

## Job

“Look to the heavens, and see:  
And behold the clouds which are higher than you.”  
(Elihu—Job 35:5)

At one time or another everyone has or will argue with God over His perceived mistreatment of them or someone they know. What happens following such a diatribe depends altogether on a proper understanding of the freedom of God and then on the disputer’s submission to His exercise of that freedom. The Book of Job presents an ancient, yet in many important respects modern, man’s journey toward such an understanding and faith. Initiated by divinely appointed circumstances, unprofitably addressed by well-meaning friends, and finally facilitated by a young sage, Job passes from shock through disputation to silence as he finally really hears the truth about God’s freedom to act in sovereignty and grace. Job, like Ecclesiastes, addresses the issue of how to live when life does not work according to the general cause and effect laws that God has laid down in His moral universe, which is the perspective of traditional wisdom literature like Proverbs.

### **Authorship**

There is no reference in Job indicating who wrote this book. Many different people have been proposed based on stylistic features and content, among them Moses and Solomon. The lengthy dialogues and involved conversations suggest that it was written by an eyewitness to the events. Since Job lived for another 140 years after this experience he would have had plenty of time to complete this composition. Apart from critical hypotheses of multiple authorship and late origination he is as good a candidate as any other (and better than some). However, it may have been written in Solomon’s time,

the great period of wisdom writing based on an older preserved account of Job and his four friends.

### **Date**

The date of writing and the time of the events must be distinguished.

Sumerian wisdom writings have been discovered which date from 1700 B.C. and there are many examples of Babylonian wisdom literature from the second and first millennia B.C. There are no compelling reasons why it could not have been written, at least in its initial form, during the patriarchal period, though final editorial work could have occurred during the period of the writing of most of Israel's wisdom literature, that is, the eighth century B.C.

### **Historical Setting**

Though there are no historical reference points within the work, there are cultural indicators that set the plot within the patriarchal period.<sup>1</sup> Job is a worshipper of Yahweh but independent of the patriarchs. He must have come to faith in Yahweh in the same way as Abraham, that is through direct contact. This makes Job one of the earliest biblical accounts of God's dealings with humanity, excluding the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

### **Original Readers / Occasion**

There is no indication of an event to prompt such a writing. However, the issue at the heart of Job is of universal and timeless significance. All people have struggled with questions over the justice and sovereignty of the Almighty. The God revealed in Job fits well with the God of Israel as revealed in the writings of Moses and in the later

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 200-201.

wisdom books. It is obviously intended for all people as they struggle with the issue of undeserved suffering in God's world.

### **Special Issues**

Literary genre and relationship to other ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. Though it has points of similarity with other ancient wisdom literature Job as a composition is unique. Since Job did not write in an ideological or cultural vacuum, it should not be a surprising to find some points of contact with works of other cultures. However, nothing has been discovered that can serve as a literary model for Job. On a micro level our understanding of certain concepts or terminology can be aided by comparison with ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. This is not to say that the theology is in any way derived from sub-biblical thought.<sup>2</sup>

Relation to history. The question can be asked like this: "Does the book of Job intend to be a historical record of an actual event in the past and, if so, how precise does it intend to be?"<sup>3</sup> First, Job is mentioned in Ezekiel (twice—14:14, 20) and in the book of James (5:11) as being an actual person. Second, the opening verse has the definite ring of an historical account (cf. Judg 17:1 and 1 Sam 1:1). Third, other reported facts in the epilogue and prologue read most naturally as definite time-place references. However, the use of lyric poetry for the extensive cycles of speeches probably indicates that the

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<sup>2</sup> For an comparative analysis of Job and other ancient wisdom literature see Francis I. Anderson, *Job*, in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries series, D. J. Wiseman, editor (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 23-31. Anderson summarizes: "Job stands far above its nearest competitors, in the coherence of its sustained treatment of the theme of human misery, in the scope of its many-sided examination of the problem, in the strength and clarity of its defiant moral monotheism, in the characterization of the protagonists, in the heights of its lyrical poetry, in its dramatic impact, and in the intellectual integrity with which it faces the 'unintelligible burden' of human existence. In all this Job stands alone. Nothing we know before it provided a model, and nothing since, including its numerous imitations, has risen to the same heights. Comparison only serves to enhance the solitary greatness of the book of Job." (ibid., 32).

