

#14. THE BOOK OF JOB

1. **Job is the first of four books devoted to a genre called *Hebrew Wisdom*.** Sometimes referred to as *Hebrew Poetry*, the collection consists of the following Biblical writings:
 - Job - deals with questions related to suffering.
 - Psalms - deals with life issues and our various responses to those circumstances.
 - Proverbs - a collection of wise sayings, primarily dealing with friends, foes, fools and true wisdom.
 - Ecclesiastes - deals with finding purpose in living.
 - Song of Solomon - a guidebook for understanding God's gift of love and marriage.
 - Some scholars have included Jeremiah's Lamentations in this genre.

2. **Concerning Wisdom Literature**
 - Such literature was common in the Biblical world, but we believe only these five books have the divine seal of authoritative inspiration upon them.
 - Though none of the books are considered primarily theological, historical or prophetic, such elements are frequently found scattered throughout the writings. Job is obviously the most historical in nature. The events of which occurred during the period of the Patriarchs (during the Book of Genesis).
 - As we work through Job, the reader learns one primary lesson: true wisdom is not necessarily rooted in linear logic and human perception. There is a higher reality found in the perspective, plans, and purposes of God.
 - Wisdom may be defined as *the right use of knowledge*. Others have defined it as *the ability to make good choices in life*. Knowledge is the acquisition of facts. Wisdom is proper application of those facts. Wisdom has almost nothing to do with I.Q. Rather, the goal of wisdom is successful, responsible, holy living.

- One more thing about Wisdom - in the culture of Israel there was not only an appreciation of wisdom, there were also individuals who excelled in the principles of wisdom and sought to teach others to follow the path effectively. These instructors were known simply as *wise men*. (Job 15:8; Ecclesiastes 9:1; Isaiah 19:12; 29:14; Matthew 23:34)
- In regard to the idea of *poetry*, we need to understand that English poetry relies primarily on rhyme or rhythm for its effect. Hebrew poetry relies on the idea of parallelism. The idea is a balance of thought, not a sense of rhythm or rhyme. In parallelism, the first line establishes a primary thought or theme. The following line (or lines) develop the thought further.
 - o *Synonymous parallelism* repeats the thought of the first line.
 - o *Contrasting parallelism* emphasizes the primary theme of the first line by contrasting it with an opposite idea.
 - o *Synthetical parallelism* uses the following lines to explain or justify the first line.

3. The Problem of Wisdom Literature

- Wisdom Literature in the Bible is often misread, misunderstood, and misapplied.
- When we read the passages in a haphazard way, we fail to understand they are very contextual and thematic. Some verses teach us not to dialog with a fool, or we will become just like them. Other verses tell us to debate fools with sound wisdom, lest they become wise in their own conceit. The balance is discovered by overall context, timing, and purpose. In other words, a verse or two of Wisdom Literature read alone often fails to portray the complete meaning behind the statement. In this way, we can misread Wisdom Literature.
- The wisdom statements are often summary statements illustrating a principle. For instance, when the proverbs tell us to stay far from the foolish, it isn't forbidding us to have social interaction with unbelievers. The point of such proverbs is to let us know the life of the foolish is not the place to look for wisdom. In this way, we can misunderstand Wisdom Literature.
- In similar fashion we can read a focused, situational observance in this type of literature and unintentionally make it a broader life principle. Job's narrative says every day the wicked suffer torment because of wicked life decisions (15:20). The meaning of this passage is clearly not that evil people never enjoy happiness or pleasure. Hebrews, for instance, admits there is a certain pleasure in sinfulness. The point is being made that

true, lasting happiness is not found in the path of wickedness. But if we make the wrong assumption about the verse, we may seriously misapply what is being said.

4. The author is unknown. Job, Solomon, and Moses have enjoyed the support of rabbinical tradition as possible authors. Certain textual indicators place the book at the time of the Patriarchs and Moses' stay in the wilderness (in Midian, adjacent to the Land of Uz) make him a likely candidate to have heard the story from men like Jethro and others. Yet the tone of the book resonates with other Solomonic writings. Job himself or one of his friends are possibilities as well.

