**Introductory Background and Summary of Job[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Background**

Job may be the oldest book in the Bible but not the oldest story. Genesis 1-10 certainly outdates the story of Job. Many scholars believe Job to be a contemporary of Abraham or close to it. Five reasons to consider Job to be so old: (1) Job’s wealth is described like that of Abraham and Isaac; (2) no priests were mentioned to offer the sacrifices, which predates Moses; (3) Job lived a long time well over 140 years; (4) Job and his children used an ancient kind of money or silver mentioned only in Genesis, Job, and Joshua.

Job has some unique details. For example, he mentions the constellations of the Bear, Orion, and Pleiades twice (9:9, 38:31-32) – possibly as part of the eastern zodiac at that time. These were well known and particularly beautiful in the heavens of the Middle East. Orion was known as the mighty warrior to the people of Job’s time and the Lord’s reference to it in chapter 38 is a play on the human and heavenly imagery, which doubly emphasizes just how finite Job was. The Hebrew names of these constellations are *Ash*, *Kesil*, and *Khimah*.

Job also mentions the behemoth (40:15-24) and the leviathan (3:8, 41:1). The writer records a detailed description of the behemoth, which has a similar spelling in ancient Egyptian. Most scholars believe the beast to be a hippopotamus. The fact that they are living in the Jordan river adds to the age of Job. As for the leviathan, the original name of this animal and its description leads scholars to believe it was a crocodile. Crocodiles are, on the whole, larger than alligators and more aggressive, which seems to be described in chapter 41. Crocodiles were worshipped as powerful gods in ancient Egypt. This is one reason they are referenced by God as an example of worshipping the creation rather than the creator.

Finally, Job may be the first to use “by the skin of my teeth” (19:20). It is a metaphor to being on the brink of death and to his emaciated condition and suffering, He is alive but barely.

**Theological Summary**

Job is one of the books known as wisdom literature in the Old Testament. Job addresses several philosophical themes but is best known for the question: “Why do bad things happen to God’s people?” Is God acting justly by letting “evil” happen to anyone but especially the innocent? Job’s self-proclaimed innocence and his suffering serve as the premise for the discussion. In religious studies this study of justice is referred to as the discipline of theodicy or the vindication of why an almighty God would allow evil (calamity) in the world.

Wisdom (chapter 28) is another theme. It is the key to defeating the Adversary’s game plan. Wisdom enables humans to rise above their pain, their humanity, their temptation to curse God, and to humble their finite selves before the Infinite. Of course, this is personified in Job – almost – as a type of Christ, who is wisdom and defeats the Adversary (I Corinthians 1:22-24).

Several other themes emerge from the story of Job as he and his “friends” grapple with these topics. The innocence or sinfulness of humans; the lack of justice for those who do evil; the nature and motives of the Adversary; loyalty to and faith in the Creator; the sovereignty of God to be God independent of human demands; friendship in time of need; abandonment and the feeling of facing life’s pain alone; the hope of resurrection; and victory and vindication.

**Character Sketches**

*Job:*

* A wealthy, righteous, landowner, and family man. Honored in his community for his consistency, integrity, and treatment of others.
* A middle aged man by the standard of the day (about 70 years old).
* A devout man that offered sacrifices to God even though he was not a priest.
* A man who walked with God despite having no law of Moses to guide him.
* He is a type – a historical forerunner of the Messiah’s righteous suffering.
* He is human, a creation of God, who shows frustration with God when there seems to be no reason for his suffering and the suffering of his family.
* In modern day terms, Job is a comfortably wealthy (made the right investments in the Market); a devout evangelical Christian who worships God daily through personal devotions and lives his life according to the Word. His world is comfortable, orderly, stable, loving, and predictable. He believes in justice but does not believe God would bring severe calamity upon him without reason.

*Job’s wife:*

* She reacts to the situation as anyone would expect a normal human to react.
* She is angry at God for the suffering He has brought on her family and she is angry with Job for not being angry with God.
* In a modern context you might picture her coming to Job with, in a light green chenille robe with her hair up in curlers and wearing fluffy pink slippers with a cucumber facial saying, “What more can God do to us before you curse Him and die?”

*HaSatan:*

* “The-Adversary”; in Hebrew “ha” means “the” and “satan” means adversary or accuser; thus this is The-Adversary or HaSatan which is all one word in Hebrew.
* He is a subtle and cunning manipulator intent on depreciating God’s glory as Creator and Magistrate of the universe.
* He wants both man and God to suffer for his own discretions by using God’s just nature against Him.
* A pitiful being with nothing better to do than bring pain to others (this is characteristic of mankind as well – wishing calamity on others because of their own misfortunes).

