

**A LOOK AT THE BOOK
JOB
WHY DO RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE SUFFER?**

Ralph Porter

"Why do bad things happen to good people?"

This is an issue people have struggled with since the beginning of the race!

Popular answers:

"That's just the way it is!"

"Life isn't fair!"

Job was written to give us a glimpse of God's perspective on the issue.

AUTHOR

The book of Job gives no indication of who may have written it.

A long list of candidates has been suggested.

Job himself is a likely candidate.

Detailed knowledge of events indicates that the author was an eyewitness.

Biblical authors frequently tell their own story using the third person.

Elihu is another eyewitness candidate.

He appears to have the best understanding among those present of what God is doing.

Other known biblical authors have been suggested:

Moses was the writer for other biblical records from this period.

He could have written this story as well.

Similar to other stories, God may have revealed to him what He was doing that Job didn't realize.

This theory is strengthened by the proximity of Uz to Midian, where Moses resided for forty years.

Solomon is suggested as a possible author because of his role in writing other wisdom literature.

The poetical structure employed is similar to that which he used.

The existence of parallel ideas also supports this possibility.

The above named candidates are only some of those mentioned.
Any of these could have written the book.

Obviously *God did not intend us to know with certainty who wrote the book.*
The message of the book gives clear evidence of its divine source.

DATE

Since the author cannot be identified with certainty, neither is the date in which the book was *written* clearly defined.

Suggested dates range from 2000 to 200 B.C.

The date suggested will be determined largely by who we believe wrote the book.

Date of the *events*

The conditions described in the book give evidence that Job probably lived during the patriarchal age, around 2000 B.C.

The clearest evidence is found in Job's age.

After his restoration, Job lived another 140 years (42:16-17)

Added to his previous circumstances, he would have had to have lived approximately 200 years.

If we accept the Genesis record as a basis for determining normal life span, this would place Job at about the time of Terah, Abraham's father (Gen. 11:32).

While the decreasing age span mentioned in Genesis can't be used to identify exact dates with certainty, it does seem to indicate the general trends of that era.

The lifestyle was that of an agricultural society.

Wealth was measured by number of cattle owned, rather than by silver and gold.

The basic societal unit was the family.

Job functioned as the family priest.

The absence of any reference to the Mosaic law or to Israel is also significant.

BACKGROUND

Little is known about the background of Job.

Similar to Melchizedek, he arrives on the scene and leaves quietly, without reference to his ancestors, nor to the future of his descendants.

At the time when God called Abraham, there were men who were trusting God apart from the descendants of Abraham.

Like Abraham, and Melchizedek, no record is given of how they came to their relationship with God.

Some of them may have learned of Him in their homes, through parents who remembered the experience of their ancestor Noah and remained faithful to his God.

Job is apparently one of those who came to be remembered along with other great men of faith.

THEME AND PURPOSE

The story of Job was written to answer the question:

"Why do the righteous suffer?"

Various solutions are offered for the problem.

The simplistic answer of Job's three friends that *suffering is the result of sin*, while true in many cases, is not the *only* explanation for *all* suffering.

Sometimes suffering comes *to perfect God's people and to teach them to trust Him more*.

While God never directly answers Job's question, He changes Job's perspective.

When human answers fail to satisfy the questioning mind of the sufferer, he needs a new vision of the sovereign God in control of the universe.

When we see God as He is, we may not yet understand, but we're willing to trust Him and His purposes for us!

Job has seen Him and that is enough. *He no longer needs to know why.*

Job, then, is as much *a book about God and the way He deals with His people, as it is a book about suffering.*

The book reveals Him and much about His dealings with those who love Him.

It will also help us to learn what our attitude should be in the light of God's revelation of Himself.

In addition to the problem of suffering and the revelation of God, *Job presents a concrete example of the spiritual conflict existent in the universe.*

Although Job was never aware of his role, he was part of a larger conflict between God and Satan, for control of the lives of men.

