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Study of Job

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An Analysis of the Book of Job

For many Christians, the book of Job is a book of mysteries – cryptic sayings, long arguments, and a fairy-tale plot. Hidden deep within the recesses of the Old Testament, the book of Job sometimes seems to bring up more questions than it answers. Who was Job? When did this all take place? Where is Uz? What should we learn from this scripture?

Although the mysteries may appear to overshadow all else, the book of Job actually contains a great deal of important truth for 21st-century believers. In particular, this book answers timeless questions about suffering and sovereignty. In order to find these answers, this paper will attempt to summarize the book, analyze the arguments contained in Job, and then conclude with several oft-overlooked aspects of the book.

The book of Job opens in the land of Uz at the time of Job's prosperity. Enormously wealthy, Job is described as "the greatest of all the men of the east" (*King James Version*, Job 1.3). Satan takes notice of Job and contends with God, arguing that Job serves God only so that he can be blessed by God. In order to prove that this is false, the Lord allows Satan to tempt Job by stripping him of his earthly blessings. After Job successfully withstands this first temptation, Satan receives permission from God to take away Job's physical health.

Subsequent to losing his health, Job continues to honor the Lord. Hearing of his troubles, three friends (Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad) come to comfort Job. However, after seeing Job's suffering the friends decide that Job is guilty of iniquity. In seventeen speeches Job and his

friends argue back and forth about whether Job is guilty or innocent, with Job's friends prosecuting and Job defending.

When the arguments wrap up, a young man known as Elihu enters the stage. He contends that Job is guilty, and he argues strongly against Job. As Elihu wraps up, the Lord speaks to Job from a whirlwind, asking him many difficult questions. Stunned by the awesomeness of God, Job humbles himself before the Lord. The Lord then commands Job's friends to humble themselves because they have spoken wrongly. In the end, Job is accepted by God and blessed with twice the riches that he had in the beginning of the book.

Having summarized the book of Job, it is beneficial to closely examine the arguments of each of the debaters in the book.

Throughout his speeches, Job repeatedly presses home many different arguments. Foremost is the argument that Job is righteous. Job was repeatedly accused of certain crimes, and he adamantly defends himself against those charges. For example, Job says,

My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death; not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure. (Job 16.16-17)

My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandments of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. (Job 23.11-12)

In chapters 26-31 Job forcefully lays out his entire situation. Near the end he devotes an entire chapter to his own innocence, laying out indictments against himself if he is guilty. For example, Job says,

If my step hath turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and if any blot hath cleaved to mine hands; Then let me sow, and let another eat; yea, let my offspring be rooted out. (Job 31.7-8)

Although Job believed himself to be innocent of the crimes which his friends accused him of, Job did not claim to be sinless (Job 9.20).

Job continually begs for answers to his questions about suffering. He inquires of God by saying,

Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? (Job 3.11)

Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in? (Job 3.23)

Another common feature of Job's arguments is the attacks on his friends. Job implies that the only thing he desires from his friends is comfort (Job 6.22-23). Since his friends refuse to give him consolation, Job calls them "miserable comforters" (Job 16.2) who dig a pit for their friend (Job 6.27). Job compares his friends to a desert brook that freezes in the winter and evaporates in the summer – a brook that promises water, but always withholds that necessity from the thirsty traveler:

My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away; which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid: what time they wax warm, they vanish: when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place. The paths of their way are turned aside; they go to nothing, and perish. The troops of Tema looked, the companies of Sheba waited for them. They were

confounded because they had hoped; they came thither, and were ashamed. (Job 6.15-20)

Several times Job declares that God has not given him justice; for example, he describes God as one “who hath taken away my judgment” (Job 27.2). As will be seen, this supposition of Job’s creates much contention between him and his friends.

One of the most important points that Job tries to press across through his speeches is that the wicked, although they are eventually judged, do seem to prosper physically for a great deal of time. Job’s friends argued that the wicked almost never prosper but are always destroyed by God. To Job, the issue was not nearly so clear. Bildad likened the wicked to a withering herb or a flimsy spider’s web, saying,

Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite’s hope shall perish: whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider’s web. (Job 8.11-14)

Job later answers this supposition by replying,

The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly. (Job 12.6)

Several speeches later Bildad again argues that the wicked do not prosper, comparing evil men to a quenched candle, a snared beast, and a dead tree (Job 18.5-21). Job answers that the houses of the wicked are safe from fear, the unrighteous are physically prospered, and the unjust man lives in pleasure (Job 21.7-15). However, Job does admit that the wicked will eventually be punished, ending up like stubble and chaff (Job 21.17-26).