*Eliphaz:*

* His name means, “God of fine gold”
* He may be an Edomite and descendent of Esau, which would require a slightly later date for the story than Abraham, but his name speaks of an earlier pagan time.
* He came as a friend (2:11) along with Bildad and Zophar.
* He seems to be the leader and probably the eldest and wisest of the trio of friends, possibly older than Job and a trusted adviser.
* He and the others may have come long distances (according to their tribal designations), which would make them more like colleagues (fellow businessmen) in the region.
* He and the others showed compassion and respect for Job’s situation (2:11-13)
* Eliphaz is recognized by most commentators as the gentlest and more understanding of the friends.

*Bildad:*

* The meaning of his name is unsure – possibly “not loved.”
* He is a Shuchite – possibly a descendant of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25:2).
* He is less polite to Job probably because Job did not accept the reasoning of Eliphaz.
* He attacks the character of Job’s children and suggests that they deserved what they got because of their sins (8:4), which Job disputes in the first chapter having made sacrifices for them in case they had sinned (1:5).

*Zophar:*

* His name is transliterated “*Tsophar*” and the meaning of it is uncertain but could be “Chirper” like a bird (Sparrow).
* He is probably the youngest of the three friends since he spoke last.
* He is quite direct because he says that he is frustrated with Job’s answers.

*Elihu:*

* Elihu means “My God is He”.
* The scripture clearly states that he is younger than the rest (Job 32:4, 6).
* Elihu is infuriated by the dialogue of the older friends and is dying to correct their perspective and their inability to refute Job.
* Elihu takes a different tack in that he claims Job has demeaned God by claiming he is righteous and undeserving of God’s justice.
* Elihu is not recognized by God nor is he chastised by Him as He does to the other three in His final comments.

**A Brief Annotated Outline of Job**

*Prologue/Adversary/Job’s Wife: Chapters 1-2*

The opening sentence is quite emphatic. Job is that particular man (implying there is no one like him) who is complete/perfect, morally innocent, upright/just, and turns aside from all evil. God shows great pleasure with Job. Job has had a full and pleasing life (wealth, children, property, etc.) thus far.

Then in comes the Adversary with the sons of God and God points to Job repeating the words of v.1 in v.8. The Adversary then claims God has bought Job’s affection and righteousness with a comfortable life implying Job would turn away from God with these comforts. The Adversary is then allowed to attack Job’s family and possessions, but Job blesses the name of the Lord. So, the Adversary again says Job is bribed by his good health, so he is allowed to attack Job physically.

Job’s wife sums up what should be Job’s response and what the Adversary is looking for if he were an ordinary man; “Do you still hold fast to your integrity [moral innocence]? Curse God and die!” Thus sets up the moral conundrum. Is Job righteously perfect or has he intentionally or unintentionally sinned against God? And if he is righteous, how can this be just? Job’s friends arrive to console him, supposedly with the wisdom to sort this out.

*Job’s Opening Speech: Chapter 3*

Job expresses his depression and despair, and eloquently asks, “Why am I not at ease with this?” (3:26) This opens the door for consolation to become patronization by his friends.

*First round of speeches: Chapters 4-14*

Chapters 4-5 Eliphaz

Eliphaz begins politely reminding Job that he has counseled others and should welcome wisdom from his friends. He proceeds to point out that all men are made of clay and adversity comes only to those who fall short of innocence. So, accept God’s discipline and admit your folly and he will heal you (5:17-18).

Chapters 6-7 Job

Job responds and proclaims the injustice of his pain for no reason. He chastises his friends for abandoning him. He then refuses to be silent and is justified to complain in bitterness. Job then turns his words to God and asks, “Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men?” (7:20)

Chapter 8 Bildad

Bildad calls Job’s words hot air. He suggests that it may have been Job’s family who sinned. But in any case, God does not bring calamity on a man for no good reason. If Job would only repent, God will be merciful and Job will be restored.

Chapters 9-10 Job

Job concedes that there is no one like God and He is beyond questioning (9:12). Job points out that God’s power is unassailable and no one can take him to court (9:19). Essentially Job has no defense even if he is righteous and disease (pain & suffering) comes to the just and unjust. Job then dwells in self-pity.

Chapter 11 Zophar

Zophar is a little more direct and thinks that Job is trying to cover his tracks in a pile of words. He also takes affront to Job’s attitude. Next he compares Job to God and quickly points out that there is no comparison. He all but calls Job an empty headed donkey (11:12). He suggests Job has forgotten his sin or let it slide by without notice. Finally, he beseeches Job to stop protesting and embrace forgiveness and a return to favor.