When Satan saw a man who was faithfully and voluntarily submitting to God's rule over His life, he set out to cause his fall.

In spite of all Satan's efforts against him, Job remains faithful to God.

Job's example is a warning to all God's people of Satan's purposes and method of attack in their lives.

He will attempt to cause us to fall.

Job's faithfulness and subsequent restoration should stimulate us to follow his example and to remain faithful to God.

By continued voluntary submission to God, we contribute to the victory of God's kingdom over that of Satan.

ORGANIZATION

The book begins with a description of *the spiritual conflict* of which Job's story forms a part 1-2

The heavenly events which caused his suffering are described.

The majority of the book (3-37) deals with *the human debate* over the causes for suffering.

Three cycles of dialogue between Job and his three friends discuss the relationship between sin and suffering (3-31).

Job's "friends" insist that only sinners suffer.

Job protests that he is innocent, yet suffering.

When that debate proves unfruitful, Elihu argues that suffering is a means God uses for our edification and purification (32-37).

Finally, *God settles the discussion.* 38-42:6

He never answers the question.

When Job sees Him as He is, Job is satisfied; he needs no further explanation.

People often comment: "When I get to heaven, I'm going to ask about ..."
Based on Job's experience, I think that when we get there, it won't matter!

The story concludes by describing *the restoration of Job* and the blessings God gives him when the test is over (42:7-17).

ARGUMENT

PROLOGUE: SPIRITUAL CONFLICT 1:1-2:13

The book begins with an explanation of the true nature of the events in Job's life.

This is the part of the story which Job was never told.

It explains why a just God would be willing to allow children He loves to pass through such a time of suffering.

JOB'S CIRCUMSTANCES 1:1-5

Job is introduced and his circumstances described.

His character 1:1

His character was spotless.

He had recognized God's authority over his life and submitted to it.

He sought to please God and to avoid evil.

His prosperity 1:2-3

As a result, God blessed him and sent great prosperity.

His family 1:4-5

His submission to God and the resultant blessing extended to his family as well as to himself.

He faithfully exercised his priestly responsibilities in their behalf.

JOB'S AFFLICTIONS 1:6-2:10

Job's faithfulness did not escape neither God's nor Satan's attention.

In the spiritual conflict between God and Satan, God presented Job's life as an example of a man who voluntarily submitted to Him.

How many times do you suppose this dialogue between God and Satan has taken place?

First series of afflictions 1:6-22

Satan, seeking an opportunity to destroy that testimony, accused Job of serving God because of the benefits he received.

Satan's proposition 1:6-11

If God were to test him by taking all he had, he would reject God.

God's permission 1:12

God gave Satan permission to test Job.

Job's perseverance 1:13-22

In spite of the loss of family and wealth, Job remained faithful to God.

He continued to praise Him.

His suffering 1:13-19

His faith 1:20-22

Second series of afflictions 2:1-10

When the first test was complete, God again presents Job's life to Satan as an example.

Satan argues that Job remains true because he's still comfortable.

He experienced no personal pain.

Satan's proposition 2:1-5

If God would let him afflict Job's body, then he would turn from God.

God's permission 2:6

Again God accepts the challenge and gives Satan permission for this second test.

Job's perseverance 2:7-10

In spite of personal pain, Job remains faithful to God.

Even his wife stops encouraging him and turns against his faithful stand.

Nevertheless he remains true to his God.

His suffering 2:7-9

His faith 2:10

JOB'S FRIENDS 2:11-13

When his friends heard about his trouble, they came to comfort him.

For seven days they realized that their best comfort was to be there with him. They said nothing.

HUMAN REASONING 3-37

Then Job began a dialogue with his friends.

The majority of the book presents the reasoning of Job and his friends as they seek to understand Job's affliction from a human perspective.

JOB'S LAMENT 3

Job begins the conversation as he laments his present condition.

Protest against his birth 3:1-10

He protests the fact that he was born.

