

INTRODUCTION TO THE 18TH BIBLEBOOK

JOB (between 1900-1450 B.C.)

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A. THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF JOB

1. The name of the book.

The name 'Job' could mean 'the assailed one' or 'the one who turns to God'. The name Job occurs in Ezekiel 14:14,20 and James 5:11 and proves that the person of Job was a historical figure. In Ezekiel, he occurs together with Noah and Daniel. This Daniel is probably not the biblical Daniel, because the name is spelt differently in the Hebrew. A *Daneel* is known from ancient Ugaritic literature and therefore Job could have been a figure from a very ancient time.

2. The writer, the date and the place of writing.

Who was the writer of the book of Job?

Unlike the other 4 poetic books of the Bible, the book of Job gives us no definite clue to its author. The book of Job was probably written by an unknown, but nevertheless divinely inspired person. This writer was acquainted with the history of Job's trials, or more likely, had observed Job's trials. He put the debates of Job with his three friends as well as the discourses of Elihu and God in the form of a poem. And because he was inspired by the Holy Spirit, God revealed to him the heavenly background of Job's earthly trials!

The third-person description of Job's virtues, attainments and possessions in chapters 1 and 42 certainly sounds like the work of an observer. Like all the other writers of Bible books, the writer stood in the service of the divine Author, the Holy Spirit, and compiled and wrote exactly those things that God wanted the people of the world to know.

Where was the book of Job written?

The Bible does not tell us where the book of Job was written, but it does tell us where Job lived (1:1). He lived in *the land of Uz*, which was most probably located near the southern border of Edom. This means that Job was probably not an Israelite.

When was the book of Job written?

Descriptions about political and social upheaval are found in Job 9:23, 12:16-25; 15:19,24 and 36:20. These could point to catastrophic events in that part of the world at that time.

There is a complete absence of any reference to the patriarchs, to Moses, Joshua, the judges or the kings of Israel. And *no other book in the Bible shows such a complete ignorance of the law, of Israel or of any part of her history*. Therefore, these facts have led them to believe that the book of Job was originally composed outside the Israelite circles altogether and that it was most likely written during the period of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, between 1876-1446 B.C.

Some Christians believe that the book of Job is the oldest written book in the Bible. The names *Temanite*, *Shuhite*, *Naamathite* and *Buzite* point to a very ancient time, when such designations were still understood and used. Based on the ancient occurrence of the names in the book of Job, some Christians even believe that Job was a younger contemporary of the patriarchs and that the book was composed about 1900 B.C.

Conclusion.

The book of Job does not contain a single statement concerning its author, nor of its time and place of compilation. Apparently these facts were not necessary for God to attain his purpose with this book; otherwise the book would have mentioned them. The book of Job is more than merely a piece of literature from Israel. It is a part of Holy Scripture, which according to 2 Timothy 3:16 came into existence through the work of the Holy Spirit. The book of Job is a part of God's revelation. The question how this part of revelation came into being and which people, means and circumstances God had used to reveal his thoughts, cannot be answered!

B. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF JOB

The theme of the book of Job: *Submit to the absolute sovereignty of God in his dealings with people.*

The book of Job may be divided into 3 parts as follows:

1. Job chapters 1:1 to 2:13. The supernatural contest in heaven is the background of the earthly sufferings of Job.

This part consists of prose in 3 sections:

- Section one consists of Job 1:1-22. Job's first test.
- Section two consists of Job 2:1-10. Job's second test.
- Section three consists of Job 2:11-13. The writer introduces Job's three friends.

2. Job 3:1 to 42:6. Dialogues and discourses.

This part consists of poetry in 7 sections:

- Section one consists of Job 3:1- 26. Job curses the day of his birth.
- Section two consists of Job 4:1 to 14:22. The first round of dialogue between Job and his friends.
- Section three consists of Job 15:1 to 21:34. The second round of dialogue between Job and his friends.
- Section four consists of Job 22:1 to 26:14. The third round of dialogue between Job and his friends.
- Section five consists of Job 27:1 to 31:40. Job's discourses.
- Section six consists of Job 32:1 to 37:24. Elihu's discourses.
- Section seven consists of Job 38:1 to 42:6. God's exclusive address to Job.

3. Job 42:7-17. The final words of God.

God expresses his disapproval of what the three friends have said in their arguments. He vindicates Job and restores him to his former state of happiness.

C. THE MAIN CONTENTS AND MESSAGES OF THE BOOK JOB

There are three messages in the book of Job. The first is the least important and the last the most important.

