

Message #1

Various Texts

At some point in life probably all of us have asked the question: “Why did this have to happen to me?” “Where was God when that tragedy hit my world?” “How could God let this happen?” Moments of pain, moments of sorrow, moments of loss, moments filled with tears and grief prompt us to ask these questions. There is a book in the Bible that is designed to help us cope with questions like that. It is a book that has fascinated minds, encouraged hurting hearts and has changed people’s entire perception of life and suffering—it is the story of Job.

Francis I. Anderson, a tremendous biblical scholar and archaeologist of this century, said—“The Old Testament book about Job is...one of the best gifts of God to men” (*Job*, p. 15).

John Kitto, who became deaf from a fall at age 13, who went on in the mid-1800’s to become one of the greatest biblical researchers, said—“The Book of Job is one of the most remarkable, not only in the Bible, but in all literature. As was said of Goliath’s sword—“There is none like it;” none in ancient or in modern literature” (*Kitto’s Daily Bible Illustrations*, Vol. 2, p. 8).

Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish historian, philosopher and writer of the 1800’s who abandoned a desire for ministry, said—“I call (Job), apart from all theories about it, one of the grandest things ever written with pen” (Samuel Cox, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, p. 1).

Martin Luther, the famed Reformer of the 1500’s, said Job was “more magnificent and sublime than any other book of Scripture” (J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 581).

Even Archibald MacLeish, the famed poet and playwright of this century, was so intrigued with the story of Job that in 1958, he tried to modernize it by producing “J.B.: A Play in Verse,” based on the book of Job.

Job has especially been an appealing story for Christians, because most of us have, at one time or another, struggled with or even questioned the matter of suffering, especially for one who seems to be so faithful. **Job has helped many believers to see God when their eyes have been filled with tears.**

But the truth is, you and I have never really known a Job or experienced anything ourselves like he did. Who do we know that in one day lost all wealth, possessions and children, only to discover that he would soon lose his health and total respect of his wife and friends?

Every now and then we hear of a tornado or hurricane or fire that destroyed a home and took some lives. Every now and then we hear of some terrible thing that happened to a child who ended up dead. But when that kind of thing happens the people involved typically receive the utmost sympathy and empathy from the community and the country. In fact, usually many people will rally around to help rebuild lives. They will support the family with prayer and support. It was not so with Job. He became in some ways the laughing stock of the world.

When he was hit with multiple catastrophes, instead of his friends rallying around him to offer support, they started making accusations against him that something was wrong with him. It is one thing to say, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15), but it is quite another to say it, believe it and live it when you are the Job of the Bible. This is a man worth knowing; this is a story worth telling and this is a book of the Bible worth studying. There is nothing quite like it.

As always, we begin a book study by asking and answering strategic introductory questions.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #1 – Why study the book of Job?

Reason #1 - Because Job is in the Bible.

Actually, Job has been challenged by liberals as belonging in the Bible because the book contains over 100 new words and certain differences between Greek and Hebrew manuscripts.

Job has tremendous manuscript support as a book that belongs in God’s Word, including a very excellent translation of the Hebrew text in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was done approximately 250 years before Christ. There is also an Aramaic Targum (translation and paraphrase of Job) that also carefully follows the Hebrew text. The best Hebrew text we have of Job is the famous Masoretic text, which was copied and vowel pointed (A.D. 600-1000).

Undoubtedly, one of the most important discoveries concerning Job occurred in the finding of the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. In March of 1947, an Arab shepherd boy (Muhammad adh-Dhib) was searching for a lost goat 7.5 miles south of Jericho and one mile west of the Dead Sea. He went into a cave and found some jars which contained several leather scrolls. These caves were located near Qumran, thus termed “Qumran Caves.” These scrolls had been written and copied some 300 years before Christ and when compared to the Septuagint and Masoretic texts, they proved they were totally reliable.

In all, there were eleven caves. In Qumran Cave #2, which was excavated between March 10-29, 1952, one of the Old Testament books which was found was the book of Job. Four years later, in Qumran Cave #11, which was excavated in January of 1956, an Aramaic Targum (Aramaic paraphrase) was discovered of the entire book of Job. The Septuagint, the Masoretic text and the Dead Sea Scrolls are powerful indicators that Job does belong in God’s Word.

The Jews have always held Job to be one of their God-inspired books. Furthermore, some of the great names of church history have given serious study concerning the book of Job. Such names as Jerome, Augustine, Aquinas, Martin Luther and John Calvin, who, according to Dr. Anderson, “produced the greatest exposition of Job ever given...” (Anderson, p. 18).

