

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
Introduction	5
Outline of Job	11
1. Does Job Serve God for Nothing?	13
2. I Want to Die	22
3. Conversations at the Garbage Dump	29
4. Do the Bad Guys Always Lose?	43
5. Arguing with God	53
6. Ash-Heap Duel	68
7. I Shall See God	81
8. Why Do the Wicked Live?	93
9. God, Where Are You?	102
10. Not Guilty!	113
11. The Angry Young Man	140
12. God's Science Quiz	163
13. Living with Mystery	186
Selected Bibliography	192

1

Does Job Serve God for Nothing?

I. PROLOGUE (chaps. 1—2)

In the prose prologue of Job, the issues and characters are set forth swiftly in tense words. Job's spiritual character, his family and possessions, Satan's accusations and attacks on Job, Job's reactions, and the arrival of his friends—all are set before the reader in rapid fashion, as if they were on a film run at fast speed. It all happens so suddenly! By contrast, the following dialogue is like slides projected on the screen for studied review. The pace is slow, the plot is simple. Obviously, the prologue is necessary background told in rapid narrative style in order to get the reader quickly to Job's agonizing confrontation with his friends and God.

A. JOB'S CHARACTER (1:1-5)

First we are introduced to Job's *place* and *piety* (1:1). He lived "in the land of Uz." Like the date and author of Job, the location also is uncertain. The place Uz is mentioned two other times in the Bible: the first says that Uz was a land of kings, at least in Jeremiah's day (Jer 25:20); and the second refers to Uz as a possession or neighbor of Edom (Lam 4:21). Some scholars think that Uz was in the fertile Bashan, south of Damascus; others suggest that Uz was in Edom, southeast of the Dead Sea; and still others point to evidence that places Uz east of Edom, in northern Arabia. The last view is supported by the facts that Job lived near the desert (1:19); his land was fertile for agriculture and livestock-raising (1:3, 14; 42:12); and customs, vocabulary, and references to geography and natural history relate to northern Arabia. Wherever the location, it was outside Palestine and thus

“serves ideally as a setting for the universal spirit and character of the message conveyed by the book of Job.”¹

Job was more than a good man. He was (1) “blameless” (“perfect,” KJV), which means “without moral blemish,” or “morally whole”; (2) “upright,” meaning “straight” in the sense of not deviating from God’s standards; (3) “fearing God,” which means “aware of, revering, and submissive to God’s majesty”; and (4) “turning away from evil,” meaning “hating and rejecting the opposite of God’s character.” That assessment, repeated by God to Satan (1:8; 2:3), tells the reader that Job is no ordinary man. It also shows that his friends were totally in error in accusing him of being a willful sinner.

Next the author describes Job’s family and his *prosperity* (1:2-3). His sheep provided clothing and food; camels and donkeys provided transportation; and oxen provided food and milk, and the power for plowing (wheat and barley are mentioned [31:38-40]). His possessions also included slaves (1:15-17; 31:13). He was wealthy as well as godly—two characteristics not often found together. He was a remarkable man indeed.

As “the greatest of all the men of the east,” he was the wealthiest of an apparently prosperous group of people in northern Arabia. (The “men of the east” are identified with Kedar, which is in the northern portions of Arabia [Jer 49:28].) Job was also unusually wise, for the men of the East were noted for their great wisdom, expressed in proverbs, songs, and stories.

And then the author speaks of Job’s *posterity* (1:4-5). His godly character is seen in his concern for the spiritual welfare of his grown children. After each year’s round of birthday parties given by each of his seven sons (a “feast” on “his day” [1:4]), Job would offer burnt offerings for forgiveness of any sins committed by them unknowingly or otherwise. In every way, Job was capable and exemplary—in his ability to amass wealth, in his concern for his family, in his godly piety before God. Those sterling qualities make Job’s adversities, by contrast, all the more severe. The stark contrast heightens the impact of the

1. Charles W. Carter, “The Book of Job,” in *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, ed. Charles W. Carter, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 14.

book's message to those whose qualifications—and sufferings—may be less severe than his.