5. The Date: The date of compilation is unknown. Fairly strong evidence indicates the events of Job took place during the Patriarchal period (the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob).

- Rabbinic tradition dates it during the middle days of Genesis.
- Job's life span of nearly 200 years corresponds to other life spans observed after the flood and before the days of the Exodus. (Job 42:16; cp. Genesis 25:7)
- This was a time of a strong Patriarchal system in the family unit. Job is seen serving a priestly function within his family. (Job 1:4, 5)
- The Chaldeans are depicted as nomads who had not yet established cities and nation-states. (Job 1:17)
- Though gold and silver was used, the idea of livestock as the primary indicator of wealth possibly points to the time of the Patriarchs. (Job 1:3; 42:12)
- There is no reference to the covenant, Mosaic Law, nor even a nation known as Israel.

6. Key Chapters

- **Chapters 1 and 2** - The Background of Job's Troubles
- **Chapters 3 through 31** - Three Wise Men Comfort and Confront Job
- **Chapters 32 through 37** - The Counsel of Elihu

- **Chapters 38 through 41** - God's Response to Job
- **Chapter 42** - The Restoration of Job

7. Key Verses

- **Job 1:1 NASB** "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil."
- **Job 2:3-7 NASB** The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." ⁴Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. ⁵However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face." ⁶So the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." ⁷Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.
- **Job 42:5, 6 NASB** "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; ⁶Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes."
- **Job 42:10-16 NASB** The Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the Lord increased all that Job had twofold. ¹¹Then all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the Lord had brought on him. And each one gave him one piece of money, and each a ring of gold. ¹²The Lord blessed the latter *days* of Job more than his beginning; and he had 14,000 sheep and 6,000 camels and 1,000 yoke of oxen and 1,000 female donkeys. ¹³He had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴He named the first Jemimah, and the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. ¹⁵In all the land no women were found so fair as Job's daughters; and their father gave them inheritance among their brothers. ¹⁶After this, Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons and his grandsons, four generations. ¹⁷And Job died, an old man and full of days.

8. Key People

- **Job** - known for his patience, faith, and virtue, Job lived during the era of the Patriarchs. He and his wife were blessed with riches and many children. For reasons we do not fully comprehend, Satan was allowed to test Job severely. He is mentioned in Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and James 5:10, 11.

- **Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar** - These were friends of Job who came to his side when they heard of his momentous suffering. Following the tradition that comforters do not speak until the mourning victim speaks, they remained silent for seven days in the face of Job's unspeakable desolation. They tried to explain Job's trials, but the problem was two-fold. They did not understand Job, and they did not understand God.
- **Elihu** - Perhaps a relative of Abraham (from the line of Nahor). Elihu was a young man who actually begins to see a little more clearly into Job's suffering, but fell far short of seeing truth fully. He was hurt over Job's condition and angry that the Wise Men were so misguided (32:2-4). He knew he was not an elder (32:6, 7), but felt he must speak concerning the matter before him.

9. Key Places

- **The Land of Uz** - probably northeast of Israel between Damascus (Syria) and the Euphrates River.

10. Key Themes

- **God's wisdom and our faith** - It has often been said that Job gives explanation for the suffering of the Righteous. That is an incomplete, perhaps even an incorrect view. We are given understanding as to how and why Job's suffering came about, but there is no indication that such conditions are the reason for our own suffering. Instead, we learn that the Righteous can trust God when there is no rhyme nor reason for our ordeal. Our aversion to suffering has caused many of us to behave like Job's friends - we look for his faults to explain his trouble. Yet he is portrayed in Scripture as an upright man in whom there is no fault (Job 1:1), and is honored by James in the New Testament as a paradigm of virtue (James 5:10, 11). Along with Noah and Daniel, he is cited as a man of supreme holiness and integrity (Ezekiel 14:14, 20). The bottom line: Job teaches us we can trust God even when our circumstances cannot be explained.
- **Satanic attacks** - There is an enemy, and he is malevolent and cruel. Not all suffering is the direct result of his attack, but all evil can ultimately be traced to him. We are to resist him steadfast in our faith, and remember that Jesus came to destroy the works of the wicked one (John 10:10; 1 John 3:5-8). He is limited in his attacks to what God allows.
- **Mystery** - Job was not privy to the details of Satan's challenge to God. Obviously it was known later, whether by revelation of The Spirit or directly from the mouth of God. We must learn that we never know all the facts about what goes on in the heavenly realm. We must never make the mistake of assuming someone's suffering is because of sin. There may be times such is the case, but that is a matter between God and each individual.

