

THE BOOK OF JOB
Chapter 1:1-5

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To understand Job, we must know about the land in which he lived, the school of religious thought to which he belonged, and the quality of life which he exemplified. Each of us is a product of the time, place, and culture in which we live. Think, for example, about living in the time one hundred plus years ago. Our nation struggled in the transition between the Age of agriculture and the Age of Industry. Most people lived on farms or in villages, few enjoyed the benefits of higher education, and none knew the impact of electronic media or the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Today our characters are shaped by the influences of the world in which we live. We are educated, mobile, and diverse. Our tastes are dominated by the media, and our values are influenced by the secular mind. The time in which we live makes the difference in how we think, what we believe, and who we are.

Job is introduced to us simply as a man who lived in the **“Land of Uz.”** Believe it or not, a wealth of meaning is contained in this simple fact. Uz is a shadowy land of the ancient past. We know little about its time, place, and culture except from bits and pieces of archeological evidence in the biblical record.

However, Uz is a real place, not a fantasy. As to the times it existed, we know that the Land of Uz is so ancient that it exists before written history. Sometime after Adam’s banishment from the Garden, Noah’s building of the Ark, Abraham’s journey by faith from Ur of the Chaldeans, and the captivity of the children of Israel in Egypt, there was a man named Job who lived in the land of Uz. As vague as the dating may seem, we know that Job lived before God revealed His written Law to Moses on Mount Sinai and before He established the nation of Israel as His chosen people.

Timing is crucial to understanding the Book of Job because it means that he had no special, written revelation to guide him in his search for God. We who have the benefits of Holy Scripture, church history, Christian theology, and literally millions of religious books can hardly imagine what it would be like to pursue our thirst for God without special, written revelation. Yet, we must try to put ourselves in Job’s time. He had only the natural revelation of God’s creation to guide him.

Natural revelation showed Job the majestic beauty, awesome power, and eternal nature of God. Through out the Book of Job these themes are expressed time and time again. Job and his friends sing of God's majestic beauty, tremble before His awesome power, and bow before His eternal nature. The Book of Job vouches for the truth that we can know God through natural revelation.

The Book of Job confirms the Apostle Paul's statement in his letter to the Roman Christians. In speaking to the question about spiritual outcome of people who do not have the advantage of the special revelation of the Scriptures he wrote, "*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse*" (Rom. 1:20).

These words of the great Apostle give us the essence of religion based upon natural revelation. In nature we see evidence of the Person and power of God. And it is these truths that form the foundation for Job's religion.

The introduction of Job as a man who lived in the Land of Uz also gives us some vital facts about the place in which he lived. Although our knowledge of the Land of Uz is very limited, we do know that it was located somewhere to the east of the Jordan River. In ancient times, the Jordan River marked the dividing line between the civilized and uncivilized worlds. The Land of Uz symbolized the wild and wooly East of ancient history. Job lived in a lawless land in which fortunes were made and lost overnight due to the random weather, ruthless thieves, and vicious competition.

Another fact crucial to our understanding all that follows resides in the four-word phrase, "*The Land of Uz.*" We know that a land which exist before written history and lies to the east of the Jordan had a male-controlled society in which the father represented the institutions of the home, church, school, government, and business. Spiritually as well, all the culture centered around the home, and the male head of the house served as the prophet, priest, and king for the entire family.

This kind of culture is strange to us today. We live in a time which the absolute authority of the father has been broken and his role in the family is shared with other institutions outside of the home. While there are disadvantages in concentrating so much power in one person, there are also advantages.

In modern society, wherever the functions of the family are taken outside the house one set of problems is traded for another. Day-care centers, for instance. Assume the role of parents in caring for children. Yet, the evidence comes in that day-care child-

ren do not learn the social graces and spiritual values which only caring parents can provide. Day-care children tend to sharpen their values against their peers who are also, two, three, and four-year-old. Even in the best day-care centers, surrogate (substitute) parents cannot replace the modeling, supervision, and love of the mother and father. Especially in spiritual development, there is no substitute for the parent and the role of the father.

Every great civilization has an image of the ideal person. Critics of the late twentieth-century society say that that is our problem. We have no heroes that represent the ideals of our time. When young people are asked to name the people they most admire, celebrities from the fields of music, professional sports, and movies are named first. Except for their social talents, basically these heroes are only bits of person. Frequently their personal lives are a mess, their characters are repulsive, and their ambitions are selfish.

Job is just the opposite. He is introduced to us as a total person who represents the most advanced ideals of his time, place, and culture. While no person is perfect, Job comes close to perfection as anyone we meet in the Old Testament. In a very real sense, we can think of him as a person who points us forward to the Person of Jesus Christ—our ultimate example.

We are introduced to Job as a man who was *“blameless and upright,” “fearing God”* and *“shunning evil.”* Each word had meaning. In his heart, Job was “blameless.” No deceitfulness plagued him. He was one of those rare people who harbored no hate nor covered no sin at the center of his soul. While he himself will later admit that he is not sinless by nature, nevertheless, he can claim to be “blameless” in the motives of his heart.

Job is as “straight” in his outer behavior as he is “blameless” in his inner desires. The word “straight” refers to an unswerving plumb line of behavior. Again, Job is a rare person—we always know where he stands, and we can always count on his actions. While Job’s consistency of behavior is an asset we admire, his highest commendation is the integrity of his character. “Blameless” and “straight” tell us that he is the same man inside and out. Most of us nurse hidden flaws of character which we try to cover by rigid external standards. The tension catches up with us when we live under the fear of being found out.

