

SOVEREIGNTY, SUFFERING, AND SYMPATHY IN THE BOOK OF JOB

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF JOB

- Job is in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament
 - Part of the Jewish division called the “Writings” (Old Testament was divided into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings)
 - Wisdom literature consists of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon
 - Wisdom literature has the following characteristics:
 - Extremely practical
 - Unifying principle → The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Job 1:1, 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; Ecclesiastes 12:9, 13) →
What is the fear of the Lord? What does it entail?
- Authorship and date
 - Time of writing is likely early – may be the oldest book in the Bible
 - No mention of Israel, Jerusalem, Abraham, the Law of Moses, etc.
 - Offerings done in similar manner as patriarchs (1:5; cf. Genesis 8:20)
 - Author is unknown – possibly Job or Moses
 - Narrated from the vantage point of God (i.e., omniscience)
- Structure of Job
 - Prologue (chapters 1-2) – Satan challenges the nature of Job’s faith. Does Job believe for selfish reasons only? Was his faith circumstantial? Breakable?

- Dialogue (chapters 3-37) – The friends’ feeble attempt to help
- Epilogue (chapters 38-42) – God speaks (cf. Romans 9:20)
- Themes in Job
 - Messianic nature – Job was a type of Christ (Job 29; cf. Philippians 2). Why?
 - Suffering and perseverance (cf. James 5:11; Ezekiel 14:14)
 - The need for a mediator (9:32-33; 16:19; 19:25-27)
- Questions for Discussion:
 - Why do you believe in God? What circumstances challenge your faith?
 - How do you view trials and hardships? How does your faith hold up under them?
 - While in the midst of suffering, what do we learn about the character of the Lord?
 - How can a believer glorify God in suffering?

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Jesus promised that, in this sin-stained world, we “will have trouble,” yet He encouraged us to “*take heart*” (John 16:33, NIV). Throughout the waves of life, we all find ourselves, at one time or another, either in the midst of suffering or trying to help someone else who is feeling crushed under the weight of it. How are we to walk in the midst of hardship, pain, agony, and affliction? How can we come alongside and help someone who is hurting? Thankfully, God has not left us without witness.

The book of Job, which is both theologically rich and practical, provides these answers and more. Central to Job is the important lesson of how a proper understanding of God’s sovereignty and goodness will lead to hope and comfort in the midst of suffering and produce godly sympathy for others who suffer.