A similar, important argument that occurs between these four companions is whether the righteous man lives in prosperity or misery. Job, trying to defend himself, contends that the righteous are often deeply afflicted. Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar, attempting to condemn Job, say that the righteous nearly always prosper, supposing that

If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles. Then shalt thou lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks. Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver. (Job 22.23-25)

Job, arguing contrariwise, asserts that “He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked” (Job 9.22).

As has already been mentioned, the main argument of Job’s friends is that the wicked almost never prosper while the righteous almost always prosper. Therefore, since Job does not prosper, he must be a wicked man. Based on this reasoning, it is not surprising that Job’s friends bitterly denounce their associate as one whose “mouth uttereth...iniquity” and one who “choosest the tongue of the crafty” (Job 15.5). Job is accused by his friends when they say,

Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite? For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing. Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry. (Job 22.5-7)

Job’s friends often give him advice and counsel about what they think he should do in order to be relieved from his suffering. They say to him,

Despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: for he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. (Job 5.17)

...Seek unto God, and make thy supplication unto the Almighty. (Job 8.5)

Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee. Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart. (Job 22.21-22)

Another prime contention that Job's friends make is that Job should not question God's judgments since God is always totally just. Several sections of their speeches are focused on showing the majesty of God:

Dominion and fear are with him, he maketh peace in his high pleaces. Is there any number of his armies? And upon whom doth not his light arise? How then can man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? (Job 25.2-4)

Although Job's friends are correct about this assumption, Job (who agrees with them in the end) accuses them of showing partiality to God and judging in God's favor before looking at all the evidence:

Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him? Will ye accept his person? Will ye contend for God? Is it good that he should search you out? Or as one man mocketh another, do ye so mock him? He will surely reprove you, if ye do secretly accept persons. (Job 13.7-11)

However, Job agrees with his friends that God is mighty; he even devotes a major portion of one of his speeches to extolling the majesty of God (Job 26.5-14).

Although Elihu is not included in the list of Job's three friends, this debater still sides against Job. Elihu lays out his arguments in a careful, logical fashion – he begins by defending his speeches, and then presents three cases against Job. Each case paraphrases something that Job

has said and then attacks Job through multitudes of arguments. Elihu concludes his tirade by panegyricizing the greatness of God for two chapters.

In his cases against Job, Elihu reckons that Job has made three erroneous judgments. First, Job has considered himself innocent when he is in fact guilty:

Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy. He putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths. (Job 33.8-10)

Second, Job believes that God has unjustly punished him:

Let us choose to us judgment: let us know among ourselves what is good. For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment. Should I lie against my right? my wound is incurable without transgression. (Job 34.4-6)

Third, Job says that there is no profit in righteousness (although Job never said anything of this sort, Job did say that godliness does not always result in physical blessings, and Elihu uses this to create his argument against the saint):

Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's? For thou saidst, What advantage will it be unto thee? and, What profit shall I have, if I be cleansed from my sin? (Job 35.2-3)

After Elihu ceases his arguments, the Lord speaks directly to Job from out of a whirlwind. Although the Lord never explicitly uses arguments against Job, he bombards his servant with questions, implying that Job has spoken without knowledge and should rather trust his maker. Indeed, the Lord even questions Job by beginning his interrogation with this challenge:

Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. (Job 38.2-3)

The Lord divides his speech into two different sections, and after each section God allows Job to acknowledge Job's own lack of wisdom. The subject matter for the Lord's questions comes mostly from creation and natural history. The Lord refers to the formation of the earth and the seas (Job 38.4-18) and to the time and weather, heavenly bodies and light (Job 38.19-38). God then turns to the beasts of the field and administers a bewildering test about lions (Job 38.39-40), ravens (Job 38.41), wild goats (Job 39.1-8), unicorns (Job 39.9-12), peacocks (Job 39.13), ostriches (Job 39.13-18), horses (Job 39.19-25), hawks (Job 39.26), and eagles (Job 39.27-30). Concluding this lengthy interrogation, Job admits his own vileness:

Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further. (Job 40.3-5)

However, far from ending the examination, the Lord then renews the inquisition by asking Job about judgment (Job 40.7-14), Behemoth (Job 40.15-24), and Leviathon (Job 41.1-34). It is regrettable that many expositors conclude Behemoth to be an elephant or hippopotamus while Levithon is deduced to be a crocodile. Considering the majestic language used to describe these beings (Job 40.17, 19, 23; Job 41.10, 21, 25, 27, 33), it is more possible that they refer to some now-extinct creatures that terrified the mightiest men on earth at that time.

