JOB

Where is God when we suffer?

• The book of Job is a clearly structured and composed book, though there is little agreement on how the book came to be written, or even when it may have been written.

• It's also important to realize that the book of Job is what we call **wisdom literature**, meaning that its primary purpose is not to communicate history, but **to impart biblical wisdom** in particular situations in life, in this case suffering.

• This does not mean the story of Job is not historical, but instead helps us understand why the book is written the way that it is and what it is trying to accomplish.

Writing of the Book

• The man named Job shows no indication of being an Israelite, he was likely an Edomite.

• God is occasionally referred to as Yahweh in the book, but most often as El Shaddai (God/Lord Almighty/Most High).

• Traditionally the events of the book have been **dated roughly to the patriarchal era** because the lifestyle and longevity of Job are most similar to those found in Genesis.

• However, the timeless nature of the message really makes the dating of the book a moot point.

Writing of the Book

• When reading the book of Job it is very helpful to pay attention to the **different genres**, or kinds of literature, **throughout the book**.

  • There is:
    • **dialogue** (4-27)
    • **soliloquy** (3)
    • **discourse** (29-41)
    • **narrative** (1-2), and
    • **hymn** (28)

Background

Purpose and Message

• The purpose of the book of Job is to **explore the justice of God's treatment of the righteous**.

• First, the satan implies in 1:9-11 that God's policy of blessing the righteous is counterproductive to the development of true righteousness.

• Satan's contention is that righteousness purely for righteousness' sake does not exist and cannot exist in the system that God operates.

• **God's policies are placed on trial here,** not Job.

• Second, **Job wonders how God can possibly allow the righteous person to suffer**.

• Again, **it is God's polices that are on trial**.

• The message of the book in regard to the satan's concern is that God's practice of blessing the righteous is not a hindrance to the development of true righteousness.

• In regard to Job's situation, the message is that God is not always under obligation to make sure that the righteous receive blessing and only blessing.

• God's wisdom is shown to be superior to all human wisdom, and therefore his justice is vindicated.

Purpose and Message

I. Prologue (1-2)

II. Dialogues
   A. Job's Opening Lament (3)
   B. Cycle 1: Attempted Consolation
      1. Eliphaz (4-5)
      2. Job (6-7)
      3. Bildad (8)
      4. Job (9-10)
      5. Zophar (11)
      6. Job (12-14)

Outline of Job

II. **Dialogues** *continued*
    C. **Cycle 2: The Fate of the Wicked**
        1. Eliphaz (15)
        2. Job (16-17)
        3. Bildad (18)
        4. Job (19)
        5. Zophar (20)
        6. Job (21)
    D. **Cycle 3: Specific Accusations**
        1. Eliphaz (22)
        2. Job (23-24)
        3. Bildad (25)
        4. Job (26-27)

III. **Interlude: Hymn to Wisdom (28)**

Outline of Job

IV. Discourses
    A. Discourse 1: Job
        1. Reminiscence (29)
        2. Affliction (30)
        3. Oath (31)
    B. Discourse 2: Elihu
        1. Introduction and theory (32-33)
        2. Verdict on Job (34)
        3. Offense of Job (35)
        4. Closing statement of summary (36-37)

Outline of Job

IV. **Discourses** *continued*

    C. Discourse 3: God

    1. Speech 1 (38-39)

    2. Speech 2 (40-41)

    D. Job's closing statements (40:3-5; 42:1-6)

V. **Epilogue (42:7-17)**

Outline of Job

The Retribution Principle

• The retribution principle provides a framework for the philosophical discussion presented in the book of Job.

• As we have seen, the principle is stated by means of conditional clauses: If a person is righteous, he will prosper; if a person is wicked, he will suffer.

• In the book of Job **everyone assumes that the retribution principle is true**.

Major Themes

• In the end, the book affirms God's general intention of operating by the retribution principle but implies that we cannot predict how or when it is going to operate.

• The principle cannot be used, however, to demand action from God or to figure out what a person is really like.

• It cannot provide consistent explanations for any particular person's prosperity or adversity.

• We often cannot know what causes our suffering, but we can take comfort that all is in the hand of an infinitely wise and sovereign God.

Major Themes

The Wisdom, Justice, and Sovereignty of God

• The divine attributes of wisdom, justice, and sovereignty are emphasized in the book of Job and in the wisdom literature generally.

• Christians tend to think of justice as something that they fortunately did not receive, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory; therefore, God's judgment is feared.

• C.S. Lewis has clarified this last contrast by observing that the Christian views judgment as a criminal case with himself as defendant; he seeks mercy, not justice.

Major Themes

• In this situation we see the broader categories of God's attributes.
    • Omniscience is only one small part of God's wisdom.
    • Omnipotence is likewise only one aspect of God's sovereignty.
    • Similar, mercy is sometimes a more personalized reflection of God's justice.

• The broader categories help us focus more **on who God is** *instead of on* **what he can do** for a particular person.

Major Themes

Satan

• In the book of Job, "Satan" is not a personal name, but a description.

• It means adversary, and is not always necessarily evil (e.g., the angel of the Lord is a satan in Num 22).

• Later biblical revelation makes it clear that **this is Satan**, the devil, our number one adversary, and that **we can use Job to help us understand Satan** and his ways.

Major Themes

Mediator

• Job pleads for the intercession of a mediator and appears convinced that such a one will arise (19:25-27).

• Some of the terminology used to describe the mediator portrays him as a near relative (kinsman-redeemer) who would appear at the height of the crisis to bring relief by providing a dignified resolution.

Major Themes

• Job's claim of having been treated unjustly dissipates in the face of God's challenges, and his need for a kinsman-redeemer is eliminated by his restoration.

• However, even this points forward to Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God to us, the one who challenges, and the one who restores.

Major Themes