

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF JOB

The problem of how one God can exist who is sovereign, good, and loving has long been recognised as one of the most difficult ones for the Christian faith to explain. The ancient Latin poet Lucretius wrote:

*Had God designed the world, it would not be
A world so frail and faulty as we see.*

In the 19th century John Stuart Mill wrote: 'Not even on the most distorted and contracted theory of good which ever was framed by religious or philosophical fanaticism, can the government of nature be made to resemble the work of a being at once good and omnipotent.' Before he became a Christian, as an atheist, C. S. Lewis used this argument against the Christian faith. Later, as a Christian, he sought to answer it in *The Problem of Pain*. The relationship between God and the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked is an issue which is often raised in Scripture (Habakkuk; Jeremiah 12:1; Psalm 73).

The date of the book of Job is unknown, but it is usually regarded as early, with good reason. Job carries out his own sacrifices, which points to Israel's situation before the institution of the Mosaic priesthood. Ezekiel 14:14 also refers to Job. Tennyson called it 'the greatest poem of ancient or modern times.'

1. Job Tested (Job 1-2)

1. From 1:1-5, show how Job is revealed to be a righteous man. _____

2. What indications are we given of Job's wealth? (1:1-5) _____

Francis Andersen thinks that Uz was to the north-east of the Sea of Galilee.

3. What was Satan's cynical view of Job? (1:9-11) _____

On the mission field, 'rice Christians' are those who gather around the missionary not for his Christianity but for his Western goods.

4. What does God allow Satan to do? (1:12) _____

5. What four disasters strike Job in 1:13-19? _____

David Atkinson refers to 'stab after stab of the dagger of misfortune', which is true, but remember that it did not just happen.

6. How does Job respond to these disasters? (1:20-22) What would Job have made of William Barclay's statement that 'I do not think that anyone can calculate the vast amount of damage that has been done, by suggesting that terrible and tragic events in life are the will of God'? _____

Notice the grief, the emphasis on the transience of life, the worship, and the emphasis on the sovereignty of God.

Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake

*To guide the future as He has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.*

7. What happens again in 2:1-8? How sovereign is God over life, death and suffering? (1 Sam.2:6) Can it be said that all suffering and death comes from Satan? (Job 2:6) What happens to Job? (2:7-8; cf.7:5; 30:30) _____

8. What was the response of Job's wife? (2:9) How does the humanist respond to intense suffering? _____

9. Contrast this to Job's own response? (2:10; see 13:15, but not in the RSV which has 'Behold, he will slay me') Would Job be a guest on the Benny Hinn Show? _____

*Take Thou my cup, and it
With joy or sorrow fill
As best to Thee may seem:
Choose Thou my good or ill.*

- Horatius Bonar

C. S. Lewis once referred to God who seemed to act like 'the Cosmic Sadist'. David Atkinson: 'Faith is learning to trust God in the dark, in unknowing, in apparent failure.'

10. List what is good in the comfort offered by Job's three friends in 2:11-13 (note 19:14; 13:5; Rom.12:15). _____

Seven days was the period of mourning for the dead.

Stanley Hauerwas tells how he simply was with someone whose mother had suicided.

Helmut Thielicke, who lived through the Confessing Church's resistance to Hitler, once said that the greatest defect in American Christians was their inadequate view of suffering. He wrote of God: 'At the bottom of every abyss he stands beside me.'

*Dear Lord! though bitter is the cup
Thy gracious hand deals out to me,
I cheerfully would drink it up;
That cannot hurt that comes from Thee.*

2. Job's Lament (Job 3)

The book would be among the leaders in the 'Inspiring Thoughts for Daily

Living' category, albeit rather tougher than most, if it concluded at the end of chapter 2. But Job is not made of iron (6:12), and in chapter 3 he breaks out in a startling lament, which leads to a heated debate with his three friends. In the debate with his three friends, Job speaks in Job 6-7, 9-10, 12-14, 16-17, 19, 21, 23-24, and 26-27. In seeking to make sense of Job's responses, we should note:

(a) Job never loses his faith. It goes through turmoil, but is never lost.

(b) Job's words were nevertheless rash (38:2; 40:1-4), and not meant for our imitation.

1. Job did not curse God, but what did he curse? (3:1) _____

Recall that Bunyan's pilgrim fell into the Slough of Despond.

2. How does Job describe the day of his birth? (3:2-10) What does he wish for? What does he think God is doing to him? (16:12-14) _____

Is this unheard of in Scripture? How common do you think this attitude is? (1 Kings 19:4; Jer.20:14, 18; Jonah 4:3, 8) _____

After Joni Eareckson had broken her neck in 1967, and had been made a quadriplegic, she became so despondent that she wanted to commit suicide. Then she became more despondent because she was unable physically to take her own life. She, of course, recovered from this.