Protest against initial life 3:11-19

If he had to be born, he wishes that he could have died at birth so as not to experience life's suffering.

Protest against continuity of life 3:20-26

Finally, recognizing that God has given him life, he protests the fact that death continues to escape him.

He has suffered the loss of everything but life itself.

Now, when he wants to die, that is denied him.

FRIEND'S DIALOGUES 4-31

Once Job begins the conversation, his friends feel that they ought to respond.

A prolonged dialogue between Job and his friends follows.

The dialogue is developed through three series of interchange between each friend and Job.

First cycle 4-14

Dialogue with Eliphaz 4-7

Eliphaz' argument: Law of compensation 4-5

The innocent don't perish.

What a person sows, he will also reap.

The solution is to seek God.

Job's response: Innocence and doubt expressed 6-7

Job responds to Eliphaz' message with sorrow.

He regrets that Eliphaz has interpreted the situation in this way rather than seeking to help his friend.

He protests his innocence and challenges his friends to reveal his sin.

He concludes his response with an expression of doubt.

He doesn't understand what is happening.

This doesn't seem to be the same God with whom he has dealt previously, the God who forgives sin.

Dialogue with Bildad 8-10

Bildad's argument: Suffering caused by sin 8

Bildad argues that God doesn't punish the innocent.

Suffering is the result of sin and of forgetting God.

If Job will repent and turn to God, He will again restore him.

Job's response: Innocence and experience in conflict 9-10

Job recognizes that Bildad's words are true, as far as they go.

His problem is that they don't correspond to his experience.

His conscience is clear before God.

He has been faithful, and yet God is causing him to suffer.

He wants a chance to defend himself or to have God accuse him of his sin.

Dialogue with Zophar 11-14

Zophar's argument: Worse deserved than received 11

His attack is direct and merciless.

He attacks Job's premise of innocence, indicating that he deserves greater punishment than God has sent him.

God has mercifully forgotten some sins that should have been punished.

Rather than protest his innocence, Job should repent and return to God again.

Job's response: Innocent shouldn't suffer 12-14

Job responds by criticizing the wisdom his friends claim to possess.

God's power and sovereignty are greater than they can even imagine.

However, false accusations of sin don't help God's cause.

Again he asks God to show him his failure and he will accept the consequences of it.

If there is no sin in his life, then God ought to leave him alone.

Second cycle 15-21

As the second round of dialogues begins, the arguments of Job's friends becomes a bit more direct.

Dialogue with Eliphaz 15-17

Eliphaz' argument: Guilt evidenced by rebellious words 15

Eliphaz argues that the evidence of Job's guilt is found in his own words.

He has turned against God.

Job's response: Friends of the innocent increased suffering 16-17

Job complains that his friends have become his enemies and have become part of his affliction, rather than a consolation.

All the suffering he has gone through demonstrates that God has turned against him.

He still cannot understand why he suffers in spite of his innocence.

The only hope he has is that of death, which he hopes will come soon and thereby improve his situation.

Dialogue with Bildad 18-19

Bildad's argument: Destiny of the wicked 18

Job's refusal to pay attention to them will only add to his trouble.

As long as he refuses to repent, he can expect the destiny of the wicked, which is suffering.

Job's response: Future vindication certain 19

Job responds to his friends with a counter attack.

In spite of his innocence, God has brought all kinds of wrong into his life.

He has lost everything and everyone has turned against him.

Even so, Job is sure that in the end he will be vindicated.

When that happens, what will become of his friends who have opposed him?

If the same form of judgment is applied against them that they have applied against him, they have reason to fear God's judgment.

Dialogue with Zophar 20-21

Zophar's argument: Destruction of the wicked 20

Job's attack upon his friends provokes Zophar to respond with a direct and blunt attack against Job.

Job is the one who is suffering, not them.

Therefore, he is the wicked one.

The wicked will be destroyed.

Job's response: Prosperity of the wicked 21

Zophar's direct attack brings Job to the answer to their accusation:

The wicked *don't* always suffer!

