



The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

Have you considered my servant Job?

Job

Chapters 1-42

The book of Job has been a beloved piece of scripture for millennia. The "wise" author profoundly wrestles with the nagging problem of evil, particularly evil that strikes the blameless and upright. Anyone who has struggled with unjust suffering will value its message.

The author of the book is unknown, other than he is a Hebrew. He uses the name YHWH for God. The setting for the story is outside of the borders of Israel in a land called Uz. The main character, Job, may or may not be a historic figure. If he was, he likely lived during the time of the patriarchs.

The purpose of the book is to wrestle with the paradox of God's sovereignty over all things, his goodness toward his people, and human suffering. Job is suffering, but he did not do anything to deserve it. Why then is he suffering? Job feels like God has made him his enemy when all along Job has been God's friend. Because of the narrative prologue of a heavenly exchange between God and Satan, the reader is also wrestling with the strength and integrity of God and Job's relationship. "Does Job fear God for no reason?" (Job 1:9)

The Structure of the book leads the reader to wrestle deeply with the questions raised in the prologue. Searching for the wise answers to the most challenging questions humanity has ever faced, the book of Job brings a resolution that is profound and true.



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Structure

The Book of Job		1-42
Prologue		Chs. 1-2
Job's Opening Lament		Ch. 3
Dialogue Dispute Cycles (3 Cycles)	1st Dialogue-Dispute	Chs. 4-14
	2nd Dialogue Dispute	Chs. 15-21
	3rd Dialogue Dispute	Chs. 22-27
Interlude on Wisdom		Ch. 28
Monologues (3 Series)	Job	Ch. 29-31
	Elihu	Ch. 32-37
	God	Ch. 28-42
Job's Closing Contrition		40:3-5; 42:1-6
Epilogue		42:7-17

And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?"

--Job 1:8

Prologue and Job's Lament (1-2)

The prologue introduces the narrative conflicts and deep questions which will be struggled with through the remainder of the book.

The Crisis

The crisis arises because of Job's faithfulness. He is described as "blameless and upright" (1:1); he feared God and resisted evil (1:1); he was successful (1:2-3); he was a blessing to his family (1:4); he was humble (1:5)

But, in spite of all of these wonderful qualities about Job, his faithfulness to God would be tested by God. Unbeknownst, God commends Job to Satan as one of his finest (1:8). In a heavenly, dialogue Satan accuses Job of fearing God for "no reason." (1:9)



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Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." ¹⁰ But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. -- Job 2:9-10

Satan proposes that if Job were to lose family and property, that he would "curse God to his face." His further accusations question Job's integrity in the face of deep personal suffering and loss of health. The role of Job's wife and the coming of the counselors in prologue will become the earthly manifestation of satanic encouragement to Job break relationship with God over loss, pain and suffering. (2:9)

Four conflicts are setup in the prologue. The first is the secret conflict between God and Satan. This conflict is unknown to Job and will lie at the heart of his misunderstanding of his circumstances.

A second conflict is between God and Job. The principles being wrestled with in the book is the assumption that God blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked. Satan's assumptions are that if God grants prosperity, the righteous will be faithful and the corollary that if God allows hardship, the righteous will not be faithful. The key question in the book is the integrity of this relationship between the faithful and God in the light of this first conflict. God allows hardship for Job, will he remain faithful? From a heavenly perspective what is at stake is *the integrity of the righteous*.

The third conflict is between Job and his counselors. These supposed friends press their own understandings of suffering and theology to logical and erroneous extremes. They lack humility and thus wisdom to trust God with matters that they do not understand. In their logic, they accuse Job of wrong doing. Job's inner conflict and laments only serve to exacerbate this conflict and vice versa.

And so, the fourth conflict is the inner conflict which Job feels within his own heart and mind related to himself and his relationship with God. He trusts and fears God, and yet he does not understand why this is happening. He believes he is innocent and believes God is sovereign and just. So why is this happening to him. Job even despairs to the point of cursing the day of his birth. (3:1-26)

From an earthly perspective Job and his counselors are also wrestling with the assumption that **God blesses the righteous**. Their understanding is that If you are righteous, you will experience prosperity. If you are unrighteous, you will experience hardship



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Job is righteous; Job is experiencing hardship. Job's counselors defend God to the detriment of Job. Job knows he is not the person his counselors make him out to be, so he is left wondering whether God is unjust? From an earthly perspective what is at stake is *the integrity of God*.

"Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to; or he cannot and does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, and does not want to, he is wicked. But, if God both can and wants to abolish evil, then how comes evil in the world?"

--Epicurus, philosopher

Job and His Counselors (3-27)

At first Job's counselors do well. They recognize Job's pain and come and sit with him.

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.... And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great. Job 2:11-13

Their sympathy breaks down when they hear what flows from Job's mouth. Job curse himself. He curses the day and night of his birth. The reason for his curse is his deep misery. He laments why did he not die at birth? To Job a death into heaven is better than the living hell he is experiencing (3:20-26).

The Dialogue-Dispute Cycles follow a consistent pattern:

- Eliphaz lectures Job
- Job pleads/argues with counselors & God
- Bildad lectures Job
- Job pleads/argues with counselors & God
- Zophar lectures Job
- Job pleads/argues with counselors & God



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Job and his counselors are wrestling with the problem of evil and two truths:

- There is but one living and true God... of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness....
- Man is not infinite in power, wisdom, or goodness.

Job's lament is certainly irrational, his counselors hear a subtle attack on God as creator. Job is desiring the *Uncreation*. They lack a certain patience and faith with a person in despondency and depression.

Job in his prayers is asking the unanswered questions. He seeks vindication. He seeks an advocate--a redeemer. (ex. Job 19:25) While Job will not accept his counselors critique of his integrity, he personally is more concerned about his own relationship with God.

Principles of Bad Counsel

- Lectured rather than listened
- Failed to empathize
- Answered the questions
- Applied theology without understanding
- Defended God not Job
- They have a low view of the value of humanity

"How then will you comfort me with empty nothings?"

There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood." --Job 22:34

Where is Wisdom? (28)

The key to answering the profound questions raised in the book of Job is in the discovery of great wisdom. But where is wisdom to be found? (28:11) The hinge of the book is an interlude poem on wisdom. It explains that wisdom is not found anywhere on earth or in the heavens--it is only found in the fear of the Lord!

*"And he said to man,
'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
and to turn away from evil is
understanding.'" --Job 28:28*



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The Three Monologues (29-42)

The three monologue speeches at the end of the book move the questions toward resolution.

Job makes his final case before God. (29-31)

Job deeply desires an answer from God. He believes he has received unjust treatment. Like a lawyer, he lays out his case before God demonstrating point by point that he has kept himself from wickedness and been a person of moral uprightness and goodness.

Elihu makes a speech (32-37)

A new counselor, Elihu, is introduced and provides the best that human counsel has to offer. Elihu rebukes both the counselors and Job. He believes that the counselors in their wickedness have wrongly accused Job who is an upright man. But, he also believes that Job has crossed the line in his words toward God. He challenges Job with the nature of God as sovereign and just. This monologue sets the book up for God to provide an answer to Job and the dilemma of the problem of human suffering.

God answers Job (38-41)

God answers Job out of a whirlwind theophany challenging him to a divine-human wrestling match. (38:1) God proclaims his wisdom and power in all creation. The purpose of God's speech is to reveal that there is much about the creation that humanity does not understand or grasp. The origins of the universe remain a mystery to humanity. We speculate, but do we really know or understand. Can we even?

The point is that so much of reality in God's creation is beyond our grasp or understanding. And, Job responds humbly. (40:3-5)

God then proclaims his absolute justice. While there are evil creatures in the creation, the Behemoth and Leviathan. Ultimately, these creatures are under God's control and will be ultimately caught and destroyed. (40:19 & 41:1, 10- 11)

Again, Job repents of his arrogance and humbles his heart before God. (42:1-6) The book ends with restoration. (42:7-17)

*“Man is most comforted
by Paradoxes”*

--GK Chesterton

*Then Job answered the
LORD and said:*

*⁴ “Behold, I am of small
account; what shall I
answer you?*

*I lay my hand on my
mouth.*

*⁵ I have spoken once,
and I will not answer;
twice, but I will
proceed no further.”*

--Job 40:3-5