
BOOK OF JOB

Approximate date: 900s B.C.E. (Right, some conservative-moderate); 700s-400s B.C.E. (some conservative-moderate, Left)

Time period: depicted in the Patriarchal era prior to the formation of Ancient Israel as a nation

Author: Moses (some Right); anonymous (some Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

Location of author: wilderness (some Right); Land of Israel (some Right, some conservative-moderate); Land of Edom (some conservative-moderate, some Left); Babylon (some Left)

Target audience and their location: human beings who endure suffering

People:

Job, Satan, Sabeans, Chaldeans, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite, Elihu (son of Barakel the Buzite, family of Ram), Jemimah, Keziah, Keren-Happuch

People mentioned:

Leviathan (creature), Bear and Orion (constellation), Pleiades (constellation), Rahab (sea monster)

Places:

land of Uz, Tema, Sheba, Ophir

Key Themes and Events:

Job is described as a very rich and blessed man, one who feared God and shunned evil / God allows Satan to bring calamity upon Job, but tells him not to touch Job himself / Job praises the Lord as his servants come to him, reporting how his property has been damaged and his family is in ruin / God allows Satan to strike Job with physical illness, but not to the point of death / Job rebukes his wife for telling him that he must curse God / Job's three friends cannot recognize him because of his extreme suffering / Job curses the day of his birth, contemplating his present frustration / Job's friend Eliphaz speaks to him, saying that he has had a Divine revelation from the Almighty / Job responds to Eliphaz, telling him how futile his Earthly life is compared to God / Job's friend Bildad tells him to go before God, rectifying his mistakes, remembering those who came before him / Job responds to Bildad, explaining to him God's almighty power, and how he loathes his life on Earth / Job's friend Zophar describes how God can and will forget sin / Job responds to Zophar, acting as though what he has said to him has no meaning, as he has already contemplated it / Job's friend Eliphaz believes that Job's sin is the cause of the problems he has / Job considers the counsel of his friends to be evil, believing

himself to be slandered by them / Job's friend Bildad urges him to be sensible / all Job desires is the consolation and comfort of his friends, not their unsolicited counsel for his problems / Zophar considers Job's words to be dishonoring, as he believes he is doing the right thing by emphasizing the fate of the wicked / Job tells his friends that their counsel does not concern his situation / Eliphaz tells Job that his sin must truly be great for God to have inflicted him with such suffering / Job presses his innocence before the Lord / Bildad asks Job how a human being can be pure before God / Job insists that he will not speak against God, in spite of the unfairness life has dealt him / Job testifies that true wisdom can only be found in God / Job describes how he thought his life was going to be prosperous, without any problems / Job's prosperity and reputation have been taken from him, despite the fact that he has committed no wrong against God / Job goes through a litany of sinful acts that he could have committed that would warrant God's punishment / the young man Elihu refutes the older Job, insisting that God must be judging him for wrong he has committed, urging him to consider God's great power / the Lord Himself speaks to Job out of a storm, declaring His almighty power over the elements of Creation / the Lord asks Job to consider the powerful creatures He has made / Job sees God, having only heard of Him, knowing that God is there when all else is taken away / having passed the test placed before him, Job is restored to his previous place of prosperity and much more

Key Scriptures: Job 1:6-12; 5:7-18; 8:5-10; 11:7-9, 13-15; 13:20-24; 15:5-6; 19:21-22, 25-27; 27:2-6; 28:28; 31:1, 9-12; 40:7-9; 41:33-34; 42:5-6 / **Job is Tested** (1:1-2:13); **Three Friends Answer Job** (3:1-31:40); **A Young Man Answers Job** (32:1-37:24); **God Answers Job** (38:1-41:34); **Job is Restored** (42:1-17)

Theological Summary: The Book of Job is widely considered to be one of the most ancient stories in Scripture, but it is also a highly contested text as to its composition and message. The events depicted in Job are pre-Israel, likely dating from sometime in the Second Millennium B.C.E. The setting of Job is Uz (1:1), which may be another designation for Edom (Lamentations 4:21), giving us a strong clue that the general area where Job occurs is certainly a desert region.¹ Job is a substantial wisdom text that has affected Biblical Studies for millennia, asking us questions about Divine justice or theodicy, combined with human patience in times of suffering. In the Christian tradition, Job is placed among the books of Wisdom literature, whereas Jewish tradition places it among the Writings.

Many Rabbis and theologians consider Job to be a real historical person enduring a real experience. Others, however, consider the story to be parabolic, reflecting a true reality but with fictional characters as historical fiction. A proper interpretation of Job will take into consideration how it is deeply rooted with an Ancient Near Eastern background.²

While most of the book is written in first person, it can be safely assumed that the author of the text is not Job. The final author of Job is likely an Israelite as the Divine name YHWH is used intermittently to refer to God, even though the story of Job is not unique to Israel. In fact,

¹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1028.