Franz Delitzsch observed that there had been at least twenty-two Greek fathers that expounded Job up until 1637 and he personally cites twenty commentaries on Job that he had studied which were written from 1831-1859 (Delitzsch, pp. 33-44).

Reason #2 - Because Job is a book of which we are ignorant.

Steven Lawson said “The story of Job is one of the best known in the entire Bible yet, strangely enough, one of the least understood” (*Job*, p. 1).

Many of us can recite the basic story found in chapters 1-2 of Job, which comprises 5% of the book, but not many can think through chapters 3-42, which comprise 95% of the book. There are things in Job we know little about. For example:

- 1) The longest section in all of Scripture where God speaks is in Job (Job 38-41).
- 2) The longest section in all of Scripture where Satan speaks is in Job (Job 1-2).
- 3) Job gives us rare insight into heaven, including scenes between God, Satan and angels.
- 4) Job uses more Hebrew words not found anywhere else in the Bible.

Furthermore, there is a tendency for us to read Job as if it were primarily written to us, when in fact it is an Old Testament book, primarily written for Israel. Let us not forget that Job is the 18th book in our English translations of the Old Testament. It is not a New Testament book. What even makes this more intriguing is there is no hint that Job was Jewish and yet he is still honored in the Hebrew Bible as being worthy of being part of Scripture.

Israel should have realized as she entered the Promised Land that life is not always smooth sailing but if we remain faithful to God, God will enable us to experience His full blessings. Job is a book that should have taught her that. The same is true for us.

Reason #3 - Because Job is a book that comforts those suffering.

Notice what is assumed by this question; **Job is a book that comforts those suffering, it is not a book that explains all the suffering.** In fact, for Job, as far as we know, the reason he suffered was a mystery to him for most of his life.

But Job does wrestle with a key “heart wrenching question,” which is “If God is so loving and merciful, why do righteous people suffer?” “Where is God in the hurts, hardships and trials of our life?”

C. Hassell Bullock said, “All of the major religions have been compelled to come to terms with the perplexity of human suffering” (Bullock, p. 69). Some religions make suffering a part of a works system of salvation. Some religions make suffering an unexplainable deistic experience, which they view as being outside of the sovereignty of God.

The Bible, however, takes an entirely different approach. One of the key doctrines that starts on page one of the Bible is the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. God reveals that He is the sovereign Creator who is in absolute, providential control of all things. Somehow this point gets lost when it comes to suffering, but **the Bible makes human suffering part of the sovereign plan of God for even the most faithful of believers.** Human suffering becomes much more than just some system of rewards or punishments. Suffering has a sovereign plan and purpose in the infinite wisdom and plan of God.

If God permits someone to suffer, His sovereignty controls it and **any suffering person who comes to understand this will end up gaining far more than he loses.**

Reason #4 - Because Job is a book that teaches us about Satan and his tactics.

Satan is out to hurt faithful people of God. He wants them miserable; in fact he wants them destroyed. If it were not for the sovereign protection of God, Satan would kill every faithful believer. But since he cannot do that, he, at times makes life as miserable as he can. His goal is to get us to blame God and turn from God.

Do not miss this point—**Satan’s real purpose in causing bad things to hit and hurt God’s people is to get them to stop worshipping God and stop believing in God and even to start cursing God in their hearts. This book is not so much about the why of suffering, but what is your attitude and relationship to God when you are suffering? If something negative hits, can Satan get you to get mad at God and hate God? That is his goal.**

So one answer to why did this terrible thing happen to me is because Satan is trying to get you to walk away from God. He wants you to hate God, get mad at God and curse God.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #2 – When did the story of Job take place and when was the book of Job written?

This is one of the questions that make Job such a difficult book and we might as well begin by answering, “we don’t know for sure.” Francis I. Anderson said, “**No answer can be supplied from outside the book of Job**” (*Job*, p. 41).

Guesses as to the date among scholars run the time gamut of the Patriarchal period around or before or after the time of Abraham, approximately 2000 years before Christ, to after the Babylonian exile, some 500 to 600 years before Christ, to the Hellenistic Greek period some 200 years before Christ.