They often experience great success, long lives and much pleasure.

Their idea is based on false premises.

Third cycle 22-26

Dialogue with Eliphaz 22-24

Eliphaz' argument: Accusation of sin 22

In this final round, the attacks become direct accusations of sin in Job's life.

Eliphaz begins the direct attack with the charge that Job's suffering was caused by his sin.

He accuses him of specific social sins against the needy.

He suffers because he thought God would not know about the sin. [Is this a revelation of what's really inside of Eliphaz' own heart?]

If he will repent of his sin, God will restore him.

Job's response: Faithful contrasted with wicked 23-24

Job chooses not to address the direct charges made for they are without basis in fact.

He returns again to his basic problem.

He knows he could stand before God, present his case, and be vindicated.

He continues to follow God's way faithfully.

However, he continues to suffer.

At the same time observation indicates that the wicked often do not suffer for the wrongs committed in this life.

God's justice is administered against them at their death, but they often live secure and exalted in this life.

This is Job's problem. His friends' view, that the wicked suffer immediate consequences, is not seen in practice.

Dialogue with Bildad 25-26

Bildad's argument: God's glory proved Job impure 25

In Bildad's final dialogue with Job, he no longer tries to respond or accuse Job directly.

His argument is that God is the powerful and holy one, before Him no man can claim to be pure.

Job, as any man, ought to recognize his sinfulness before the holy God.

Job's response: Unresolved question 26

Job expands the thesis of Bildad even further, as if to belittle his brief presentation.

However, awareness of God's greatness fails to resolve the problem.

Job still struggles with the basic issue of why an innocent man should be caused to suffer as he has.

Job's final response 27-31

Job's friends have run out of arguments.

Their solution for the problem will not resolve Job's doubts.

He is willing to accept their premise that wickedness produces suffering, although even that is not consistently true during the human life span.

They are unable to answer the problem of why a righteous man would suffer because they don't believe that it is possible.

Job concludes this section with a final response to his three friends.

Their erroneous interpretation 27

He demonstrates that their interpretation of his condition is erroneous.

Innocence reconfirmed 27:1-6

He is not being punished for sin because he has maintained a righteous way of life.

He has given God no reason to punish him.

Fate of wicked clarified 27:7-23

The wicked do indeed suffer for their evil ways, but not always immediately.

In the end, they must leave all their prosperity behind and pay for their wicked ways.

However, this does not always occur immediately.

The wicked cannot call upon God, but Job, in spite of his suffering is still able to do so.

Thus there is a clear difference between his fate and the fate of the wicked.

Divine source of true wisdom 28

Job explains that the problem with their explanation lies in its source.

The explanation is logical and often seems to be true.

However, even true principles must be applied with the wisdom which only God can give.

Job had been appealing to God for an answer.

They have been dogmatically applying their own solution.

They need to turn, along with him, to God and to seek His solution for Job's condition.

They will only comprehend what is happening when they see the situation from God's point of view.

This is true wisdom.

Summary of Job's life 29-31

Job reviews his life history in the presence of his friends.

His past blessing 29

He recalls the pleasant days when he walked in fellowship with God and enjoyed His blessing.

His present affliction 30

Then he describes the present affliction and his despair because of his suffering.

His continuing innocence 31

He reviews his personal life and demonstrates that in all areas of his life he has maintained an upright life before God.

Personal holiness 31:1-12

Justice toward oppressed 31:13-23

Faithfulness to God 31:24-28

Kindness and generosity 31:29-32

Confession of sin 31:33-34

Certainty of vindication 31:35-37

Fairness with land 31:38-40

His conscience is clear and he is willing to face any accuser.

He will readily accept his guilt, if there is a basis for a charge against him.

He is confident that no such charge will be presented.

ELIHU'S SPEECHES 32-37

When Job's three friends had no more to say, a fourth observer, Elihu, spoke up.