² *Ibid.*, pp 1023-1027.

the story of Job enduring difficult times is an integral part of the overall human experience.³ We see a mix of literary types in Job, including: poetry, prose, and polemic speeches. Various scholars have compared Job to Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature as well as Greco-Roman diatribe.⁴ Examining each of these forms gives the interpreter a unique perspective.

The Book of Job is not without its controversy from its message to its composition.⁵ Did the story of Job originally come from oral or written sources? A basic story of Job as a person is seen in 1:1-2:13 and in 42:7-17, interspersed with various dialogues and arguments in between. Some consider the Elihu speeches of chs. 32-37 to be a later addition. Was there a single author for Job? Or, was the story added to over time? These are some of the questions that arise when one considers the makeup of Job, and there is no uniform agreement among either conservatives or liberals.

Many conservatives believe that Job was a real person, but many others consider him a parabolic figure based on the literary type that we see in the text. Job is mentioned by name in Ezekiel 14:14, 20 as being a significant character, but the view of Job being a fictional character has been present throughout history.

Some Jewish tradition holds that the author of Job was actually Moses (b.*Bava Batra* 15a),⁶ a view likewise held by some early Church Fathers.⁷ Most conservatives today, however, feel that this is an arbitrary assignment and consider Job to be an anonymous book. This should not be surprising as no author is identified in the text.⁸ But this does not mean that conservatives consider the text to have been pieced together over a series of centuries, either. Many conclude “the bulk of the present work comes from a single author. Some obscure passages are most likely the result of difficulties in transmission” (*ISBE*).⁹

Dating the text of Job is very difficult.¹⁰ The events of the book probably occur concurrent to the Patriarchal era, and it is not improbable that Job was some kind of contemporary to Abraham.¹¹ The two options we are afforded to dating the composition are (1) sometime during or after the reign of Solomon, or (2) sometime during or after the Southern Kingdom’s exile to Babylon.

Conservatives generally date the text to the Solomonic period or immediately thereafter,¹² and adhere to some kind of unified authorship or composition of Job. A few do concede, however, that the text may not have reached its final form until the Third Century

³ Meredith G. Kline, “Job, Book of,” in *NIDB*, 529.

⁴ J.E. Hartley, “Job,” in *ISBE*, 2:1071; Mayer Gruber, “Job,” in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1499.

⁵ Katharine J. Dell, “Job,” in *ECB*, 337.

⁶ “Moses wrote his own book and part of Balaam and Job: *That supports the view of R. Levi bar Lahma, for said R. Levi bar Lahma, Job. lived in the time of Moses. Here it is written, ‘O that my words were now written’* (Job. 19:23) and elsewhere, ‘For wherein now shall it be known’ (Exo. 33:16)” (b.*Bava Batra* 15a; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

⁷ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1040; Elmer B. Smick, “Job,” in *EXP*, 4:850.

⁸ Dillard and Longman, 200.

⁹ Hartley, “Job,” in *ISBE*, 2:1072.

¹⁰ Kline, “Job, Book of,” in *NIDB*, 529.

¹¹ M.J. Pope, “Job, Book of,” in *IDB*, 2:913; James L. Crenshaw, “Job, Book of,” in *ABD*, 3:863; Dillard and Longman, 200.

¹² Dillard and Longman, 200.

B.C.E.¹³ Conservatives do not deny interpolations or additions to the text of Job, probably from its original sources.¹⁴ The existence of a Targum on Job by the Second Century B.C.E. cannot place Job as a late text.

Liberals often date Job to the post-exilic period, and consider Job to solely be a literary character but not a real person.¹⁵ They argue for a later dating of the text sometime in the Fifth Century B.C.E., and frequently argue that the story developed over time with bits and pieces added.¹⁶ The main pieces of Job added or compiled over time would have included: (1) the prose narrative (1:1-3:1), (2) a Book of Job the Patient (1:1-2:13; chs. 27-28; 42:7-17), (3) a Book of Job the Impatient (chs. 1-31; 42:7-14), and finally (4) the three speeches of Elihu the intruder (chs. 32-37). Some liberals will even suggest that the theological message of Job became more complicated in relationship to the suffering of Israel,¹⁷ possibly to answer the questions of the exile with Job representing "Israel."¹⁸ Interestingly enough, trends in liberal scholarship today are leaning toward a more unified composition,¹⁹ but this does not necessarily mean that liberals are arguing for an older story.

