him, they were not with him in spirit.

The gift of friendship is one of God's most marvelous provisions. It is one of the most Christian of our relationships. Being a caring and supportive friend is a powerful Christian witness.

Job is not mentioned in the “Faith Hall of Fame” of Chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews. Matter of fact, Job is mentioned just two other times in our entire Bible. The prophet Ezekiel mentions his name along with Noah and Daniel (Ezek. 14), and the writer of the Book of James gives him a well-deserved praise which sums up the central thought in our lessons, ***“Behold, we count them happy which endure. You have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy [Job stood firm and in the end the Lord treated him with compassion and mercy]”*** (James 5:11).

To study the Book of Job is an experience of a lifetime. Its theme is timeless, its appeal is universal, its language is matchless, and its moral is eternal. Yet, Job’s story is deeply personal. It has meaning for every person in every culture in every time. We do not need to be poets, philosophers, psychologists, playwrights, or preachers to understand the book.

Every person on earth identifies with Job at one time or another. We weep with him in the tragedies that wiped him from depths of physical suffering. We rebel with him at the insensitivities of friends upon whom we thought we could count. We, too, wonder why God is silent just when we need Him most. But then, with Job, we hear the voice of God out of the whirlwind and realize that He has something more for us to learn. When all is said and done, we confess with Job, ***“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye sees You”*** (42:5). In that confession rests our hope—for physical and emotional healing, for social restoration, and for spiritual redemption.

But we are far ahead of our story. The study of the Book of Job begins with a question, not an answer. The question we ask about the book determines the answer that we will receive from our study. Satan, for example, asked the skeptic’s question, ***“Does Job serve God for nought?”*** In other words, did Job serve God because of the blessings he received? We will learn the answer to that question as we become acquainted with Job and the nature of his faith.

Job himself asked the sufferer’s question, ***“Why was I born?”*** His question still hangs in the air. We do not understand the reason why God permits suffering, especially among innocent people. Skeptics turn this question into a reason for agnostic (nonbelievers) and sometimes atheistic (godless) doubt. We will not learn the answer to this question from the study of the Book of Job, at least to the satisfaction of skeptics.

God's question to Satan will be our guide. When Satan appears before the Council of Heaven to report on his restless wanderings on earth, God asks him, "***Have you considered my servant Job?***" A world of meaning is wrapped up in this question. God is not only revealing a personal relationship that He enjoys with Job, but He is also expressing absolute confidence in his integrity.

But even a man who is commended as "perfect" in wisdom and righteousness by human standards has room to grow. Therefore, God is also saying that Job can stand the test of his faith at the hands of Satan. Contrary to some opinion, God is not wagering with Satan on Job's destiny of yielding to Satan's intimidation. He still has Job's welfare in mind when He permits Satan to test him by tragedy. Until we confront the contradictions of life which put our faith to the acid test, we do not become the mature believers God intended us to be.

This is the story of Job. Introduced to us an example of human righteousness. Job is remembered as an example of God's grace. Job's story is our story. His tests are our tests. If we are skeptics, we may react to testing with bitterness and perhaps blasphemy. If we are believers, we will still react at first, most likely with the skeptic's question, "Why?" But if we will not let God go, He will eventually speak to us. When He does, it will be in the form of another question, "Who am I?"

Once we see who He is, we will drive deeper the stake of our commitment so that the tether (rope) of our faith can play out to cover the emergencies of human existence, including the question, "Why do the innocent suffer?" When we know Who God is, the question "Why?" is the motivation to spiritual growth rather than skeptical disbelief.

Discovering Job is a journey. It is a struggle with spurts, a path that leads through swamps to mountain peaks, a tragedy with some comical relief, but always an adventure that moves us forward to the time when we bow before God, receive His grace, and become all that He intends us to be.

I invite you on a journey with Job. Signs for the journey come as lessons that will keep us moving toward the goal of our study—to share Job's trust in God and receive God's grace for us.