3. What does Job desire for himself? (3:11-12) When would he have liked to have died? (3:13-16) _____

4. How does Job view death? (3:17-19) _____

Bach once wrote a piece of music entitled *Come, Sweet Death*, but that was written in serenity - unlike Job's sentiments.

5. What central issues are raised about life here on earth? (3:20-26) What do we possess as human beings, and how does this make suffering, initially at least, more difficult? _____

David Atkinson says that this section, Job is 'close to the danger area where his faith in God's goodness is being pushed to its limit'.

Blaise Pascal: 'Man's greatness comes from knowing he is wretched: a tree does not know it is wretched, but there is greatness in knowing one is wretched.'

Matthew Prior: *Who thinks must suffer, and who feels must mourn,*

And he alone is blessed who ne'er was born.

Can you think of ways in which the greatness of man is closely linked to the

misery of man? _____

Jean-Paul Sartre: 'Man is a useless passion.'

William Howells: man is 'a modified fish'.

William Cowper: *His purposes will ripen fast,*

Unfolding every hour;

The bud may have a bitter taste,

But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,

And scan His work in vain:

God is His own interpreter,

And He will make it plain.

Does Christ know nothing of Job's anguish? (Matt.27:46) _____

3. The Response of the Three Friends (Job 4)

There are three cycles of speeches by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, with replies by Job.

Eliphaz speaks in 4-5, 15, and 22;

Job replies in 6-7, 16-17, and 23-24;

Bildad speaks in 8, 18, and 25;

Job replies in 9-10, 19, and 26-27;

Zophar speaks in 11 and 20;

Job replies in 12-14 and 21.

A fourth friend, Elihu, comes into the picture in 32-37. William Henry Green and David Atkinson both see him as preparing the way for God who begins His speeches in chapter 38.

David Atkinson comments: 'It is frustrating because the first rule of ministry to people who are depressed is that you will almost certainly get it wrong.'

1. What does Job 42:7-8 tell us about interpreting the speeches of the three friends? Having said that, much of what they say is true (note that Job 5:13 is quoted in 1 Cor.3:19 as Scripture). _____

2. How does Eliphaz begin? (4:1-6; note Prov.17:14) Notice how the debate soon gets out of hand (22:5-11) _____

3. What is Eliphaz's starting point? (4:7-9; see Prov.22:8 and Gal.6:7-8) How far is he correct and how far is he wrong? _____

4. What is the theology of Job's three friends? (22:23; 8:3-4; 11:5-6, 13-16) _____

5. Does it always fit the facts? (note Abel in Genesis 4; Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-3)

6. Where did Eliphaz get his theology from? (4:12-21; cf. Prov.30:5-6) How correct is Eliphaz's theology? _____

7. What was Eliphaz's advice to Job? (5:24-27) _____

The words of the three friends are not so much evil as inappropriate.

*Here in the maddening maze of things,
When tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed ground my spirit clings:
I know that God is good.*

4. Faith in the Darkness (Job 13:15; 19:21-29)

1. List some of the features of Job's suffering from 7:5, 14; 16:16; 19:17, 20; 30:17,30 _____

David Atkinson: 'It is Job's very faith in the ultimate goodness and justice of God which creates his dilemma.'

2. Assuming that Job 13:15 says: 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him', what does this teach us about faith? Is it easier to trust God in times of blessing or in times of suffering? Does faith guarantee blessing? _____

3. There is a hint of resurrection in Job 14:14-15. Increasingly, Job gives up on his 'miserable comforters' (16:2), and turns to God. From Job 19:25-27, what can we learn about:

a. assurance _____

b. Job's Redeemer (see too Lev.25:25-28, 48-49; Ruth 4:3-6; Heb.7:25) _____

c. the future hope (cf. Gen.3:15; John 8:56) _____

d. the resurrection of the body (cf. Phil.3:20-21; 1 John 3:2) _____

e. the personal nature of salvation (cf. Gal.2:20) _____

My times are in Thy hand,

*Jesus, the Crucified;
Those hands my cruel sins had pierced
Are now my guard and guide.*

*My times are in Thy hand:
I'll always trust in Thee;
And, after death, at Thy right hand
I shall for ever be.*

Compare this to the death of the novelist Aldous Huxley. As he was dying, his wife gave him LSD.

4. Why should the post-Easter Christian's faith be even stronger than Job's? ____

5. Job's Good Conscience (Job 31)

Job has gone three rounds with his three friends. Then in Job 29:2-3, 5 Job indulges in a lament for the past, and in Job 30:1 he regrets the present. In Job 31 he asserts his integrity in a passionate outburst.