Elihu's intervention 32-33:7

His presentation 32:1-5

The three friends quit arguing with Job because he considered himself to be righteous.

Elihu was provoked to speak for the same reason.

He was angry because he felt that Job should have justified God's actions rather than his own.

He had kept quiet because of his youth.

He wanted the older men to answer him.

When they were unable to answer Job, Elihu could resist no longer.

He had to speak up.

His explanation 32:6-22

Elihu begins his intervention by explaining to Job's friends why he felt compelled to speak.

While he believed that priority should be given to elders, he also recognized that God is the source of understanding.

When they were unable to answer, he felt compelled to explain what God had taught him about His purpose in suffering.

His appeal 33:1-7

He then appeals to Job to listen to his explanation and respond to it.

Elihu's first speech: God's educational system 33:8-33

As Elihu speaks to Job, no response is given.

Elihu answers some of the key premises Job has expressed previously.

Elihu speaks to Job's complaint that while he is innocent, God is against him (8-11).

Job had appealed to God for an explanation, but has not received an answer.

Job supposes that if there is injustice, it's on God's side—He knows that *HE* is alright! 33:8-11; 34:5-6, 35-36; 35:3

Elihu responds that God, due to His greatness, is under no obligation to answer man (12-13).

Nevertheless, God does answer man in various ways (14-18).

The problem is that frequently the answer is not understood.

Suffering is one of the ways by which God speaks to man.

Rather than complain, Job should seek to learn the lesson God wants to teach him through his suffering (19-22).

Another way God answers a man is by sending another as a mediator who can help him to understand what God wants to teach him.

Elihu suggests that he has been sent to fulfill that role.

Therefore, Job ought to listen to him.

Elihu's second speech: Job's proper reaction 34

Elihu speaks to Job's complaint that although he is innocent, God is not compensating him according to his faithful walk (1-6).

Elihu responds that it is impossible to accuse God of acting unjustly (10-30).

God is always just in His dealings with man.

He may not act immediately, but he will repay justly that which a man deserves.

Rather than accuse God, Job ought to submit to Him, recognize His sovereignty and justice, and ask God what He wishes to teach him (31-37).

By accusing God of injustice, Job has identified himself with the wicked.

They are the ones who propose that point of view.

Elihu's third speech: Job's need to seek God 35

Elihu responds to Job's complaint that it is useless to try to please God.

He has sought to serve him and received nothing for it (34:7-9; 35:3).

He answers that God is transcendent.

Our sin harms us, not him.

Our righteousness is for our benefit, not His.

He wants us to seek Him out of love for Him, not for the benefits we can receive from Him.

Elihu's fourth speech: God's greatness 36-37

Elihu's fourth message summarizes and concludes his previous ideas.

God is always just.

He uses suffering to correct and to teach men.

Therefore, suffering should cause man to listen for God's instruction.

God's greatness is abundantly demonstrated in the universe.

His greatness ought to cause man to fear Him, rather than rebuke and challenge Him.

Job's approach to the problem is wrong.

If he doesn't humble himself and turn from his self-righteous attitude, God will have to judge him even more severely.

God's sovereignty over men 36:1-25

God's sovereignty over nature 36:26-37:21

God's greatness merited reverence 37:22-24

Based on the fact that Job never responds to Elihu, it appears that his message gave Job something to consider.

God's revelation to Job seems to build on Elihu's explanation.

Even more significant is the fact that Elihu is not included in God's rebuke at the end.

Thus it may be assumed that, while he may not understand all that is involved, Elihu was able to call Job's attention to the proper perspective.

Job was concentrating on himself and his affliction.

He needed a clearer view of God. That perspective was provided by God Himself.

DIVINE REVELATION 38-42:6

After Job's frequent appeals for a face-to-face confrontation with God, Job is granted his request.

God reveals Himself to Job.

God is not just another participant in the dialogue.

In fact, He never answers Job's question.

He merely reveals Himself.

When Job sees God as He is, he is satisfied.