<sup>3</sup> Dillard and Longman, *Introduction*, 207.

actual conversations between Job and his friends have been worked into a form that is both striking and memorable. This does not mean that the content has been manufactured after the fact, but rather that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the human author has cast the experience of Job into the form of wisdom teaching for purposes of communication and memory retention.

The presence of mythological ideas and terminology. It is evident that there are many mythological elements in the Book of Job, that is, terms and ideas that came from or were associated with non-biblical religions of the ancient world. Their presence cannot be denied. The issue is how the author of Job may have used these terms and images. An example is the use of the sea as a biblical symbol of chaos, which has direct parallels in pagan religions of the early Old Testament period. In every case of their appearance such terms and ideas are being used for communicative effect without in any way subscribing to their underlying cultic significance. Great literature involves the craft of evoking images familiar to the reader in order to communicate an idea or otherwise move to a response. The meaning of such terminology is ultimately controlled by the way an author uses it, not by all of its past associations.<sup>4</sup>

### **Message**

Since God is free in the ordering and utilization of His creation, the proper relationship between God and man is based solely on God's sovereign grace and man's

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<sup>4</sup> Smick says that "the distinguishing mark of a mythology is not references to gods or the use of anthropomorphism and various descriptive metaphors which describe deity in concrete terminology but rather the narration of the actions of numerous gods who have the same limitations and sins common to man, including especially sexual relations. Neither the Book of Job nor any of the Old Testament has the slightest hint of belief in any such mythology." (Elmer B. Smick, "Mythology and the Book of Job," in *Sitting with Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job*, Roy B. Zuck, editor (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 229). For a full discussion of this feature see *ibid.*, 221-29 originally published in *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 13 (Spring 1970): 101-8 and *idem*, "Another Look at the Mythological Elements in the Book of Job," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (1978): 213-28 reprinted in Zuck, *Job*, 231-44.

response of faith and submissive trust.

## Outline

- I. Prose Prologue: Job’s surprise test sets the stage for his journey of faith. 1:1–2:13
  - A. The statement of Job’s piety and prosperity. 1:1–5
  - B. The attack on Job’s possessions. 1:6–22
    - 1. The Adversary attacks Job’s character. 1:6–12
    - 2. The Adversary takes Job’s property and children. 1:13–19
    - 3. Job worships Yahweh. 1:20–22
  - C. The attack on Job’s person. 2:1–10
    - 1. The Adversary impugns Job’s motivation. 2:1–6
    - 2. The Adversary renews the attack against Job’s person. 2:7–8
    - 3. Job resists the appeal to curse God. 2:9–10
  - D. The arrival of Job’s friends to mourn with him and comfort him. 2:11–13
- II. Poetic Body: Job disputes his way to silence, understanding, and a deeper faith. 3:1—42:6
  - A. Job’s initial monologue: his life has not been worth the enduring of his present circumstance. 3:1–26
    - 1. He curses the day of his birth. 3:1–10
    - 2. He laments that he did not die at birth. 3:11–19
    - 3. He complains that God is prolonging his life. 3:20–26
  - B. Dialogue with the friends in three cycles: the only explanation for Job’s suffering is that he is the object of the retributive justice of God. 4:1—27:23
    - 1. Summary of the speeches of Eliphaz (chapters 4—5, 15, 22)
      - a. Basic charge: Job has sinned.
        - 1) “Who ever perished being innocent?” (4:7,8)
        - 2) “Is not your wickedness great?” (22:5)
      - b. Basis of Appeal: Experience and illumination.
        - 1) Personal Experience: “I have seen” (4:8; 5:3; 15:17)
        - 2) Special Illumination: “Now a word was secretly brought to me” (4:12–16)
      - c. Specific Accusations: Supposed oppression and neglect of the poor and needy.
        - 1) “You have taken pledges...and stripped the naked” (22:6)
        - 2) “You have not given the weary water...and withheld bread...” (22:7)
        - 3) “You have sent the widow away empty, And the strength of the fatherless was crushed” (22:8)
      - d. Summary Exhortation: Repent and be restored—“If you return to the Almighty, you will be built up; You will remove iniquity far from your tents” (22:23)
      - e. View of God: The Almighty controls the destiny of men and is independent of mankind.
        - 1) “Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty” (5:17)