1. What is the difference between a good conscience and a dead conscience? (compare Luke 18:21 with Acts 20:18-21, 26-27; 23:1; 24:16; 2 Tim.1:3) _____

Can a good conscience go hand-in-hand with the sentiments of Romans 7:15, 18-19? _____

2. What had Job done in 31:1-4, and why? What is it that motivates him? (see Matt.5:27-28) What does this have to say to us about what we watch e.g. videos, television programmes, movies, suggestive magazines? What does Job say about his actions in sexual matters in 31:9-12? _____

3. What does Job say about his honesty at work? (31:5-8) What is this teaching us? _____

4. How did Job treat his servants? (31:13-15) Why did he treat them well? Why should we treat others well? Why should we look after the child with Down's Syndrome? Compare the Christian view to the pagan view, as exemplified by Aristotle: 'A slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave'.

5. How did Job treat those who were in need? (31:16-23) What does this teach us? What does he say about how he treated his enemies? (31:29-30)

6. What is Job's attitude towards wealth? (31:24-25) _____

7. Is there any secret idolatry in his heart? (31:26-28) _____

8. Looking over Job 31, do you think Job had a good conscience or a dead conscience? Can it be fairly said that Job has a superficial understanding of sin? Do you think that Job could have prayed the prayer of Psalm 139:23-24? (note his words in Job 31:33) Could the rich young ruler have prayed that prayer? What is the difference between Job and the rich young ruler?

6. The Lord God Intervenes (Job 38-41)

C. S. Lewis once wrote an essay entitled *God in the Dock*, where he pointed out the modern folly of having God answerable to man. In reality, of course, we are in the dock.

1. What did Job ask for in Job 13:22-23 and 31:35? _____

2. How does God begin His address to Job? (38:1-2) What is Job called upon to do in 38:3? What do you think Job's posture would have been? _____

3. Who was there in Genesis 1:1? (Job 38:4-5; see John 1:3 and Job 33:4) Why is God so sarcastic? _____

George Bernard Shaw complained that God was jeering at Job, David Atkinson sees 'a gentle irony' in Job 38-41, and Francis Andersen writes: 'There is a kindly playfulness in the Lord's speeches which is quite relaxing.' Do you think that any of these views is correct? _____

4. Does God answer Job's questions? Does Paul answer objections to the doctrine of predestination in Romans 9:14-23? Do you find this surprising? _____

5. What does God ask about in 38:8-11 and in 38:12-15? What does God call upon Job to do in 38:18 and 38:19-21? _____

David Atkinson has a point although I cannot see that it is the main point of Job 38-41: 'It is by enjoying the Creator's handiwork that we often begin to feel again the touch of the Creator's hand.'

6. What is the point of the avalanche of divine questions in Job 38-39? (40:1-2)

7. What is Job's response in 40:3-5? _____

8. Does God let up on him? (40:8-14) _____

40:15-24 refer to a behemoth, which cannot be a hippopotamus (note the tail). The other candidate is a dinosaur, which certainly fits this description.

9. What do Isaiah 40:17, 21-23, 25-26 tell us about the majesty of God? What had Job forgotten? _____

*Great Father of Glory, pure Father of Light,
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would rend Thee: O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee.*

How easily we sing it, and how quickly we forget it!

10. What is the appropriate posture before God? (Rev.5:13) _____

7. Restoration: Some Answers (Job 42)

For so long the jig-saw had not looked like the picture on the box, but now there is restoration.

1. What does Job recognise about God in 42:2? _____

2. What does he recognise about himself in 42:3-4, 6? _____

See Genesis 18:27.

3. What has Job experienced in a fresh way? (42:5; cf. John 4:39-42) _____

When Charles Williams died in 1945, his friend C. S. Lewis recorded: 'It has made the next world much more real and palpable.'

4. How is Job's battle with his three friends resolved? (42:7-9) How are human beings reconciled to one another? _____

5. Trace through the account of Job's restoration in 42:10-17. _____

Francis Andersen: 'Only God can destroy creatively.'

6. What do you notice about 42:13? (recall 1:2) What is this saying to Job, and to us? _____

When asked how many children he had, G. Campbell Morgan used to reply: 'Seven. Six on earth, one in heaven.' It was Campbell Morgan who published the book *The Answers of Jesus to Job*.

Be still, my soul: thy Jesus can repay,

From His own fulness, all He takes away.

7. What do Job 42 and John 11 point us to? _____

8. In what ways can it be said that the afflictions of the Christian are momentary and light? (2 Cor.4:17; see John 16:19-22) How is Job remembered in the New Testament? (James 5:11) _____

*When the shore is won at last,
Who will count the billows past?*

9. Take eternity and resurrection away, would there be any answer to suffering?

10. If someone offered you an hour of excruciating suffering followed by a lifetime of inexpressible joy, would you accept it? What about a lifetime of suffering, followed by an eternity of boundless joy? _____

