

Job: Background, Theme, Purpose, Structure

Thomas Carlisle called Job “the grandest book ever written with pen.” G. Campbell Morgan said Job seems to be the record of an unanswered agony.

It is imperative that Job be read with New Testament glasses on.

Job can’t be interpreted correctly apart from the cross.

Job is not really a book about suffering as much as it is a book about God.

Job asks wheelchair questions. He deserves something more than armchair answers.

Authorship.

Job the man and Job the book are shrouded in obscurity. We don’t know who wrote Job. We don’t know when Job was written. We don’t know anything about Job other than what is recorded in the book. Traditional wisdom assigns the book to Job himself, though there is no internal or external evidence to confirm this. Though some have suggested Moses as the author, this is unlikely. Linguistic clues point to an early provenance of the book, most likely sometime during the patriarchal period. Since the author uses the name “Yahweh” throughout, the covenant name for God, it is likely the author was an Israelite.

Setting and Date.

The story is set in Uz, an unknown location somewhere outside of Israel. The most likely location is somewhere in Edom (see Lam. 4:21). The time period is typically thought to be during the patriarchal age in the second millennium B.C.

Job: fact or fiction?

It is difficult to interpret Job in any other way than as a factual, historical account. This is the way Job has been viewed traditionally. There are several strands of evidence confirming the historicity of the book.

1. Job 1:1 begins with a historical statement similar what we find in Judges 17:1 and 1 Samuel 1:1.
2. Ezekiel mentions Job twice in conjunction with Noah and Daniel (Ezekiel 14:14, 20).
3. James refers to Job in James 5:11 as a historical person.

Contrary to some, Job is more than a non-historical work of imaginative literature.

Though the dialogue is couched in poetic style, there is no reason to doubt the historicity of the book or the dialogue. Scripture often reports dialogue in other than verbatim form.

Literary Characteristics. The fact that Job is likely a work to be dated in the patriarchal period may explain the frequent difficulty in style and the resultant differing translations of words and phrases among modern translators. The book reads like a unified whole, not a compilation of redacted parts by different authors.

How should we categorize the genre of Job? The book is often viewed as one long poem bounded with a narrative prologue and epilogue. The bulk of the book contains speech cycles between Job and his three friends (plus Elihu). Some have described Job's genre as a legal disputation.

Purpose(s).

1. To address the problem of human suffering.
2. To challenge the assumption that personal sin is always the cause of suffering.
3. To explore human limitations in probing the issue of divine justice (Theodicy).
4. To demonstrate God's sovereignty and inscrutability (God is beyond comprehension).
5. To teach us to trust God when disaster strikes.

Purpose and theme are related. Job refutes the idea that all suffering is a sign of God's displeasure or a result of unrighteous conduct on the part of the sufferer. Job focuses primarily on the sovereignty of God.

Structure. Job is predominately poetry bounded by an introductory prose prologue (1–2) and a concluding prose epilogue (42).

1. Introduction (Prologue)	(1–2)
2. Speech Cycle One (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar)	(3–14)
3. Speech Cycle Two	(15–21)
4. Speech Cycle Three	(22–27)
5. Monologue of Job (no response)	(28–31)
6. Speech of Elihu (no response)	(32–37)
7. The Lord speaks to Job	(38–42:6)
8. Conclusion (Epilogue)	(42:7-17)