B. JOB'S CALAMITIES (1:6—2:10)

Job was subjected to two tests—one on his possessions and offspring (1:6-22) and one on his health (2:1-10). In each test are two scenes, one in heaven and one on earth. Each scene in heaven includes an accusation by Satan against Job, and each scene on earth includes an assault by Satan against Job.

On the day the sons of God (angels) presented (literally, “stationed”) themselves before God to report on their activities, Satan reported that he was roaming (“going around”) and walking on the earth, apparently looking for those whom he could accuse and devour (cf. 1 Pet 5:8). Knowing Satan's searching, the Lord mentioned Job as His supreme example of piety: “there is no one like him on the earth” (1:8), and He called him by the honorable title, “My servant.” God was confident that Satan would find in Job more than surface devotion.

Satan's response attacked Job's motives. Because Satan could not deny God's assessment of Job's godliness, he questioned *why* Job was pious. “It's all a front. He serves You only because of what he gets out of it. Take the pay away and he'll quit the job. Certainly he doesn't serve You for nothing!”

Does Job serve God for nothing? That is a basic question in the book of Job. In addition to causing the reader to ponder why a righteous man should suffer, the book poses the question, through Satan's words, of whether Job's worship has been genuine or self-motivated.

Will Job be seen as one who will serve God even if he gets nothing in return? Will *anyone* serve God for no personal gain? Is worship a coin that buys us a heavenly reward? Does man serve God to get blessings, fearing that failure to worship will bring punishment? Is piety part of a contract by which to gain wealth and ward off trouble?

Satan's subtle suggestion that worship is basically selfish hits at the very heart of man's relation to God. “Remove your protecting hedge and Your blessings from his work, and his true colors will show. Subtract what he has and You'll see him for

what he truly is—a cursing, self-centered man.”² That accusation also attacks the integrity of God. As one writer explains it: “Satan is also accusing God of rigging the rules of the game, i.e., He can’t get a response from man without a bait.”³ Why God allowed Satan to buffet Job is not fully understood. “Doesn’t God already know the motives of his children? Why does he need to test them to find out?”⁴ Surely God knows, but He used Job as a demonstration to silence Satan. In addition, He wanted to deepen Job’s spiritual insight.

Having gained permission, Satan began his assaults on Job when his ten children were feasting in their eldest brother’s house (1:13, 18). The assaults were alternately caused by human and “natural” forces: first, a Sabean attack; second, “the fire of God”; third, a Chaldean raid; fourth, a great desert wind. Satan was able to move both kinds of causes to accomplish his purposes—and to do so according to rapid, precise timing. Job, while reeling in shock from the news of one loss, was stunned with another.

The Sabeans, who stole the 1,000 oxen and 500 donkeys and slaughtered the servants (1:14-15), may have been from the region of Sheba, in southwest Arabia, or from a town called Sheba, near Dedan, in upper Arabia (Gen 10:7; 25:3).

The fire of God, which “fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants” (1:16), may have been caused by lightning. Some surmise that the 7,000 sheep were in a large barn, which caught fire.

The Chaldeans, who attacked in three companies from three sides and stole the 3,000 camels and slaughtered the servants (1:17), were fierce, marauding inhabitants of Mesopotamia. They possibly came from the north, in contrast with the Sabeans, who had come from the south. Apparently the raids by those two groups were surprise attacks.

The great wilderness wind that “struck the four corners of the house” (1:19) suggests a tornado or whirling wind, building in

2. In the question “Hast Thou not made a hedge about him?” “Thou” is emphatic.

3. Edgar Jones, *The Triumph of Job* (London: SCM, 1966), p. 29.

4. L. D. Johnson, *Israel’s Wisdom: Learn and Live*, p. 56.

momentum as it whipped across the desert. The wind toppled the house, causing it to fall on Job's ten children and kill them.

