

Job

The Book of Job begins in heaven with a conversation between God and Satan, then moves to earth for a detailed look at the life of an ancient patriarch named Job. Overnight, Job's blessings dissolve into heartaches as he faces the loss of his health, wealth, family, and status. Left in turmoil over his sudden change of fortune, Job seeks an answer to the question, "Why?" Four of Job's friends take on the role of counselor but are unable to provide the insight Job desperately needs. Finally, Jehovah teaches Job some valuable lessons on the sovereignty of God and the need for complete trust in the Lord who is constantly at work behind the scenes.

INTRODUCTION

Job is perhaps the earliest book of the Bible. Set in the period of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph), it tells the story of a man who loses everything - his wealth, his family, his health - and wrestles with the question, Why?

The book begins with a heavenly debate between God and Satan, moves through three cycles of earthly debates between Job and his friends, and concludes with a dramatic "divine diagnosis" of Job's problem. In the end, Job acknowledges the sovereignty of God in his life and receives back more than he had before his trials.

AUTHOR

The author of Job is unknown, and there are no textual hints as to his identity. Many suggestions have been given: Job, Elihu, Moses, Solomon, Isaiah, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, Ezra, and others.

One Talmudic tradition suggests that Moses wrote the book. The land of Uz (1:1) is adjacent to Midian, where Moses lived for forty years, and it is conceivable that Moses obtained a record of the dialogue left by Job or Elihu.

DATE & SETTING

Chapter 4, verse 21 locates Uz around Edom, southeast of the Dead Sea. This is also in the region of northern Arabia, and Job's friends come from nearby countries.

It is important to distinguish the date of the events in Job from the date of its writing. Accurate dating of the events is difficult because there are no references to contemporary historical occurrences. However, several facts indicate a patriarchal date for Job, perhaps between Genesis 11 and 12 or not long after the time of Abraham:

- Job lived 140 years after the events in the book (42:16); his lifespan must have been close to 200 years. This fits the patriarchal period (Abraham lived 175 years, Gen. 25:7)
- Job's wealth is measured in terms of livestock (1:3; 42:12) rather than gold and silver.
- Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Job is the priest of his family and offers sacrifices.
- There are no references to Israel, the Exodus, the Mosaic Law, or the tabernacle.
- Fitting Abraham's time, the social unit in Job is the patriarchal family-clan.
- The Chaldeans who murder Job's servants (1:17) are nomads and have not yet become city-dwellers.

Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and James 5:11 show that Job was an historical person. Several theories have been advanced for the date of writing:

- It was written shortly after the events occurred, perhaps by Job or Elihu
- it was written by Moses in Midian (1485-1445 b.c.)
- it was written in the time of Solomon (c. 950 b.c.). Job is like other Wisdom Literature of this time. The problem here is the great time lag of about a thousand years.
- it was written during or after the Babylonian captivity.