

The Book of Job: A Brief Summary



Job was an extremely rich and successful man who lived in a land called Uz. By today's standards, he could be compared to someone like Bill Gates: unimaginably wealthy and greatly respected and admired in society for being a good man.

Job had a large family; seven sons and three daughters and he owned extensive flocks of livestock. He was 'blameless' and 'upright,' always careful to avoid sinning. One day, Satan visited God in heaven. God boasted to Satan about Job's goodness and Satan challenged God, claiming that Job was only good because God had given him many blessings. Satan said that if God gave him permission to punish Job, he would certainly turn away from God and curse Him. God granted Satan permission to torment Job to test Satan's claim, but he told Satan that he was not allowed to physically harm Job in the process.

In just one day, Job received four messages, each giving him awful news. He learned that all of his livestock, servants, and ten children had died due to invaders and natural disasters. Crushed by the news, Job tore his clothes and shaved his head in mourning, but still he honoured and blessed God in his prayers.

Satan returned to heaven again, to request permission to test Job further. God granted Satan another chance at testing Job, and allowed that Satan could cause physical suffering to Job, but must not take away his life. Satan afflicted Job with agonizing, weeping skin sores all over his body. Seeing how mercilessly he suffered, even Job's wife encouraged him to curse God and to give up and die, but Job refused to turn his back on God, and instead entered a struggle to accept his difficulties.

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Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, three of Job's friends went to visit him. To support Job in his grief, they sat in silence with him for seven days. On the seventh day, Job began to speak, and the four of them shared their thoughts about Job's afflictions. Job cursed the day he was born! Eliphaz replied that Job, who had comforted many other people, must have never really understood their pain. Eliphaz told Job that his suffering must be due to some sin he committed, and he encouraged Job to seek God's forgiveness and favour. Bildad and Zophar agreed that Job must have done evil and offended God; they urged him to resolve to live a more blameless life from now on. Bildad claimed that Job's children probably brought their deaths upon themselves. Zophar even suggested that Job may even have deserved a far greater punishment than what he had already suffered, for whatever wrongs he had committed.

Job became upset at his friends' remarks. He insisted that, in spite of their accusations, he really had lived a good and blameless life in the service of God and his fellow man. He began to ponder God's relationship with man. He could not make sense of why God judged people by their actions if He could just as easily change or forgive their behaviour. As he had been so badly afflicted, in spite of living an honourable, life devoted to God, he was at a loss to see how humans can please God and gain His justice. God is unseen, Job said, and God's ways are beyond human understanding. Job claimed that people cannot persuade God with words. Job desperately wished for someone who could be a go-between between himself and God, or for God to end his suffering by sending him to Sheol, the deep place of the dead.

Job's friends were offended that he ignored and criticised their advice. Believing that Job was not being honest about his wicked actions, they stressed to him that nothing good could come of wickedness, and accused him of not being God-fearing enough. Job responded by telling them that he believed there would be a 'witness' or 'Redeemer' in heaven who would know that he was indeed an innocent man (16:19, 19:25). Distraught, Job became agitated and afraid. He lamented God's injustice – how God let wicked people prosper while innocent people suffered. Job wanted to confront God and complain, but he was unable to physically find God to do this. He felt that wisdom was hidden from humans, but he decided to persist in searching for wisdom by fearing God and avoiding evil.

Without prompting, another friend of Job's; a young man named Elihu, joined in the discussion. He too assumed that Job must have done wicked things to deserve his afflictions. He saw Job's lengthy speech and questioning as being rebellious against God. He asserted that Job has spent too much effort vindicating himself rather than God. Elihu explained that God communicates with humans through visions and physical pain. He said that through physical suffering, humans can experience God's love and forgiveness. Elihu concluded that, when Job recovers, he would understand that God has saved him from death (33:24).

Finally, from a whirlwind, God Himself interrupted the conversation. God demanded Job to be brave and give answers to his questions. God's questions were rhetorical, aimed at showing Job how little he knew about creation and God's power. God described many detailed aspects to show the extent and power of his creation, praising especially his creation of and control over two large and frightening beasts, the Behemoth and Leviathan (sometimes thought to be the hippopotamus and the crocodile, or mythical creatures). These beasts are said to represent the disorder and chaos that can be found in God's world. Overwhelmed and humbled by the encounter with God, Job acknowledged God's unlimited power and admitted that our

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human knowledge is very limited. God was pleased with Job's response, but was upset with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar for their poor reasoning and advice. Job stood up for his friends, and God forgave them. God restored Job to good health, gave him twice as much property as before, new children, and a very long life he lived 140 more years and saw four generations of grandchildren.

The Bible Project.com Video – The Book of Job



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