All Job's livestock had been stolen; all his servants had been murdered (except four messengers who had escaped to report; they were either Job's servants or others who had witnessed the tragedies); and all his children had been killed. In a few minutes, Job had plummeted from wealth and prosperity to grief and pauperism. Would he also plummet from love for God to imprecation of Him?

In the aftermath (1:20-22) of that first assault, Job tore his robe,⁵ symbolizing inner turmoil, and shaved his hair, depicting the loss of his personal glory. Falling to the ground, not in despair, but in obeisance to God, Job worshiped God. As his face touched the ground, his body conveyed the attitude of his heart—submission before God in humble worship.

Job recognized that his loss was not unlike his birth and his death: he had been naked at birth, and he would be naked at death. Similarly, now he was naked, not literally, but figuratively: with no possessions and no one to give them to. By "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there," Job did not mean he longed to go back to the prenatal security of his mother's womb. Instead, he meant the grave, for speaking of the womb of one's mother is a poetic way of referring to the earth (cf. Psalm 139:15; Eccles 5:15; 12:7). The connection is obvious; for man, formed in the womb, is also made "of dust from the ground" (Gen 2:7; 3:19; Job 10:9; 34:15), and the earth, like a mother, gives birth to living things.

Recognizing God's sovereign rights ("the LORD gave and the LORD has taken away" [1:21*b*]), Job praised the Lord (literally, "Yahweh"). How many believers today would react as Job did if they encountered the blows he experienced? How many would follow adversity with adoration, woe with worship? How many would, like Job, maintain their moral integrity, refusing to bend to bitterness? How many, suffering inequitably, would refuse to blame⁶ God of wrongdoing?

Satan lost in his first effort to uncover Job as a worshiper for

5. The robe was worn by men of rank.

6. "Blame" is literally "give or ascribe what is tasteless or inappropriate."

the sake of wealth. Job's amazing response showed Satan to be utterly wrong in predicting that Job would curse God. Devotion *is* possible without the dollar received in return. Man *can* be godly apart from material gain. Job's saintly worship at the moment of extreme loss and intense grief verified God's words.

Satan did not give up, however. In the second test (2:1-10), he again indicted God's word and impugned Job's motives and character. In this third scene, back in heaven, Satan implied that Job was still worshipping God because he had not yet given up his life. "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life" (2:4). "Anyone," Satan insinuated, "would give up his possessions and children—all that he has—in order to preserve his own life." "Skin for skin" was a proverbial saying, possibly used to refer to bartering or trading animal skins. "Job has willingly traded the skins [lives] of his own children because in return You have given him his own skin [life]." The statement again implies that Job is selfish. "Sure, he will worship You, so long as You spare his life. But if you touch his body with disease, then, with no further reason for worship, he will curse You."

Receiving permission from God to touch Job's body, but not to take his life, Satan immediately caused Job to have "sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (2:7). Whereas the first test involved Job's wealth, the second one involved his health.

The two Hebrew words translated "sore boils" were used of one of the ten plagues in Egypt (Exod 9:8-11; Deut 28:27) and of Hezekiah's illness (2 Kings 20:7). Some scholars say that the disease may have been smallpox.⁷ Others suppose it to be elephantiasis, so-called because of swollen limbs and black, wrinkled skin resembling the hide of an elephant. It was apparently some skin condition with scabs or scales, such as chronic eczema, leprosy, psoriasis, pityriasis, keratosis,⁸ or pemphigus foliaceus.⁹

7. A. Rendle Short, *The Bible and Modern Medicine* (Chicago: Moody, 1953), pp. 60-61.

8. C. Raimer Smith, *The Physician Examines the Bible* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), p. 60.

9. See Samuel Terrien, "The Book of Job," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), p. 920; and

The latter seems to fit best the symptoms of Job's afflictions—infamed, ulcerous sores (2:7), itching (2:8), degenerative changes in facial skin (2:7, 12), loss of appetite (3:24), depression (3:24-25), worms in the boils (7:5), hardened skin and running sores (7:5), difficulty in breathing, figuratively if not literally (9:18), dark eyelids (16:16), foul breath (19:17), loss of weight (19:20; 33:21), continual pain (30:17), restlessness (30:27), blackened skin (30:30), and fever (30:30). It may have lasted for several months at least, because Job referred to his "months of vanity" (7:3) and the "months gone by" (29:2).