We have seen Job as the epitome of righteousness. He is also the epitome of wisdom. Thinking in the ancient East was dominated by what was called the Wisdom School, made up of scholars and students who tried to know God and live righteously

through the revelation of natural creation. Motivated by their hunger for God, the Wisdom School thinkers exercised their gift of human reason to reflect upon nature and teach others their faith. Their doctrine centered on a belief in a sovereign God whose awesome power created the physical universe and all forms of life.

Motivated by their thirst for God and activated by their ability to think about God, they set wisdom as the goal for their spiritual quest. Wisdom is the ability to see things whole. By worship and righteousness, they hoped to understand the ways of God in the world and His purpose for humankind. In their search for God, Wisdom School people leaned into the future when God would lift the veil on His special revelation—the written Law of Moses, the promise of the prophets, and eventually the coming of Jesus Christ. Beginning with the power of God, then, and leaning toward His promises, the Wisdom School people put their faith into the capsule of a single sentence, ***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psa. 111:10).***

Job represents the Wisdom School. We have seen the integrity of his inner and outer life in righteousness; we now see the integrity in his vertical and horizontal relationships. Vertically, he ***“feared the Lord.”*** Fear of God may be negative or positive. We can be paralyzed by fear before the awesome power of an angry God, or we can bow and worship before the majestic power of a loving God. As we will see throughout our study, Job’s ***“fear of the Lord”*** is based upon a reverent relationship with a God who is at one and the same time the untouchable sovereign of the universe and the intimate friend with whom Job walked and talked.

Another hint about Job’s relationship with God comes to us in his horizontal relationship with the world in which he lives. Because he feared the Lord, Job also ***“shunned evil.”*** Fear is a weak motivation for shunning evil on the long run. We need a higher motivation for morality. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, love is the greatest motivation of all. He wrote, ***“the love of Christ constrains me.”*** So, we can suppose that Job’s fear of the Lord went beyond fright to respect and worship, even love. In that sense, he approached perfection in wisdom as he began to see things as whole.

Our introduction to Job continues with the description of his family, his fortune, and his fame. Perfection thrives once again, at least in human terms. According to ancient standards, Job had the perfect number of children—seven sons and three daughters. Seven symbolized “wholeness” to the ancients and in a male-controlled age, seven sons represented “perfection.” In turn, three daughters rounded out the family and left nothing to be desired. Also notice the priority of Job’s family in listing of his wealth. His children came ahead of his possessions.

The numbering of Job's possessions is not accidental either. ***“Seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred donkeys”*** reveal the abundance of his wealth (1:3). The numbers of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys are all “perfect” for the area and the time.

Ranchers, traders, farmers, and builders set their goals at these numbers, and when they reached them, they knew they had arrived. But Job went one better. By achieving the “perfect” number in diverse fields, he became a large multinational corporation with many companies of note. His sheep filled the hillside, his camel caravans supplied international trade routes, his oxen ploughed acres and acres of farmland, and his donkeys carried sand and stone, wood and mortar for construction. To top it all off, Job had so many servants that the head count is lumped into the phrase, ***“a very large number of servants.”***

To summarize Job's family and fortune, the author of the Book of Job flatly states that he ***“was the greatest of all men of the east.”*** In the wild East with its unsafe environment, its lawless nature, and its unstable culture a good and godly man stood head and shoulders above all the others. A single word in our Scripture lessons tells us why. Job's righteousness is related to his riches and his reputation by the word, ***“And”*** (Job 1:2). The relationship is not necessarily a matter of cause and effect, but it is a matter of conjunction—meaning that Job held his righteousness and riches in balance—one complementing the other.

Righteousness, riches, and reputation are empty without quality in human relationships, especially with our families. Job qualifies as “perfect” on this count as well. Scripture tells us that his family knew how to celebrate. We are told that his sons took turns holding feasts in their homes and even inviting their sisters to eat and drink with them (1:4).

The fact that the seven sons of Job invited their three sisters to celebrate with them is an act of love, not necessity. Women had little worth in the man rule age of Job's time. The Land of Uz was a man's land in which brute strength was most highly prized. We understand, then, why the Scriptures make special note of the relationship between Job's sons and daughters. Even though their father was dominant in the household, he taught his sons to value their sisters as persons, not possessions. Only a father could communicate those values.

Job's family also knew how to worship God. Without a synagogue or a priest, Job accepted his responsibility as spiritual head for his family. How sensitive he was to their needs. Although celebration can often lead to excesses that can lead to sin, the

Scriptures tell us that Job's children did not sin in their feasting. Still, the temptation persisted, so Job took it upon himself to make sacrifices for his children just in case they sinned and ***"cursed God in their hearts"*** (1:5). Before they sinned, Job regularly prayed and offered sacrifices for his children. Many of us pray for our children only after they have sinned, when it is too late, or in trouble.

Probably no person in Scripture other than Jesus Himself is more thoroughly examined than Job. Yet, under the microscopic eye which magnifies his righteousness, his riches, his reputation, and his relationships he remains blameless in his heart, straight in his conduct, in his worship, and strong against evil. Without the special revelations of Scripture, the commandments of the Law, the promises of the Prophets, or the redemptive grace of Jesus Christ, Job is "perfect" in righteousness for his time, place, and culture.

How do we improve on perfection? The many tests of suffering were yet unknown to Job. On the sacred journey ahead, we will learn that his "perfection" is relative. Even Job has room to grow. And so do we.

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