Introduction to Job

***Who are the characters?***

**Job –** A man from Uz (location unknown) who was “blameless and upright”. Job was seemingly wealthy and had a large family. He was by all accounts “blessed”. In this book/poem, Job has all that he has taken away and Job is made to suffer. Job’s response to his change of circumstance as it relates to God is the main focus of this story.

**God –** In the Book of Job, God has conversation with the satan in the heavenly court but God also addresses Job from a whirlwind. God is seen as sovereign over all things and Job’s suffering only occurs because God allows it.

**The satan –** In Hebrew “satan” means accuser. While this character is certainly up to mischief in the story he does not represent the same character as the Devil/Satan of the New Testament. The book of Job was likely written before much of theology of the Devil had developed in Near Eastern Religion.

**The 3 friends –** Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are Job’s three primary friends who come to comfort Job in his suffering. Ultimately when they become uncomfortable with the suffering they seek explanations which offer Justification for God’s actions and generally lay blame on Job (or his family) for the suffering that is taking place.

**Elihu -** Scholars have long wondered about the sudden appearance of Elihu in chapter 32. Up to this point in the book, there were only three friends. They were introduced at the end of chapter 2 and took turns talking to Job about his suffering. Elihu claims to be young and angry about the way the conversation has gone. He is going to step up and speak his mind because he cannot any longer sit back and witness the inability of the others to make good responses to some of Job's outrageous statements. Those who see Elihu as an original part of the book think that he helps prepare Job for his audience with God (chapters 38-41). The majority opinion is that Elihu was added to the book at a later time to make one more attempt to deal adequately with the hard questions about suffering and God's justice. [[1]](#footnote-1)

**The behemoth and leviathan –** The Behemoth (chapter 40) and Leviathan (chapter 41) represent a common Old Testament way of personifying the presence of evil in the world. The sea and the monsters that live in the sea provide symbolic or mythic ways to identify the reality of evil at work in the world.[[2]](#footnote-2)

***When was it written?***

When and by whom a book is written is important for understanding its meaning and significance. Most scholars argue that Job was written in stages likely by several authors. Much of the language (other than the Elihu speeches) is similar in style to post-exilic writings (after 587 BC) placing much of this book likely between 600 and 400 BC. The Elihu speeches tend to be viewed as a later addition probably around 300 BC.

***By whom?***

Job is a non-Israelite name, Uz may likely refer to a region outside Israel (Edom or Aramean territory) and Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite all come from non-Israelite locations. This story probably has its origins in other cultures and was adapted/adopted by the Israelites.

The language is very stylized which leads scholars to believe that Job was adapted and written in Hebrew by very learned scholars of the day.

***What is the message?***

Initial impressions might be that Job helps explain suffering and evil in the world. In poetic form, Job wrestles with the question of why God would allow such terrible suffering. Ultimately we will find, as Job did, that there are no good explanations. Instead, we are invited to accept the uncertainty that is present in every life and trust God beyond what we see and experience in this world.

**Outline[[3]](#footnote-3):**

1. **Job 1:1- 2:13 – Introduction** 
   1. 1:1-22 – The First Test
   2. 2:1-10 – The Second Test
   3. 2:11-13- The 3 Friends
2. **Job 3:1-31:40 – Poetic Dialogue between Job His Friends**
   1. 3:1-14:22 – The 1st Cycle
      1. Job curses the day of his birth
      2. Traditional understandings of Misfortune
      3. Job defends the vehemence of his words
      4. A Metaphor of two plants
      5. Job imagines a trial with God
      6. Zophar defends God’s wisdom
      7. Job burlesques the Wisdom of God and struggles with mortality
         1. Job parodies traditional praise of God
         2. Job criticizes deceitful speech
         3. Job experiences the destruction of hope Week 2 – Sept. 25
   2. 15:1-21:34 – The 2nd Cycle
      1. Eliphaz describes the fate of the wicked
      2. Job complains of God’s criminal violence
      3. Bildad describes the fate of the wicked
      4. Job denounces God’s injustice
      5. Zophar describes the fate of the wicked
      6. The fate of the wicked is prosperity and honor
   3. 22:1-27:23 – The 3rd Cycle
      1. Eliphaz urges Job to repent
      2. Divine Justice is elusive
      3. Bildad and Job argue about the power of God
      4. Job defends his integrity
   4. 28:1-28 – Interlude: Where can wisdom be found
   5. 29:1- 31:40 – Job’s concluding speech
      1. Job recalls an idyllic past
      2. Job laments his present humiliation
      3. Job’s oath of innocence Week 3 – Oct. 2
3. **Job 32:1-37:24 – The Speeches of Elihu**
   1. 32:1-33:33 – Elihu attempts to Answer Job
   2. 34:1-37 – God, the Absolute Sovereign, always acts Justly
   3. 36:1-37:24 – Elihu describes the Character of God Week 4 – Oct. 9
4. **Job 38:1-42:6 – God’s Speeches from the Whirlwind and Job Replies**
   1. 38:1-40:5 – Understanding the Divine Plan in the World
   2. 40:6-42:6 – Understanding the Nature of Divine Governance
5. **Job 42:7-17 - Conclusion** Week 5 – Oct. 16

1. <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=38> 9/15/14 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The New Interpreters Bible Commentary, Volume IV– Abingdon Press 1996 pg. 340 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)