

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

## A KINGDOM established

### GOD ALL WISE

### *Job and the Dilemma of Suffering*

As we consider the dilemma of suffering, let's be careful to not forget that there is much about God that will always be a divine mystery. **Deuteronomy 29:29 (ESV)** <sup>29</sup> *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.* The book of Job may not completely satisfy the question of why we suffer, but it does teach us that when we suffer to remember that there is a God in heaven who only has our good in His mind.

We have briefly looked at the ‘wisdom’ books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes written by Solomon. Today, we turn to the ‘wisdom’ poem of Job. Before we consider the dilemma of Job’s suffering, let’s look into the background of his story.

Some wonder whether the events in Job really happened – or could they be a parable like the stories Jesus told in the New Testament? Job is a historical person and God’s Word verifies it. Around the time that the Jews were taken into the Babylonian captivity, the LORD declared through his prophet Ezekiel regarding the downfall of Jerusalem in **Ezekiel 14:14 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> *even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord GOD.* This mention of Job verifies that he is just as real and historical as Noah and Daniel. Job’s veracity is also testified to in the New Testament when James uses Job as an example of encouragement to us when we suffer. **James 5:11 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> *Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

The exact location of Job’s hometown of Uz is not known today; however, the Bible does give us a clue. The prophet Jeremiah wrote in **Lamentations 4:21 (ESV)** <sup>21</sup> *Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz...* The descendants of Isaac’s son Esau were called Edomites and it is interesting to note that Esau had a son named Eliphaz who had a son named Teman. Eliphaz the Temanite was one of the ‘miserable comforters’ of Job making him most likely a descendent of Esau. Another miserable comforter was Bildad the Shuhite. Abraham had a son named Shuah by Keturah after Sarah died. This connection seems to make Bildad a descendent of Abraham. As far as I know, there is no biblical information regarding Job’s heritage.

There are several reasons to believe Job lived during patriarchal times. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were known as the patriarchs. Several facts support this dating: (1) Job lived more than 140 years (**Job 42:16**) which was a common lifespan during the patriarchal period. (2) The economy of Job's day was measured in livestock (**Job 1:3**), which was typical of the patriarchal period. (3) Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Job was the priest of his family (**Job 1:5**). (4) The absence of any mention of the nation of Israel or the Mosaic Law suggests Job lived before the law was given to Moses.

No one knows who wrote the story of Job – possibly it was Job himself and later preserved for the nation of Israel by either Moses, David or Solomon. Some believe that the book of Job was the first book of the Bible that was written – possibly even before the book of Genesis. When you come to the bottom line – it was God who brought the story into being and preserved it for us! It is a living and active portion of God’s Word and it helps us understand that the Bible does not ignore one of the greatest questions that has ever faced mankind – if God is sovereign why does evil exist? The quick and easy answer to the question is God gave us freewill – we have the right to choose to do good or to do evil.

And that brings us to Job’s dilemma: Why do **good** people suffer?

**Read Job 1:6-8 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.* <sup>7</sup> *The LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.”* <sup>8</sup> *And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?”*

The first five verses of chapter 1 provide details of Job and his family – seven sons, three daughters, livestock aplenty. He was a good man – upright – he stood out from his peers. Because Job served as the priest for his family, he offered sacrifices to God on behalf of his children. We could say he was living the ‘perfect’ life on earth when God singled him out for a reason. God said to Satan: *Have you considered my servant Job?*

God’s Word gives us a glimpse into heaven in order for us to understand how Job’s suffering came about. The sons of God or angels came before the LORD and Satan was among them! Job would be in the dark concerning their conversation throughout his suffering and loss.

**God is sovereign in all things.** He is on the throne of heaven, the angels do His will and report to Him, and even Satan can do nothing to God's people without God's permission. No matter what happens in this world, God is on His throne and everything is under His control even in the bleakest of times.