We agree with Anderson’s conclusion that you must determine the time of the book from inside the book itself, and **if we examine what is actually in the book of Job we may conclude that this book was written approximately 2000 years before Christ, and the events took place very near the middle of the book of Genesis (Genesis 25 ff.) in the Patriarchal period.** We may determine this by making the following eleven observations:

1. There are no allusions in Job to the key historical events of Israel's history, such as the Exodus, Red Sea, the Law or the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, the Conquest of Canaan, or the Tabernacle of the special days or priests. The fact that Job offers his own sacrifices plus seven separate sacrifices is something not sanctioned by Mosaic Law.
2. There does seem to be a reference to the Flood - Job 22:15-16. This would make the story sometime after the Flood of Genesis 6.
3. The Hebrew word "piece of money" (Job 42:11) is only used twice in the O.T. and both times it is used in reference to Jacob (Gen. 33:19; Josh. 24:32). This would place the story near or after the time of Abraham, in the middle of Genesis.
4. Job is a monogamist (Job 2:9; 19:17; 31:10), something that lends itself to the early days of the Old Testament.
5. Job's length of life is something very close to the length of life which was extended in the middle part of Genesis. Job lived an additional 140 years after the story happened (Job 42:16). Tereh, Abraham's father, lived to be 205 (Gen. 11:31-32); Abraham lived to be 175 (Gen. 25:7); Isaac lived to be 180 (Gen. 35:28); and Jacob lived to be 147 (Gen. 47:28). The time frame of his length of life is actually very Abrahamic.
6. Several names of people and places are those found in the middle of Genesis.
 - 1) Both Tema and Sheba were grandsons of Abraham (Job 6:19); Sheba through Ketura (Gen. 25:1-3) and Tema through Hagar (Gen. 25:12, 15).
 - 2) Most historians agree that the Sabeans are a group that stems from Sheba, because the actual Hebrew word use in Job 1:15 is "Shebah."
 - 3) Eliphaz (Job 2:11), one of Job's friends, may be Eliphaz, son of Esau, through his wife Adah (Gen. 12:16).
 - 4) Uz (pronounced in Hebrew "You-ts" or "Oots"), the place where Job lived (Job 1:1) is a place named after Abraham's nephew (Gen. 30:43).
7. Wealth was thought of in terms of the amount of cattle and livestock (Job 1:3; 42:12). This was something very consistent with Genesis, especially in the times of Abraham (Gen. 12:16). Also in Genesis there is a real drama of this kind of wealth that takes place with Jacob (Gen. 30:43).
8. The musical instruments mentioned in Job (timbrel, harp, flute) 21:12; 30:31 are instruments that are mentioned in Genesis(4:21; 31:27).

9. Job's daughters were given an inheritance with their brothers (42:15), which was something not possible under the Mosaic Law if the sons were alive (Num.27:8). This would suggest that Job was written before the Mosaic Law.
10. Among the Qumran scrolls, only the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy) and Job are written in a Paleo-Hebrew Script, which would indicate that Job is one of the oldest compositions in the Bible. This would easily fit the Genesis time frame.
11. The story occurs when Job was the godliest man on earth, by God's classification (Job 1:8).

There were some very godly men on earth in biblical times such as Abraham and Moses. If those men had been on earth when Job was written, it would seem that God would not say there is no one like him on earth. It would certainly fit if Job lived in between these two faithful men that he could have been the godliest man on earth.

All of these facts taken into consideration, which come from inside the book itself, lead us to conclude that **we cannot be far from the time of the actual events of Job when we suggest it occurs about midway through Genesis, approximately 2000 years B.C.**

If the story were penned shortly after it happened, Job is the first book of the Bible to be written for there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Genesis was written by Moses. Since Job occurs some 500 years before Moses writes the first five books of the O.T., **Job was written before Genesis at about the mid-point of the book of Genesis.**

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #3 – Who wrote Job?

The name Job means hated or persecuted. The Hebrew, Greek, Latin and English Bibles title the book Job because he is the key character. But a big question is who wrote it? The authorship of Job is really unknown. The bigger argument among critics concerning Job was whether it was written by one writer or several writers.

1. Some say Job was written by Moses. Those who hold this position cite the Mosaic name for God found in the book (YHWH-Jehovah-LORD), which was a name given to Moses (Exodus 3:14; Job 1:6, 7, 8); plus they cite that Jewish tradition does say Job was written by Moses.

Problem is the Hebrew grammar, for the most part, does not fit Moses' other writings, Genesis through Deuteronomy.

2. Some say Job was written by Solomon or wise men because there is a major emphasis on "the fear of the LORD" which is a key to wisdom literature.

Problem is internal data from inside Job indicates it was written much earlier than Solomon.