1. The book of Job teaches the joyous adoration of God's work in nature.

The book is full of descriptions of God's work in nature.

- The daily miracle of the dawn as described in Job 38:12-14 makes us think of the word of Christ in Matthew 5:45 where God causes his sun to rise upon the righteous and the unrighteous.
- The statement in Job 38:26-27 that God causes the rain to fall on a land without people, a steppe devoid of population, and that the hippopotamus and crocodile play around in the rivers, remind us of the words of Christ in Matthew 6:28-30 about the lilies of the field, and teach us that there are works of God in nature that seemingly do not have any practical importance to man, yet are important for God.
- In Romans 1:19-21, Paul teaches that God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - can be seen in the works of his creation! When Job considered God's works in nature, he became aware of God's majesty, power and wisdom.

2. The book of Job teaches one important cause of suffering: that the work of God may be displayed in the person suffering.

The view in Israel is that suffering is exclusively a punishment for man's sin.

The essence of the book of Job is the struggle between Job and his friends about the cause of Job's catastrophes and suffering. The friends' point of departure is that God punishes sin and that sin leads to punishment. The punishment consists of catastrophes¹. This may be true in itself, but the friends also reverse their thesis and say that catastrophes are punishments and prove that there *must* be sin! They therefore conclude that Job must be a great sinner!

This belief of the friends had persisted a very long time in Israel, so that even Jesus had to oppose it.

- In John 9:1-3, the disciples of Jesus asked him, whether the blind man was born blind because of his own sin or because of the sin of his parents. And Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." *John 9 approached the question of the cause of suffering from God's point of view: The work of God must be displayed in that person's life.*

- In Luke 13:1-5, Jesus told the people that they must not think that certain catastrophes happened to people because they were worse sinners than other people. He said that people who suffered in that way were not necessarily guiltier than those who did not suffer. But Jesus warned that unless people repent, they too would perish. *Luke 13 approached the question of the cause of suffering from man's point of view: Man must repent, or else he too would suffer a terrible catastrophe.*

- In Romans 5:3-5 he said that Christians rejoiced in their sufferings, because they know that suffering produces perseverance, character hope and love.²

- In Galatians 4:13-15 the apostle Paul praised the Galatians for the fact that they had not viewed his illness as proof of sin.

The view in Job is that suffering is also a display of God's work and glory.

The book of Job *helps us to view catastrophes and suffering from God's point of view*. That is why the book begins by taking us behind the scenes of earthly events and see especially what happened in the court of heaven. This is pictured in earthly terms as a royal court where God grants audiences to his servants, the inhabitants of heaven. Among these royal officials there was also Satan. The word *Satan* means *adversary*. In ancient times, a king was first of all a judge.

To his court belonged an *adversary*, who fulfilled the function of an *inspector-general and accuser*. His task was to travel throughout the kings' domains with eyes and ears wide open to report whatever evil he had observed. Of course, God does not need such an inspector or accuser, because God knows perfectly well who serves him and who does not.

¹ Isaiah 3:10-11

² Romans 5:3-5

According to Hebrews 4:13, God sees everything and is thoroughly familiar with every person on earth. But Satan or the devil is a fallen angel and he opposes God and seeks to destroy the honour of God. He is also a liar and falsely accuses people before God.

God expressed his joy concerning Job, who was not only the wealthiest man among all the people of the East, but morally and religiously without equal on earth. In the opinion of Satan, however, Job's piety, and therefore all human piety, was a refined form of egoism. By being pious a person gained for himself security and prosperity, because God protected the pious together with their possessions. Satan said that if a person would derive no gain whatsoever from his proper behaviour towards God and man, he would act very differently and he would not be pious anymore. Satan challenged God to adopt a different policy towards Job and withhold his protection from Job. Then God would see that Job would leave God. God knew that Job did not serve God for something he could gain for himself by it, but that he served God to bring glory to God.

But to argue with Satan is useless, because Satan does not have a righteous character. Therefore the test must be taken, and it must become apparent who is right: God or Satan. God accepted the challenge of Satan and put his own glory at stake. *The way Job would respond to his catastrophes and suffering would affect the glory of God.* Job must suffer all kinds of catastrophes in order that the work of God may be displayed in Job's life. Therefore, God gave Satan permission to take all Job's possessions away. But because God trusted Job and loved him, he put Satan under one limitation: Satan may not touch Job's person; that is, he must spare his life and his health.

Conclusion.