Chapters 12-14 Job

Job essentially replies that there is nothing new in what they are saying and that their wisdom is the pits (literally the death of wisdom (12:2). Job thinks his friends are mocking him (12:4). Now Job turns on them and calls them dumb as fish (12:8). Job then rehearses several reversals in fortune, which his eyes have seen and his ears understood (13:1). This comes back to Job later when God speaks and only then does he see the hand of God (42:3-5). Job then calls on his false physicians to be quiet and to listen to his words lest God hold them in contempt. In chapter 14 Job goes into another fit of depression and laments to God.

*Second Round of Speeches: Chapters 15-21*

Chapter 15 Eliphaz

Less generous and patient now, Eliphaz calls Job a wind bag full of hot desert air (15:2). Eliphaz is convinced more than before that Job speaks out of guilt and condemns himself with his own words. Eliphaz mocks Job suggesting he has a secret relationship with God and therefore thinks he is wiser than men older than his father (15:-8-10). Eliphaz suggests that Job has sinned against God by being arrogant and simply questioning God’s actions (15:25). Eliphaz is now convinced that Job deserves what he has gotten and that the emptiness of his life is a sign of his wickedness.

Chapters 16-17 Job

Job now suggests his comforters are so pitiful that they should be comforted (16:2). Then he equates them to his persecutors (6:11). Job all but gives up in a deep depression – his spirit is broken (17:1).

Chapter 18 Bildad

Bildad now pours salt in Job’s wounds by suggesting his depression is a sign of his guilt (18:5, 16, 21).

Chapter 19 Job

On the brink of falling into the abyss of despair, Job entertains the possibility of having gone astray but implies that this is between him and God (19:4). Job has another pity party (19:21). But in the midst of his lament, he comes back to trust in God (19:25-26).

Chapter 20 Zophar

Zophar is indignant, and insulted, and essentially says that Job is but a passing dream (or nightmare) and no longer to be remembered.

Chapter 21 Job

Job agrees with Zophar regarding the plight of the wicked but refuses to be corralled with such wicked men as these. Job rises above the counsel of the wicked (21:16).

*Third round of speeches*

Chapter 22 Eliphaz

Eliphaz becomes a little desperate. Now he makes up sins that Job must have committed to be suffering under these circumstances. Eliphaz tries one last time to bribe Job with the blessings of God if he will just confess (22:25-26).

Chapters 23-24 Job

Job reiterates his desire to simply have an audience with God so he can present his case. In an effort to manipulate God (silly Job) by trying to draw Him into defending Himself, Job then presents a litany of sins committed by others. These are the ones who should be in Job’s and received God’s wrath but have not (Psalm 73). Job then concedes that no one understands the workings of God.

Chapter 25 Bildad

In a terse response Bildad proclaims that all are born sinners and in the presence of God nothing more than worms and maggots (25:6).

Chapters 26-32:1 Job

Job responds with sarcasm and mocks his comforters. He also acknowledges the depths of the Almighty. He then reasserts his righteousness and that he will not violate the truth to gain favor with God (27:6). Job continues by contending that justice will come to the wicked (ch 27); but asks where is wisdom (ch 28) and who shall find it (28:20, 28)?

Finally, Job opines for days gone by when he was fulfilled and respected, and he did good for those around him (ch 29). But all that is gone (ch 30, 30:31). Once again he makes his case for an appearance in the court of the Almighty (31:35). And all were silent. Zophar is speechless.

*Elihu’s Speaks*

Chapters 32:2-37 Elihu

Elihu is to be commended for defending God’s goodness and consistency (34:12), but he does it at the expense of Job’s righteousness (34:5-6).

Elihu asserts that if you do not find fault with Job, then you are condemning God (34:17), so he builds a case for the honor and impartiality of the Almighty (37:23). Thus, the logic of the three friends is reversed; if God is righteous then Job must be suspect, so “please examine Job in perpetuity for he answers like a man of iniquity” (34:36).

*The Lord Speaks*

Chapters 38-42:9 God

In a series of eloquent creation metaphors God puts Job in his place. Job is finite; the Almighty, is infinite. Who is Job, the Lord’s creation to instruct the Creator of the universe with all its wonders. The question that sums it all up is, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding?” (38:4). Job then repents of his impertinence and humbles himself before God (42:1-6).

Finally, God chastises Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar and tells them to make sacrifices for their treatment of Job and to atone for their sins. Note that Job is not required to atone for any sin, and strangely, Elihu is not mentioned nor is the Adversary. Their absence may be considered a silent rebuke, a declaration that God has no esteem for their hubris.

*Ch 42:10-42:17 Job Restored*

Job’s life is restored twofold, and he lives a full life. His friends are chastised by God and Job shows remorse, but does he repent?

1. Gary C. Huckabay and James R. Hannibal, *A Spy and the Book of Job: a Bible Study Companion for The Paris Betrayal* (Houston: Lightraider Press) p 85-98. These are appendices II through IV in the book. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)