3. Some say Job was written by Job. Those who do, suggest that he would have had the time to write the story after it happened during his 140 years of blessing (Job 42:16). Those who take this position reason that only Job was in a position to know the conversation that took place between himself and God (Job 38-42:6).

Problem is the last two verses of Job—how did he write concerning his own death (Job 42:16-17)? Those who hold this position point out that this is often done in Scripture; someone writes the post-scripture end of the writer (i.e. Moses-Deuteronomy 34:5ff).

4. Some say it is written by Elihu who carefully listened and recorded everything that happened (Job 32:16-17) and then spoke and wrote in the first person (32:17ff). This explains the record of Job's death.

Problem is the discussion which appears to take place only between God and Job.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #4 – What is the purpose or theme of the book?

When it comes to this question, there seems to be some real wisdom in Dr. Smick's statement, a seminary professor of Old Testament languages, who writes, "The purpose of Job cannot be reduced to a single statement" (p. 858).

- 1) To establish for Israel that severe suffering was not always a sign of divine displeasure. Normally, people tend to think that God repays good with blessing and evil with cursing. That is the way we think it should work. The assumption then is if bad things are happening, it must be an indicator that God is angry and mad. Job says that is not true.
- 2) To communicate for Israel that no matter how distressful life may be, by maintaining a pure and upright position in the sight of God, one will eventually be blessed by God. If a believer will stay the course of honoring God, God will honor the believer.
- 3) To broaden one's theology as to why godly people suffer and have pain—
 - A. To show God is worthy of our love and faith apart from blessings.
 - B. To show God may permit suffering to develop our character .
 - C. To show that puny man does not always know the exact purpose and workings of God, but can know that God will always end the story right.
 - D. To show that the goodness of God does not exclude suffering.
- 4) To show the vast level of power and resources God has in working out His divine plan in the world.
- 5) To show man that everything in life is not pleasant , even though God is in total control.
- 6) To show that prosperity is not always a payment for righteousness and adversity is not always a punishment for sinfulness.

- 7) To show that God may purge a faithful and fruitful tree through suffering in order to produce even greater fruit.
- 8) To show that faithfulness, after a long season of severe trial, will eventually receive tremendous blessing.
- 9) To show godly people the right way to cope with their own suffering—keep worshipping, keep praising and keep witnessing.
- 10) To show people the right way to view things when other godly people do suffer.
- 11) To show Satan that God’s plan and people will always succeed no matter what he does.
- 12) To show God’s people that God’s plan and people will always succeed no matter what Satan does.
- 13) To reveal Job’s level of spirituality and show that it is possible to patiently endure and wait on God for His blessings no matter what we face (James 5:11).
- 14) To teach that no matter how godly we are we all need to repent in view of our failures (Job 42:5-6).

I believe Job, like Esther, was initially designed to show Israel the magnitude of the sovereignty of God, so God’s people would fear God and obey Him, no matter what the circumstances.

Steven Lawson said “The most prominent theme of this book is the message of the sovereignty of God. More than being a book about Job, it is, actually a book about God” (p. 7).

God is a God who does what He pleases, when He pleases and with whom He pleases. He is sovereign over Satan’s power and man’s circumstances. He is sovereign over everything including suffering and speech. He is sovereign over adversity, prosperity, forgiveness and blessing. It is no wonder that “fearing God” is such a critical part of the book. Fearing God is a critical part of wisdom literature and Job contributes to this literature by presenting a remarkable picture of God’s sovereignty.

If Job is the first book ever written, as we have suggested, it would stand to reason that God would reveal His majestic sovereignty just like He does in Genesis 1.

I believe the theme of this book is this:

God is completely sovereign over everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen to His people during their lives and in view of this, if God's people purpose to remain faithful to Him in worship and stay committed honoring Him through whatever He permits, they will eventually receive God's full blessings .

If you, with Job, truly have a faith that says, "the LORD gives and the LORD takes blessed be the name of the LORD" no matter what you face, you will receive the rich blessings of the same sovereign God who permitted your very circumstances. Those who will be blessed by God will always have a high and holy view of God's sovereignty no matter what is happening.

No one may know everything that is happening in your world right now, but God knows it. Your world may be totally falling apart and you have no idea why. If you will purpose to fear God and remain faithful to Him, you will eventually receive the greatest level of blessings you could ever receive from the same God who is sovereign over everything in your life. That is Job and this is his story and in the next weeks we will travel through the book that bears his name.