The book of Job rejected the idea that suffering is exclusively the punishment for sin and that one can therefore reason from a person's misfortune to his misdeeds. The reason of Job's sufferings was not his sin, but that the work of God might be displayed in him. Romans 8:28 says, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." God's thoughts and ways have eternity in view and are moved by considerations too vast and profound for our finite comprehension.

3. The book of Job teaches that in suffering man must submit to the sovereignty of God and worship God.

This is the most important message of the book of Job. The essential question in the book of Job is, "Does God have the right to allow Job and other people to suffer so much?" *The book of Job proves that God has the absolute right to allow people to suffer, because he has holy reasons, which he does not reveal to Job and neither to us.* The book of Job teaches that God is the absolute sovereign Creator and Lord of the universe and of every human being on earth.

God has sovereign power over a person's prosperity.

Job acknowledged the absolute sovereignty of God. After Job lost all his possessions, he responded by falling to the ground and worshipping God. He summarised his whole life by saying that he came onto the earth without any possessions and he would also leave the earth without any possessions. He never expected more from life. His great wealth was entrusted to him after his birth as *a temporary gracious gift* from God. Job found no reasons to make accusations against God, but instead praised God for the many blessings he had received during his life. God was fully within his rights to take back from him all the possessions that had been given to him on loan on an interest-free basis. *Job acknowledged God's absolute sovereignty over all his possessions!*

At the second assembly of God's heavenly court, God pointed out to Satan that after Job had lost all his possessions, he still maintained his piety. In spite of the fact that Job had not deserved this misfortune by committing some gross sin, he remained a man of impeachable integrity. However Satan could not admit that God was right and he was wrong. Satan argued that Job did not turn away from God because he had only lost his possession, but not his health. Satan argued that if Job would be brought to the edge of death by illness, he would turn away from God.

God has sovereign power over a person's health and life.

Once more, God accepted the challenge of Satan. He allowed Satan to make Job deathly ill, but he may not let him die. After Satan had afflicted Job with sores over his entire body, Job had to endure intense pain and an unbearable itch. Since the days of mourning over the death of his children began, he sat on the ground in front of his house. His wife could not bear seeing his suffering and also could not help. So in her frustration, she ran into a conflict with God and incited Job to curse God. Without realising it, she was helping Satan to destroy Job, and with him the honour of God. But Job replied that *whoever accepted God's blessings had no choice but to also accept his trials.* The conclusion of this episode was the same: Job remained blameless in his conduct. Even now, no improper word crossed his lips. *Job continued to acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of God over his health and whole life!*

God has sovereign right to reveal or not to reveal the real reasons for suffering.

Later, during the dialogues with his friends, Job no longer acknowledged the absolute sovereignty of God. Instead, he called God to give an account of what he was doing and to give the reasons why he was suffering. This change in Job is psychologically quite understandable. Which human being would not question his suffering and the reason behind his suffering?

Of course, God could have solved Job's problem concerning his suffering immediately by telling him the real reason for his suffering. But God did not do that. *He did not allow Job to look behind the scenes. However, he does allow us to look behind the scenes and see the contest between God and Satan.*

Throughout the book of Job, God sovereignly reveals to us that *in general he has his own holy reasons or purposes with everything that happens*. But he does not reveal his holy reason or purpose in every specific experience of suffering we have. That is God's sovereign prerogative and it is none of Job's business or our business. Job, therefore, does not know why he is suffering; otherwise the test would not be a real test anymore.

In Job 38-42, when God spoke exclusively to Job, he did not give Job an answer to his question why he was suffering. He only showed him his majesty and power and wisdom, which is beyond human understanding. He answered Job out of the storm. What brought Job *to surrender and submit himself completely to God's sovereign dealings with him, was not that Job received an answer to his question about why he suffered, but that Job had seen the majesty of God*. And Job humbly repented that he had questioned God's dealings with him and that he had spoken arrogantly against God.

The fact that God rebuked Job's friends and thus vindicated Job, does not mean that Job was always innocent of committing sin, but rather that the reason of his suffering was not due to some gross sin he had committed. The reason of his suffering was that, in God's sovereign and inscrutable wisdom, God was displaying his work in Job's life. The fact that God restored Job's health, family and possessions, was not a proof of God's righteousness, but rather of God's mercy and love for Job.

Conclusion.

Although it is true that God will punish and reward people in accordance with their deeds, this is not the message of the book of Job. The main message of the book of Job is that God is absolutely sovereign in his dealings with people. And the only proper response to God's sovereignty is to submit to God and to worship God! That is what Job did. And that is what we should do.