Conservatives find a post-exilic dating for Job difficult due to the literary genre(s) of the book, and specific comparison with other Ancient Near Eastern literature of the same variety.²⁰ These comparisons are now acknowledged by most liberals,²¹ leading them to a variety of conclusions. Some liberals have thought that the author of Job was an Edomite, and that the text or its sources were originally composed in a Semitic cognate of Ammonite, Moabite, or Aramaic,²² not Hebrew. Others have thought that the story was originally Babylonian and brought into Hebrew during or after the exile.²³ Interestingly enough, various Rabbis who have held to a rather low opinion of Job have proposed similar theories since the Twelfth Century.²⁴

The Book of Job can be very difficult to translate due to some of its archaic words.²⁵ Consider that the meaning of the name *Iyov* (יֹבָב) itself is open to a variety of meanings, ranging from "enemy" to "where is my father?" (*IDB*)²⁶ to "the penitent one" (*ISBE*).²⁷ The Greek Septuagint version omits information from the Hebrew Masoretic Text because of the relatively primitive nature of some of the words, abridging sections of the story.²⁸ In Bible

¹³ Hartley, "Job," in *ISBE*, 2:1065.

¹⁴ Smick, in *EXP*, 4:846-847.

¹⁵ Dell, in *ECB*, 338.

¹⁶ William P. Brown, "Job, Book of," in *EDB*, 716; Gruber, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1501.

¹⁷ Pope, "Job, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:920.

¹⁸ Dell, in *ECB*, 337.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 338.

²⁰ Smick, in *EXP*, 4:843-844; Dillard and Longman, pp 205-206.

²¹ Pope, "Job, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:914-917; Hartley, "Job," in *ISBE*, 2:1066-1067; Crenshaw, "Job, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:864-866; Lisa Davison, "Job," in *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 704.

²² Pope, "Job, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:912.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2:913.

²⁴ Hartley, "Job," in *ISBE*, 2:1065.

²⁵ Gruber, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1500.

²⁶ Pope, "Job, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:911.

²⁷ Hartley, "Job," in *ISBE*, 2:1064; Smick, in *EXP*, 4:861.

²⁸ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1032; Smick, in *EXP*, 4:855.

translation and interpretation, the LXX of Job must be relied on less than the MT. Fragments of Job were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The overall theological message of Job is suffering, but the kind of suffering described is open to a wide variance of interpretations. Is Job depicted as debating with God? Does Job have a crisis of faith? Certainly, we see in Job a person who struggles through life, losing his health, family members, and possessions, and he wonders why he must endure terrible tragedy. Is God the One who allows this evil? Or, is it the result of the *satan* or accuser that is introduced?²⁹ Was Job's godliness genuine, or perceived? Did he experience difficulty because of his faithfulness, or a lack of it? Did Job lose almost everything because of God's action—or inaction? Was Job being punished for his sin, or the sin of his forbearers? The Book of Job asks its readers a variety of difficult questions. It also details the reactions of Job's friends to his suffering. In the end, we see that Job is faithful to God and is restored.

Many debates have ensued for centuries over the precise message of Job. In the end, we see that "No comprehensive answer is given to the problem of suffering" (Kline, *NIDB*),³⁰ and each reader is left to himself to meditate on the text and draw his own conclusions. Job certainly teaches us critical lessons about suffering, and suffering that he did not willfully submit to. This is to be contrasted against the suffering and agony of Yeshua the Messiah who suffered and died willingly for humanity.³¹

The current Messianic handling of Job today is uncertain. It often ranges from standard positions proposed by evangelical conservatives to fringe advocates who date Job's composition prior to the Noahdic Flood. No discussions to our knowledge have ensued over whether the account is historically factual or parabolic. Likewise, not many discussions occur in today's Messianic community over the subject of true suffering and the involvement or non-involvement of God. Ultimately, we see Job arising above the conflict and the emerging Messianic movement will eventually be forced to address age-old theological questions when it considers Job as a part of its greater Biblical Studies.

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²⁹ Hartley, "Job," in *ISBE*, 2:1067-1068.

³⁰ Kline, "Job, Book of," in *NIDB*, 530.

³¹ Dillard and Longman, pp 209-210.

Zukerman, B. "Job, Book of," in *IDBSup*, pp 479-481.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON JOB:

- 1. What is your initial impression after reading the Book of Job? What roles do its long discourses and speeches play in understanding the position of its characters?**
- 2. What was Job's sin? Had Job sinned against God? What did Job's three friends try to do?**
- 3. If Job had not committed any major sin against the Lord, then why did he suffer so? What are any of us to take away from the interactions between Job and those who counseled him?**
- 4. What feature of Job struck you as being the most significant regarding your own walk with the Lord? Do you identify more with Job *or* those who counseled him? Are there any implied warnings to seek in the Book of Job?**
- 5. Does an accurate application of the Book of Job matter if one views the text as an actual historical narrative, or as a parabolic illustration?**
- 6. What lessons might today's Messianic community learn by listening to the message of Job?**

REFLECTION ON JOB'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Book of Job: