

Job

1. Summary – The book of Job deals with a question that is virtually universal: “Why am I suffering? What did I do to deserve this?” Unknown to Job, the LORD expresses his pleasure in Job to Satan; and Satan dismisses Job’s faithfulness as nothing but a response to the easy life God has given him. The LORD gives Satan permission to afflict Job. Job suffers horribly but refuses to curse God. At the same time, he agonizes over his suffering. His three friends are convinced that he is suffering because of some sin he has committed. Job denies this but grows bolder in claiming that he is wise enough to vindicate himself before God. Finally, the LORD confronts Job and his three friends with unanswerable questions and demonstrates that He alone is truly wise. Job’s friends are rebuked, and Job repents of his pride. In the end, God removes Job’s suffering and restores his health, family, and fortunes. Job is never told why he suffered. However, we learn that not all suffering is an immediate response to particular sins and that God is wiser than we are in leading us through suffering.
2. Author and date – We must distinguish the date of composition from the date in which the account is set. Job was clearly a historical figure (Ezek. 14:14, 20; James 5:11). The author begins the book very similarly to statements in Judges 17 and 1 Samuel 1, which are clearly historical. Internal evidence indicates that Job lived during the patriarchal period, in the same general time frame as Abraham. Wealth is measured by cattle and servants (1:3; 42:12). Fatherhood implies priesthood (1:5), which would only be appropriate before the Levitical priesthood was established. Finally, Job lives in Uz (1:1), outside the borders of Israel. Therefore, Job should be viewed as a faithful servant of God living before the Abrahamic covenant narrowed the community of the faithful to a specific family.

While Job lived in the patriarchal period, there is no reason to date the composition of the book that early. The language used seems to hint at a fairly late composition or at least a late update of an earlier work. The concepts in the book reflect a later period in redemptive history, with a clearer understanding of angels and Satan than would be expected in the patriarchal period. Early tradition attributes the book to Moses. However, there is no direct evidence for this. No clear scholarly consensus exists concerning the author or date. Thankfully, these issues have little bearing on our understanding of the book, since suffering is a universal experience throughout human history and the divine answer to it is still true today.

3. Character of the book – The book is a sandwich. It begins and ends with a prosaic account of Job’s life and is filled in the middle with poetic dialogue. While other texts from various places and religions bear some similarity to Job, Job stands unique. “Nothing we know before it provided a model; and nothing since, including its numerous imitations, has risen to the same heights. Comparison only serves to enhance the solitary greatness of the book of Job.” (F. I. Andersen)
4. Structure of the book (Dillard & Longman):
 - a. Prose introduction (1-2)
 - b. Job’s dialogue with three “friends” (3-31)
 - i. Job’s lament (3)
 - ii. Three cycles of dialogues (4-27)
 - iii. Poem on divine wisdom (28)
 - iv. Job’s last speech (29-31)
 - c. Elihu’s monologue (32-37)
 - d. Yahweh speaks from the whirlwind (38-42:6)
 - e. Prose conclusion (42:7-17)

Reference:

An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.