11. The Contents of Job

- The Setting for Job's Trial (1:1-2:13)
 - Introduction to Job the Righteous (1:1-5)
 - Satanic accusation; God's Response (1:6-2:10)
 - The arrival of Job's friends (2:11-13)

- The Discussions: Comfort, Conflict, and Confusion (3:1-37:24)
 - The First Cycle (3:1-14:22)
 - Job's expression of grief (3:1-26)
 - The response of Eliphaz: urging humility and repentance (4:1-5:27)
 - Job's reply to Eliphaz; a request for sympathy (6:1-7:21)
 - Bildad accuses Job of prideful blasphemy (8:1-22)
 - Job's defense against Bildad's accusations (9:1-10:22)
 - Zophar accuses Job of sin: urges repentance (11:1-20)
 - Job's defense against his friends; Job hopes God will speak, bring clarification and vindication (12:1-14:22).

 - The Second Cycle (15:1-21:34)
 - Eliphaz accuses Job of denying ancient truth (15:1-35)
 - Job reacts and asks for God's defense (16:1-17:16)
 - Bildad declares that Job deserves his punishment (18:1-21)
 - Job rejects Bildad's counsel and asks God to show pity (19:1-29)
 - Zophar accuses Job of questioning God's treatment (20:1-29)
 - Job scoffs at Zophar's estimation of trouble (21:1-34)

 - The Third Cycle (22:1-26:14)
 - Eliphaz criticizes Job (22:1-30)
 - Job defends his integrity (23:1-24:25)

- Bildad questions Job's appeal to God (25:1-6)
- Job defends Himself; leans of God's true sense of justice (26:1-14)
- Job's Final Defense (27:1-31:40)
 - Job insists on his own integrity and God's Mystery (27:1-28:8)
 - Job proclaims his own innocence and his trust in God's goodness (29:1-31:40)
- Elihu's Speeches (32:1-37:24)
 - Elihu enters the debate by expressing his frustration with all parties (32:1-22)
 - Elihu accuses Job of presumption (33:1-33)
 - Elihu accuses Job of cynicism (34:1-37)
 - Elihu encourages Job to be patient (35:1-16)
 - Elihu tells Job he is being chastised (36:1-21)
 - Elihu says God's ways are beyond human understanding (36:22-37:24)
- God Rebukes, Refreshes, and Restores (38:1-42:17)
 - God's Response to Job (38:1-41:34)
 - God speaks majestically (38:1-40:2)
 - Job speaks in humility (40:3-5)
 - God speaks majestically (40:6-41:34)
 - Job's Vindication (42:1-17)
 - Job repents (42:1-6)
 - God corrects the Wise Men (42:7-9)
 - God restores Job's family, wealth, and health (42:10-17)

Worth noting

- It can be argued that the central point of the book, ironically, is found in the question posed by Satan: "Will a man serve God for nothing?" (Job 1:9)
- In the end, God rewards and vindicates Job, who continued to trust God even though it appeared he would receive nothing for doing so.

When reading Job:

- Remember, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar represent conventional wisdom, which is often at odds with divine wisdom.
- Job is truly one of the literary treasures of the world! Along with Revelation and Ecclesiastes, it is easily one of the most misunderstood books of Scripture. It deals with matters of trust, justice, and wisdom.
- The speeches get progressively shorter as the cycles continue, as though each participant recognized the limits of his own wisdom. Both accusations and defenses are steadily reduced until the final response belongs to God alone.
- Job received his reward at the end of his trial, and we celebrate this with him. It should be noted, however, that not every vindication will come in this life. Hebrews 11 is a graphic reminder that some rewards are received in this temporal realm, while others are reserved for display in an eternal setting. God is always just, but the timing of His justice is solely His domain.