The aftermath (2:8-10) of this second assault included three things: Job's separation from the city, his temptation by his wife, and his submission to God.

He sat "among the ashes," that is, on or near the pile of dung ashes and garbage outside the city. Beggars, outcasts, and dogs were present. How indignant and humiliating for one who had sat at the city gate as a local judge (29:7) now to be outside the city walls with beggars, scraping his itching, running sores with a piece of broken pottery!

When his wife urged him to forget his integrity (related to the word "blameless" [1:1]), curse God, and die, he called her a foolish (i.e., spiritually ignorant or nondiscerning) woman (2:10). Her suggestion that he curse God was exactly what Satan had twice said he would do (1:11; 2:5). At the moment when he needed comfort from her, he received another terrible blow—evidence of her bitterness toward God.¹⁰

His willingness to receive adversity as well as blessing from God shows that he did not serve God for personal gain. The affirmation "In all this Job did not sin with his lips" proved wrong Satan's predictions that Job would curse God, and it vindicated God's words.

Rupert Hallam, "Pemphigus Foliaceus," in *The British Encyclopaedia of Medical Practice*, vol. 9, pp. 490-92.

10. Some expositors view her remark as a word of compassion, as if she were preferring for him a sudden death rather than a prolonged illness. That, however, does not seem to match her recommendation that he withdraw from his moral consistency or wholeness and curse God.

C. JOB'S COMFORTERS (2:11-13)

Having heard about Job's perils, three of his friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, apparently prominent men—visited him. “Eliphaz” is an Edomite name (Gen 36:4), and as a Temanite he was from either Teman in Edom, known for its wisdom (Jer 49:7; Obad 8), or Tema in Arabia. “Bildad” is not used elsewhere in the Bible, and “Shuhite” may suggest a relationship to Shuah, Abraham's youngest son (Gen 25:2). “Zophar” is used only in Job, and his lineage as a Naamathite is unknown, although some have suggested that Naamah, a Judean town (Josh 15:41), was his hometown. A fourth friend, Elihu, was present though he is not mentioned until later (chap. 32).

Eliphaz was probably the eldest of the three, for he is listed first (2:11; 42:9), he spoke first, his speeches are longer and more mature in content, and God addressed him as the representative of the others (42:7).

The three comforters agreed to meet at the same time (apparently arranged by means of personal messengers, for “they came each one from his own place,” [2:11]), and their purpose was to sympathize with Job and comfort him.

Because Job was disfigured from the disease, they did not recognize him. Somehow they did know it was Job, for they then expressed their grief and despair in four ways (2:12): they wailed (in emotional shock), wept (in sorrow), tore their robes (in brokenheartedness), and threw dust over their heads to the sky (in deep grief or “in recognition of their helplessness”¹¹).

Sitting down in silence with him for a week may have been their way of mourning over his deathlike condition,¹² or it may have been an act of sympathy and comfort. Other explanations for their silence are that the comforters were so horrified at his loss that words of sympathy escaped them, or that they began to reflect in surprise at the possibility of his having been a hypocrite all along, considering his suffering as punishment for sin. Whatever their reasons, they followed the custom of that day and allowed the grieving person to express himself first.

11. Carter, p. 42.

12. The usual time of mourning for the dead was seven days (Gen 50:10; 1 Sam 31:13; Ezek 3:15).

The prologue tells the reader at the start that the friends were wrong in their view that Job's suffering was the result of his sin. The reader is also told something that Job and his comforters themselves did not know—that Satan was the instigator of Job's trouble, and that one of the purposes of his suffering was to answer Satan's question, "Will a man serve God gratis; will he worship if nothing is gained in return?"