

Job Notes

Purpose

The author leaves some questions unanswered [see below], but seems to indicate that we cannot fathom the ways of God, so we must remain trusting of him, hopeful in him, and true to him.

Major Sections

1:1-2:10: The purpose of this section is to provide the setting: to describe Job's character and life, to describe Job's affliction, and to provide background as to why Job is afflicted. This section provides the tension, raising the questions of whether Job will remain righteous in the face of affliction, whether God will leave him afflicted without apparent cause, and whether God will justify this affliction.

2:11-42:6: The purpose of this section is to debate the righteousness of Job and of God's actions toward him. Most of this debate is carried on by five humans, Job and four visitors, but God weighs in at the end. This section provides the bulk of the plot of the narrative, as Job seeks to respond to the tension.

42:7-17: The purpose of this section is to close the narrative and provide some judgment on the actions of the characters. This section provides resolution to the tension.

Tension Questions

There are three questions that arise in the first two chapters:

- † whether Job will remain righteous in the face of affliction [a question only the reader and Satan hold, for Job views himself as righteous throughout, his companions view him as unrighteous throughout, and God is omniscient];
- † whether God will leave Job afflicted; and
- † whether God can and will justify this affliction [Job's burning question, which he brings up frequently during the dialogue that follows].

As to the first question, whether Job would remain righteous in the face of affliction, consider this progression, as Job's suffering increased:

- 3:1: Job cursed the day of his birth.
- 6:10: Job rejoiced that he has not denied God's words.
- 7:11-21: Job complained about his afflictions and questioned God.
- 9:17, 22: Job questioned the justness of his suffering.
- 10:2, 7: Job wanted to know why he was suffering, since God knew he was not guilty.
- 13:15: Job still placed his hope in God, but would argue with him about his suffering.
- 13:20-24: Job wanted God's mercy and answers.
- 14:16-20: Job sounded first hopeful but then hopeless again.
- 16:19: Job claimed an advocate in Heaven, yet lamented he could not plead effectively with God.
- 17:15: Job sounded like he was giving up hope.
- 19:6-7: Job declared that God had wronged him and there was no justice in his suffering.
- 19:25-26: Job declared his redeemer lived.
- 27:6: Job said he was holding fast to his righteousness.
- 28:23-28: Job rattled off a good sonnet of wisdom, about wisdom being fear of the Lord.
- 30:19-21: Job said God was persecuting him.
- 31:1-40: Job gave a declaration of his righteousness.

The above progression leads the reader to conclude that Job did well remaining righteous in the face of his afflictions. There is a question, however: while Job did not outright condemn God or give up his faith, he did make demands of God and declare that God was unjustly persecuting him.

The question of Job's steadfastness was answered by God himself. In 38:2-4 God was angry, clearly telling Job he had no right to question God; and in 40:7-8, even implying that Job's insistence on his righteousness and the injustice of his sufferings were a condemnation of God, which was also intolerable. However, in 42:7, God said that Job spoke of God correctly. Thus the reader must conclude that Job – while edging a little close to the line, thus drawing a warning rebuke from God – did carry himself well throughout the ordeal.

As to the second question, whether God would leave Job afflicted, 42:10-17 reveals that God restored Job to health, wealth, and happiness.

As to the third question, whether God could and would justify this affliction of Job, the narrative's resolution is less satisfactory. In 42:7, God said Job spoke of him correctly, yet Job had accused God of persecuting him unjustly [9:17, 22; 10:2, 7; 19:6-7; 30:19-21; 31:1-40]. Furthermore, to the reader was revealed some events Job did not know, which showed that it was God who brought up the blameless nature of Job in the first place [1:8], practically tempting Satan to afflict Job. Also, while the reader knows it was Satan doing the dirty work, remaining is the question of why God allowed it [1:12; 2:6] and why God said that Satan had incited him against Job [2:3]. If this story predates the Mosaic Covenant, then perhaps there is no promise of justice in this dispensation, but the human characters all assumed there was by the very nature of God [e.g. 8:3; 34:12]. Particularly troubling is the apparent incorrectness of Eliphaz' words in 22:21-23a: "Yield now and be at peace with Him; Thereby good will come to you. Please receive instruction from His mouth And establish His words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored..."

The book raises questions about the theology of human righteousness. God himself calls Job "blameless" [1:8; 2:3], as does the narrator [1:1], and Job insists on his righteousness. On the other hand, Eliphaz questions whether man can be just or pure before God [4:17] and whether he can be pure or righteous at all [15:14], Bildad questions whether man can be just before God or clean [25:4], and Job himself questions whether man can be right before God [9:2]. The modern believer holds to imputed righteousness only, and must therefore ponder if perhaps Job had no unconfessed sin [see 1:5], and by this God called him blameless, yet was tainted with the sin-nature, which caused need for confession occasionally, which would fit in with the content of the other references herein.

In the end, the reader must remind himself of God's warning that we have no right to question him [38:2-4; 40:7-8], but that is less than satisfactory to the reader who is searching God's Word in the effort to understand the nature of God. We can say that "righteousness" is the character of God by definition, but that negates any human concept of righteousness, leaving us without a clear understanding if God will not explain his actions in the story. The reader is left wondering whether the purpose of Job's affliction was to provide this biblical story [see Job's own lament in 19:23], but then again the reader would want to understand the point of the story for that to be worthwhile.

Other questions worth consideration

† Does Job's mention of an advocate in Heaven and a redeemer who lives indicate an understanding of the Messiah promise [particularly if this story predates Moses and even Abraham]? Or is it merely witty foreshadowing on God's part to have a character who complains of unjust suffering believe in a redeemer and heavenly advocate?

† Is the reader to assume Job is expressing bad theology about death in 3:16-17; 14:12?

† In 42:7, God says that Job's three friends spoke incorrectly about him [though there were four companions altogether], but the words of Zophar in 11:7 and of Eliphaz in 15:8 sound a lot like God's words to Job in 38:2-4.

† Would God use Greek names for constellations [38:31], particularly if this book predates the Greek civilization?

† 41:34 is confusing, as are a handful of other verses.