- 2) “Can a man be profitable to God?”
2. Summary of the speeches of Bildad (chapters 8, 18, 25)
  - a. Basic Charge: Job had sinned—“Behold, God will not cast away the blameless, Nor will he uphold the evildoers.” (8:20)
  - b. Basis of Appeal: Wisdom of Tradition—“For inquire, please, of the former age, And consider the things discovered by their fathers...” (8:8–10)
  - c. Summary Exhortation: Repent and be restored—“If you would earnestly seek God, And make your supplication to the Almighty, If you were pure and upright, Surely now He would awake for you...” (8:5–6)
  - d. View of God: The Almighty is just in dispensing retribution and is sovereign over the universe.
    - 1) “Does God subvert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice” (8:3)
    - 2) “Behold, God will not cast away the blameless, Nor will He uphold the evildoers” (8:20)
    - 3) “Dominion and fear belong to Him; He makes peace in His high places” (25:2)
3. Summary of the speeches of Zophar (chapters 11, 20)
  - a. Basic Charge: Job has sinned.
    - 1) “Know therefore that God exacts from you less than your iniquity deserves” (11:6)
    - 2) “The triumphing of the wicked is short, And the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment.” (20:5)
  - b. Basis of Appeal: Dogmatic Assumption.
    - 1) “Know therefore...” 11:6
    - 2) “Do you not know...” 20:4
  - c. Summary Exhortation: Repent and be restored—“If you would prepare your heart . . . and . . . put [iniquity] far away . . . Then surely . . . you could be steadfast, and not fear” (11:13–15)
  - d. View of God: The Almighty is mysterious and unknowable in His retributive justice.
    - 1) “Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?” (11:7)
    - 2) “God will cast on [the wicked] the fury of His wrath, And will rain it on him while he is eating” (20:23)
4. Summary of Job’s responses to the speeches of the friends.
  - a. His brothers have dealt deceitfully; his complaint is just (6:1–22)
  - b. He has no mediator to argue his case before God (9:1—10:22)
  - c. He is as knowledgeable as they (12:1—13:19)
  - d. His friends bring no comfort (16:1–5)
  - e. Both his friends and God have wronged him (19:1–6)
  - f. He has been estranged from friends and relatives alike (19:13–20)
  - g. He observes that the wicked and righteous do not always receive their just due (21:1–21)