After briefly reviewing the contents of the book of Job and analyzing the arguments used by each of the debaters, several important questions must still be asked. First, what is the point of this book? Second, how is the book of Job a book of lawsuits? Third, what does the book of Job teach believers about the majesty and sovereignty of God?

In answer to the first question (what is the point of this book), the book of Job seems to show how saints should view suffering sent by the hand of a sovereign God. Believers need to recognize that affliction does not always come as punishment for sin. Rather than self-sufficiently questioning God about why they are troubled, believers need to do as Job did and see the sovereignty of God displayed throughout his creation. This will cause Christians to patiently rest in the Lord and trust that their maker knows what is best for them.

The second question to consider is how the book of Job is a book of lawsuits. Most any reader of the manuscript should recognize certain judicial tendencies in the book – long speeches of defense or prosecution, intricate and detailed arguments, and an abundance of flowery, descriptive speech. Noting these aspects, it is no wonder that the book of Job contains four lawsuits. The first lawsuit is Satan versus God. The Lord deems Job to be innocent, but Satan contests that God’s judgment is wrong (Job 1.8-10). Implicit in Satan’s words is a claim that God has judged wrongly – that God is not righteous – and therefore God is no longer fit to rule everything. With the stakes obviously set very high, the Lord enters into a (seemingly) risky challenge with Satan: if Job turns from God, then Satan is correct, and the Lord has proved himself false. God would therefore no longer be God.

How does this lawsuit conclude? Although Job questions the Lord, Job refuses to turn from his master, stating,

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways
before him. (Job 13.15)

In retrospect, after reading the questions that the Lord presents to Job, it is no wonder that the Lord won this case against Satan – God is sovereign, and “the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Pro. 21.1).

The second lawsuit in the book of Job has been mentioned before – Job’s friends believed that Job was guilty, while Job maintained that he was innocent. Although the verdict is not explicitly given later on, the reader is given a unique glimpse into the court of heaven, where God declares Job to be righteous (Job 1.1, 8; Job 2.3).

The third lawsuit is when Job accuses his friends of cruelty because they do not comfort him. Job says,

How forcible are right words! but what doth your arguing reprove? Do ye imagine to reprove words, and the speeches of one that is desperate, which are as wind? Yea, ye overwhelm the fatherless, and ye dig a pit for your friend. (Job 6.25-27)

The Lord passes judgment on this case at the end of the book when he declares Job’s three friends to be in the wrong (Job 42.7-9).

The final lawsuit in this book involves Job versus God. As has already been mentioned, Job charged God with denying Job justice. However, after the Lord argues his wisdom in the matter, Job wisely chooses to withdraw the accusation (Job 40.3-5; Job 42.2-6).

The final matter which must be addressed is how the book of Job should influence man’s views of God’s majesty and sovereignty.

Although Job’s friends were wrong in their analysis of the issue, they yet declare many righteous things. For example, several sections of their speeches are dedicated to the glory of God (Job 5.8-16; Job 25.2-6). Job also makes several sage observations about God (Job 9.3-12; Job 12.12-25; Job 26.1-14). Elihu makes good remarks as well (Job 36.22-37.24).

The final authority on the issue is God himself. If the reader would slowly and thoughtfully read through God’s questions to Job (Job 38.2-41.34), it is quite probable that much good wisdom would be gained about God’s greatness.

After hearing God's questions, Job concluded that God was far above all else and was worthy of praise and trust. Creations which are majestic and fearful to men are small and insignificant to God. Job decides that his own wisdom is far below the wisdom of his maker, and so Job determines to trust the Lord.

In summary, the book of Job contains a great deal of extraordinary wisdom for the thoughtful reader. Although there is much that is difficult to understand, the wisdom proclaimed in this book is immense – and has the potential to completely change one's views of their God and maker, the LORD JEHOVAH.