**Satan has access to God's throne in heaven.** Thanks to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, many people have the mistaken idea that Satan is ruling this world from hell. Milton wrote, “Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven”. God’s Word reveals that Satan will not be cast into the lake of fire until the final judgment. **Revelation 20:10 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.* Like in the days of Job, Satan our Adversary, still has access to earth and he is always ‘on the prowl’. **1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

**Read Job 1:9-12 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> *Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason?”* <sup>10</sup> *Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.* <sup>11</sup> *But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.”* <sup>12</sup> *And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.*

When things go bad for us, we have a tendency to think ‘what did I do to deserve this?’ **God found no fault with Job, but Satan did.** This is a courtroom scene, and God and Satan each deliver different verdicts about Job. There was nothing in Job's life that compelled God to cause him to suffer. But Satan said "Guilty!" for no other reason than he is the Accuser of God's people and finds nothing good in them. We can take to heart that it will not always be this way. **Revelation 12:10 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.*

Apparently Satan had been trying to hurt Job and made the discovery that he could not because there was a hedge of protection around Job. In the midst of his troubles, Job saw that hedge differently than Satan. **Job 3:23 (ESV)** <sup>23</sup> *Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? Job thought God’s hedge had turned into something bad because of his current circumstances.*

I often ask for God’s protection and I know He hears and answers my prayers. However, I must also accept at times that God’s hedge of protection may have a different purpose than what I consider best. The Master of the Universe sees the bigger picture. This is biblically expressed in the life of Job. Job would become a shining light for God in the midst of his trials to the point of impacting generations to come. The important part of the story is not Job’s troubles. The thing that matters is Job’s RESPONSE to those troubles. **Romans 8:28 (ESV)** <sup>28</sup> *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

On that day in heaven, the LORD gave Satan permission to touch his servant’s possessions and his family but not his body. Even with Job’s wonderful godly response to the loss of family and possessions, the Accuser would not give up – he felt that if he could just touch Job’s body that would do the trick. When God allowed Job’s body to be attacked, let’s read Job’s response.

**Read Job 1:20-22 (ESV)** <sup>20</sup> *Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped.* <sup>21</sup> *And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”* <sup>22</sup> *In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.*

I have always loved Job’s words and have hoped that if the time ever came for such trouble they would be my words as well. *“The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”*

When the Accuser couldn’t get Job to curse God, his own wife decided to give it a try. Let’s read Job’s response when she told him to curse God and die!

**Read Job 2:10 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.*

Curse God and die!" was exactly what Satan wanted Job to do, and Job’s wife put the temptation before her husband. Yes, Satan can work through people who are dear to us and the temptation is stronger when it is

someone we love. Adam listened to Eve and Abraham listened to Sarah; but Job did not listen to the advice of his wife. If Job had listened to his wife it would only have made things worse.

Job had Satan after him – then his wife go after him and finally his friends. In fact, Job described them as miserable comforters. They were opinionated, judgmental, unloving and totally off base regarding Job’s suffering. From Job’s friends we can learn what NOT to do when ‘comforting’ others. Job says much to his comfortless friends in this book.

**Read Job 16:18-21 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> *“O earth, cover not my blood, and let my cry find no resting place. <sup>19</sup> Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he who testifies for me is on high. <sup>20</sup> My friends scorn me; my eye pours out tears to God, <sup>21</sup> that he would argue the case of a man with God, as a son of man does with his neighbor.*

Job’s suffering was so great that he longed to die, but he didn't want to die before he could vindicate himself or see God vindicate him. During this time period, they believed that the blood of innocent victims cried out to God for justice; hence Job’s comment in verse 18. Recall when the LORD questioned Cain about Abel, **Genesis 4:10 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.*

None of his friends would defend him, so his only hope was that God in heaven would defend him. The Holman Bible uses the word Advocate while most other translations use witness. Because of the work of Jesus, the Son of God, we do now have an Advocate. **1 John 2:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.* Let’s read what Job said about needing a mediator.

**Read Job 33:23-24 (ESV)** <sup>23</sup> *If there be for him an angel, a mediator, one of the thousand, to declare to man what is right for him, <sup>24</sup> and he is merciful to him, and says, ‘Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom;*

And a Mediator is exactly what we have in Jesus! **1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

God Himself eventually put Job’s comforters in their place and the LORD told them to have **Job** offer up an offering for **them**. We should be careful in how we treat our friends so that God in the throne room of heaven will not become angry with us.

As we conclude our study of this wisdom poem, let’s be reminded of a couple of observations that Job made during his time of trouble. **Job 23:10 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.* Job’s last conclusion to me is the most remarkable because he proclaimed it long before the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus! **Job 19:25-26 (ESV)** <sup>25</sup> *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. <sup>26</sup> And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,*