- h. He would contend with God (23:1–7)
- i. His friends have not helped (26:1–4)
- 5. Summary of Job’s case against God.
  - a. God has unfairly set Job as His target (7:20)
  - b. God has an unfair advantage over Job because there is no mediator who can adequately frame his defense (9:1–35)
  - c. God’s destruction of His own creature, Job, is nonsensical (10:1–12)
  - d. God has unfairly concealed the reason for Job’s affliction (13:20–27)
  - e. God has worn Job out (16:7)
  - f. God has turned Job over to the ungodly (16:11)
  - g. God has ruined Job’s good reputation (17:6–9)
  - h. God has left Job without hope (19:1–12)
  - i. God has separated Job from family and friends (19:13–20)
  - j. God has hidden Himself from Job so as not to hear his case (23:1–12)
- 6. Job’s Summary Speech to the three friends: 27:1–23
  - a. Job maintains his integrity and protests his righteousness. 27:1–6
  - b. Job imprecates his enemy. 27:7–10
  - c. Job instructs the friends about the way of God with the wicked. 27:11–23
- C. Poem on Wisdom: Job confesses that God alone knows the way of wisdom and that He reserves it for those who fear Him. 28:1–28
  - 1. Man can mine precious metals from deep in the earth but he cannot mine wisdom as though it was gold. 28:1–19
  - 2. God alone knows the ways of wisdom. 28:20–27
  - 3. God communicates the benefit of wisdom through fearing Him. 28:28
- D. Monologues in three cycles: Job’s test is concluded with his submission to God’s free exercise of His sovereignty in grace. 29:1—42:6
  - 1. Job’s Concluding Monologue: God is called to a judicial proceeding so as to formalize His charges against Job. 29:1—31:40
    - a. Job recounts his past prosperity as proof of his innocence. 29:1–25
    - b. Job sets forth his present humiliation as indication that some charge has been imposed against him. 30:1–31
    - c. Job invokes his Accuser to specify the presumed charges against himself. 31:1–40
  - 2. Elihu’s Speeches. 31:1—37:24
    - a. Narrative introduction of Elihu, an Israelite who understands God in His sovereign freedom. 32:1–6
    - b. The first speech: Elihu defends his right to speak and purposes to teach Job wisdom. 32:6—33:33
      - 1) He is qualified to speak and compelled to act. 32:6–22
      - 2) He contends with Job over God’s supposed silence. 33:1–33

- c. The second speech: Elihu corrects Job's erroneous view of God's justice. 34:1–37
- d. The third speech: Elihu corrects Job's erroneous view of his own righteousness. 35:1–16
- e. The fourth speech: Elihu affirms God's righteousness in the context of His sovereign freedom. 36:1—37:24
  - 1) God is Mighty in delivering the oppressed. 36:5–21
  - 2) God is Exalted in His power to instruct. 36:22–25
  - 3) God is Magnificent in the deployment of His clouds. 36:26—37:18
  - 4) God is Free in the exercise of His power. 37:19–24
- 3. Yahweh's speeches with Job's responses. 38:1—42:6
  - a. Yahweh's first speech: Mere man cannot comprehend God's creation. 38:1—40:2
  - b. Job's first response: He has nothing to answer. 40:3–5
  - c. Yahweh's second speech: Mere man cannot control God's creation. 40:6—41:34
  - d. Job's second response: He has a better understanding of himself and of his God. 42:1–6
- III. Prose Epilogue: Yahweh rebukes the friends for their error and blesses Job out of His sovereign grace. 42:7–17
  - A. Yahweh rebukes Job's three friends for their erroneous view of Himself. 42:7–9
  - B. Yahweh restores Job's prosperity and family as a demonstration of His sovereign grace. 42:10–17

## Argument

The structure of Job is straight forward: there is a narrative prologue which reveals Job's basic character and introduces the reader to his test, followed by a poetic body arranged as cycles of speeches with intervening and concluding summary monologues, and concluded by a narrative epilogue resolving the crisis.

### I. Prose Prologue: Job's surprise test sets the stage for his journey of faith (1:1–2:13).

Job is introduced as a historical figure who fears God and lives an exemplary life—nothing here warranting personal disaster (1:1–5). Unbeknownst to Job an angelic adversary attacks his character and receives permission from God to destroy Job's property and kill his children, which he does (1:6–19). Very quickly, Job's life has been



turned completely upside down and the reader's attention is captured. Job's response of worship (1:20–22) only makes matters worse as the adversary receives additional power over Job's physical body (2:1–8). Once again Job maintains a response of submission and trust (2:9–10). Job's suffering has not gone unnoticed; three of his friends silently attend his grief for a whole week (2:11–13). The stage is set for—what? Will God tell Job about the bet? Will Job's three friends help him understand his plight and weather the storm? Will there be a theological lesson on why the righteous suffer? Actually, none of these happen as God has a more important purpose in mind.