REVELATION OF GOD'S KNOWLEDGE 38-40:5

God's message 38-40:2

In God's first revelation to Job, He reveals His omniscience.

He uses a series of questions that reveal the greatness of His knowledge and Job's ignorance.

The questions deal with basic aspects of the earth, the heavens, and all living creatures.

If Job doesn't even understand these basic objective facts of God's plan, how can he expect to answer the great mysteries of God's eternal plan for man?

Knowledge concerning the earth 38:1-19

Knowledge concerning the heavens 38:20-38

Knowledge concerning the living creatures 38:39-39:30

Challenge to Job 40:1-2

God concludes with a challenge to Job to answer Him.

Job's reply 40:3-5

Job, having received a revelation of God's great knowledge, recognizes how small he really is.

He has already said too much.

He will not open his mouth and reveal any further foolishness.

REVELATION OF GOD'S POWER 40:6-42:6

God's message 40:6-41:34

In order to emphasize the lesson taught, God gives a second revelation.

God speaks again and reveals to Job His great power.

Again he uses a series of questions to make Job aware of his smallness compared to God's omnipotence.

Job's reply 42:1-6

Once again, Job quickly gets the point.

He recognizes God's greatness and his own foolishness.

He didn't understand what he was saying.

From now on, he will ask God and let Him give the answers.

Having come face-to-face with God, he confesses his own worthlessness.

EPILOGUE: FINAL RESULT 42:7-17

The story concludes with a description of the final results of the conflict.

The heavenly results are not stated, but it is apparent from Job's attitude at the end that **Satan had lost the contest.**

Job remained faithful to God.

FRIENDS REBUKED 42:7-9

Job's three friends are rebuked because they have not rightly understood God and His purposes.

They had enclosed Him in their mold as a vengeful God, seeking the opportunity to punish anyone who crosses Him.

They failed to realize His mercy, and the other purposes God pursues in His plan for His children.

The friends are required to go to Job as a mediator because they have been disrespectful of him, as God's servant, and have failed to recognize the testimony he has maintained.

He was more just than they, yet they criticized him.

At a time when they should have been supportive, they have joined the opposition in bringing affliction on him.

Job demonstrates his character by forgiving them and acting as their mediator.

Therefore, God accepted Job's prayer for them.

JOB RESTORED 42:10-17

Job was recompensed materially, in the end, for his faithfulness.

He was given a double portion of the wealth he had possessed previously.

All of his relatives and friends returned and consoled him.

His children were replaced by an equal number of beautiful children.

Finally, Job lived for an additional 140 years to enjoy the benefits of his restoration.

DOCTRINAL INSTRUCTION

Identify what each of the following believe about God.
Then identify their view of suffering.

	God	Suffering
God (Plan)	Sovereign Just Permits testing of His children	Proof of His servant's faithfulness Proof of Satan's error
Satan	Sovereign Briber	Pain will produce unfaithfulness
Job (First)	Just Forgiving Source of every blessing Sovereign	Confused (but worshiping God) Trusts in God when he doesn't understand
3 Friends	Just Vengeful	Result of sin "Only sinners suffer"
Elihu	Sovereign Just Greater than man	Result of sin, OR Teaching instrument from God "What do you want to teach me?"
God (Revelation)	Sovereign	Doesn't give an answer

	Omniscient Omnipotent	
Job (End)	Sovereign Omniscient Omnipotent	Doesn't matter He has seen God as He is! He can trust Him in the dark

PRACTICAL LESSONS

What lessons do we learn about our own lives today from studying Job?

1. We are participants in a spiritual conflict.
Satan will do everything he can to cause us to fall.
God wins a victory when we are faithful and submit to His will.
2. God is in control of history, even when we are in difficult and adverse circumstances.
3. God has purposes for our life that we can't always understand.
4. The problem of suffering isn't solved by focusing on the problem itself.
5. The problem of suffering is solved when we focus on God Himself.
6. Those who are faithful will triumph in the end.