II. Poetic Body: Job disputes his way to silence, understanding, and a deeper faith (3:1—42:6).

In an extended series of speech cycles and strategically placed monologues Job is drawn into and then delivered from his disputation, finally being brought into the silence of submissive trust in his sovereign Lord. The amount of time and ink that it takes Job to get where God was taking him symbolizes the spiritual distance that he needed to move in order to come to a better understanding of his God and into a more secure and satisfying relationship with Him.

A. Job's initial monologue: his life has not been worth the enduring of his present circumstance (3:1–26).

In an opening monologue, which structurally and thematically parallels Yahweh's concluding monologue,<sup>5</sup> Job curses the day of his birth, which in effect impugns the wisdom of God in bringing him forth in the first place. Since Job cannot arrive at a positive net evaluation of his life he presumptuously concludes that it must

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 170.

have been a mistake. This questioning of God's sovereign activity introduces the issue and sets the tone for the next twenty-seven chapters.

B. Dialogue with the friends in three cycles: the only explanation for Job's suffering is that he is the object of the retributive justice of God (4:1—27:23).

In turn Job's three friends admonish him on the basis of their understanding of God's character and ways. Nothing that they say is wrong in and of itself. What will be discovered at the end of the book is that they had an incomplete view of God, which meant they were applying the wrong aspect of God's character to Job's situation. They all make basically the same mistake but come at it in different ways, using different means to support their "wisdom."

Eliphaz's basic charge is that Job has sinned since God does not punish the innocent (4:7–8). The bases of his appeal are personal experience ("I have seen"—4:8; 5:3; 15:17) and special illumination ("Now a word was secretly brought to me"—4:12–16). His contention is that, contrary to what is generally supposed, Job had actually been guilty of misconduct with regard to the weary and weak (22:6–8) though there is nothing known about Job to support such a conclusion. Eliphaz's exhortation is to repent and be restored ("If you return to the Almighty, you will be built up; You will remove iniquity far from your tents"—22:23). At the foundation of his brand of retribution theology stood a God who controlled the destiny of men and yet stood independently of him (5:17).

Bildad's charge is, likewise, that Job has sinned (8:20). However, his basis of appeal is the wisdom of tradition ("For inquire, please, of the former age, And consider the things discovered by their fathers . . ."—8:8–10). As with Eliphaz, Job's responsi-

bility is to repent and be restored (8:5–6). His theology emphasizes the justice of the Sovereign of the universe in dispensing retribution (8:3, 20; 25:2).

Zophar also charges Job with sin (11:6; 20:5). His appeal is based on dogmatic assumption, seen in introductory statements like “Know therefore . . . (11:6) and “Do you not know . . .” (20:4). He also is confident that if Job would just repent, God would restore him to his former health and prosperity: “If you would prepare your heart, And stretch out your hands toward Him; If iniquity were in your hand, and you put it far away, And would not let wickedness dwell in your tents; Then surely you could lift up your face without spot; Yes, you could be steadfast, and not fear” (11:13–15). For Zophar the Almighty is mysterious and unknowable in his retributive justice (11:7; 20:23).

After each of the friend’s speeches Job counters their analysis and advice and at the same time carries on his dispute with God. Job accuses his friends (not without cause) of dealing deceitfully (since his cause is a just one—6:1–22), of being no more knowledgeable about God and His ways than he is (12:1—13:19), of bringing him no comfort (16:1–5), of wronging him (19:1–6), and just generally being of no help (26:1–4). In terms of their counsel these are all true. However, in terms of God’s providential design, the friends become the foil against whom Job verbalizes his anger and argues out his position so that when God speaks His point will become crystal clear.

Interwoven in his reply to the friends Job carries on a diatribe against the Lord and His treatment of him. Basically Job charges God with unfairness. He has wrongfully set him as a target (7:20) and taken advantage of him because there is no way to adequately present his case (9:1–35). He destroys Job, His very own handiwork (10:1–12), all the while concealing the reason’s for Job’s affliction (13:20–27). As a result Job is

completely worn out (16:7). He has come into the power of the ungodly as a result of God's abandonment (16:11) and is left without hope (19:1–12). His good reputation has been ruined (17:6–9) and he has become separated from family and friends (19:13–20). But worst of all God has hidden Himself from Job so as not to hear his case (23:1–12). Thus does innocence so nobly protest. What Job is being set up to learn is that fairness is not a divine characteristic. God is free from any accountability to man and is under no obligation to respond to any question or answer any charge. That He chooses to do so is a matter of grace. This truth is entailed in Job's own words as he muses over God's activity in the clouds but he is not yet prepared to grasp their implications for his current situation (26:5–14).

In Job's summary speech (27:1–23) he continues to maintain his integrity and protest his righteousness (27: 1–6) while imprecating his enemy (27:7–10). He too understands the way of God with the wicked (27:11–23); it is just that this does not apply to him in the current situation. Job is not inferior to his friends in understanding, and yet he is no better off for it.

C. Poem on Wisdom: Job confesses that God alone knows the way of wisdom and that He reserves it for those who fear Him (28:1–28).

As a fitting conclusion of Job's answer to his friends he delivers a discourse on wisdom. Though man can mine the hidden treasures of the earth (28:1–11) wisdom is not so easy to come by since only God knows its ways (28:12–27). However, to the person who fears the Lord the benefits of wise living are available because he has departed from evil (28:28). Job has declared that this is the case with himself, which leaves

him with but one option, namely, a legal appeal to the Lord to present His case against the unjustly accused sufferer. This will be the subject matter of the next section.

D. Monologues in three cycles: Job's test is concluded with his submission to God's free exercise of grace (29:1—42:6).

Paralleling the three cycles of speeches in 4:1—27:23 are three monologues which lead to a resolution of Job's ordeal. These involve Job (29:1—31:40), Elihu, a surprise participant (31:1—37:24), and Yahweh Himself (38:1—42:6).

1. Job's Concluding Monologue: God is called into a judicial proceeding so as to formalize His charges against Job (29:1—31:40). Following the practice of ancient Near Eastern covenant lawsuits, Job calls God into a formal juridical proceeding.<sup>6</sup> Job feels that he has been unable to convince God of his innocence, set forth in summary form in 29:1–25, since his continuing humiliation must indicate that God does indeed have some unspecified charge against him for which he is suffering retribution (30:1–31). In this Job shares the basic retribution theology of his friends; he just does not know what his sin is. According to ancient lawsuit procedures a defendant, in this case Job, could invoke a formal hearing before the magistrate to have the charges set forth when attempts at private settlement had been unfruitful. The plea itself occurs in 31:35: "Oh that I had one to hear me! . . . Oh, that the Almighty would answer me, That my Prosecutor had written a book!" What makes Job's case so frustrating is that the magistrate and (assumed) plaintiff are one and the same—God. The fact that God has no complaint against Job with which to respond seems to bring the whole affair to an impasse.

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<sup>6</sup> See Michael Brennan Dick, "The Legal Metaphor in Job 31," in *Sitting with Job*, 321-34.

However, a surprise interlocutor enters with a new perspective designed to shift Job's focus away from retribution theology and covenant lawsuits.

2. Elihu's Speeches: (31:1—37:24). In a dramatic twist a new, and very important, participant enters the discussion. In four speeches Elihu, the only Israelite in the group, supplies a needed shift in focus. The first speech (32:6—33:33) has two parts. In part one (32:6—33:7) the young Elihu presents himself and defends his right to speak. He bases this on the fact that he is in touch with the Almighty, who alone is the source of wisdom (32:–9), that he has carefully listened to all the preceding dialogue and discourse (32:10–13), and that he will take a new tack to the problem (32:14–22). In the second part (33:8–33) Elihu confronts Job over the issue of making God his equal by calling Him into court (33:8–13). He assures Job that God does speak to man for his benefit in many different ways (33:14–18) and can be relied upon to reveal any disciplinary purposes in suffering so that restoration of fellowship can be effected (33:23–28). This is a new perspective.

The second speech (34:1–37) corrects Job's wrong view of God's justice (cf. 33:5–6). Since God himself is the standard of justice, He cannot be reproached for the manner in which He administers it. The third (35:1–16) and fourth (36:1—37:24) speeches move Job to a consideration of God's sovereign freedom as the corrective to retribution theology. In that Job has complained that God has ignored his righteous living he makes himself out to be more righteous than his Maker (35:2–3). Elihu corrects this by asserting God's right to act in sovereign freedom in every area of life (35:9–16).

The fourth speech (36:1—37:24) is a proclamation of God's righteousness (36:3) in the context of His wise ordering and sovereign utilization of His creation for

multiple purposes, an ordering which may often seem contradictory and confusing to people. Central to this praise of God is the object lesson of the clouds, first introduced in 35:5. Through a consideration of the awesome majesty and widely divergent effects of everything associated with clouds Elihu is able to focus Job on a work of God that uniquely reveals His freedom to use one of the most common, and yet incomprehensible, objects of nature in ways that defy human explanation and often appear to be contradictory and capricious (cf. 36:26—37:13). As a result of Elihu's discourse Job is prepared to hear and understand what Yahweh is about to say to him.

3. Yahweh's speeches with Job's responses (38:1—42:6). Finally, Yahweh speaks to Job but not as the disputer had demanded. Instead of answering questions, the Lord asks them; and instead of dealing with the issues of suffering and justice His questions have to do with creation and providence. Job has "darkened counsel by words without knowledge" (38:2) and will now be quizzed on his understanding of things much less complicated than the righteousness and judgment of human beings. Yahweh's first speech (38:1—40:2) tests Job's understanding of the creation, both inanimate (38:4—38) and animate (38:39—39:30).<sup>7</sup> Job is without comprehension and confesses that he is unable to answer anything (40:1—5). Yahweh's second speech (40:6—41:34) begins by issuing an even greater challenge to Job (40:6—14). It concerns Job's power over two of God's outstanding beasts, the behemoth of the land (40:15—24) and Leviathan from the sea (41:1—34). The point is that Job has no cause to lift himself up against God in his pride when he cannot even begin to challenge one of these creatures (cf. 40:11—14). To

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<sup>7</sup> McKenna divides the topics as the *sources* from which the universe began (38:4—21), the *systems* upon which the earth depends (38:22—38), and the *specialties* by which the animals are distinguished (38:39—39:30) David McKenna, "God's Revelation and Job's Repentance," *Sitting with Job*, 381-409.

this Job's response is also the correct one: he repents of his pride (42:6), having now accepted God's sovereign activity (42:2), confesses his own ignorance (42:3–4), and retracts his accusations (42:6). He now has new insight into God, namely that He is good in doing whatever He pleases so that man must accept what He does and trust Him in it regardless of appearances. The proper relationship between a person and God is based on the free exercise of sovereign grace and a person's response of faith and submissive trust.<sup>8</sup>

III. Prose Epilogue: Yahweh rebukes the friends for their error and blesses Job out of His sovereign grace (42:7–17).

Job has come to a proper view of God's goodness with respect to undeserved suffering and has said so (cf. 42:2–6). In that condition he becomes the Lord's mediator of forgiveness to the three friends who are rebuked for the untrue depiction of His character (42:7–9). In addition, since God is free to bless just as He had been free to withhold blessing, He restores to Job double what he had lost (42:10–14). That Job truly understood the freedom of God's sovereignty is demonstrated by the gracious inclusion of his daughters in an inheritance among their brothers (42:15). And where is Elihu? He is nowhere in sight because God is free to commend or to withhold commendation regardless of due, which to Elihu there was.

**Conclusion**

The Book of Job never answers the question about why good people suffer. Instead it brings the reader into a fresh understanding of God's freedom in exercising His

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<sup>8</sup> See Greg W. Parsons, "Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (October-December 1994), 398.



sovereignty over His creatures and still be counted worthy of man's trust and submission.

The clouds have done their job for Job.

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