

“The job of understanding Job”

Part 1 of 1

The book of Job is kind of like a trip to Las Vegas, there's betting, suffering, and a chance at a happy ending – Cecil Sherman

A.) Background on the Book of Job

1.) The book of Job is unique within the scriptures in that the whole book is the authoritative source on Theodicy within the scriptures. The term Theodicy is of course derived from the Latin words Theos, meaning God and Dike meaning Judgement. So, a literal translation would be The Judgement of God or divine judgement. The concept of Theodicy especially within the Book of Job can be re-phrased into the question Why do bad things happen to good people? It also deals with the question “Why does evil exist? I think anyone, growing in their faith would and likely has struggled with that question at least once in their lives.

2.) Job is also unique among the scriptures in that it is extremely difficult to translate, more than any other book. When biblical scholars try to understand what a word means, they look at how that word is used in other places in the Bible. However, sometimes words only appear once in the Bible. These words are known as Hapax Legomenon. These words are therefore extremely tricky to translate. The book of Job had more Hapax Legomenon, or One-time words than any other book in the bible. Because of its unique vocabulary, the Book of Job can be extremely difficult to translate. For example, in the Greek Translation of the Bible, known as the Septuagint, Job is 400 lines shorter than the Hebrew. Which has led some to theorize that the Greek translators became so frustrated with the Book that they omitted certain parts of the book that they couldn't understand. Luckily I am not using the Greek translation. The good news is that translations and understanding of the Book of Job has improved a great deal in recent years, so with great confidence I can say we can understand the Book of Job within the context that the book was first written.

3. It has been noted as an extremely well written book. Alfred Lord Tennyson called The Book of Job “The greatest Poem of Ancient and Modern Times” High praise from the Poet Laureate of Great Britain and Ireland during much of reign of Queen Victoria.

4. The Book of job takes place somewhere between 1500 and 1200 B.C., although it was written much later (most scholars agree sometime around 586B.C. during the Babylonian Exile.) Rabbinic Tradition identifies Moses as the author although considering that it was most likely written well after the time of Moses, this is highly doubtful. Job has also been identified as the author, but this too is highly doubtful. The author or authors is most likely an Israelite who lived around 600 B.C. Ironic because Job, who is seen as this righteous man is in fact a non-Israelite (Job was from the land of Uz , traditionally located Southeast of Israel in the land of Edom).

B. Satan in the Bible.

Surprisingly, most of what people believe about Satan does not come from the Bible. For instance, the common image of Satan as a fork-tailed horned with a goat's body from the waist down derives more from the Greek god Pan.

The Hebrew name Satan (pronounced Sa-tan) means adversary. He's also referred to as Ha-satan, which just means The Adversary. Satan's role through the scriptures grows in both scope and scale through time. In the early writings of the Hebrew Bible. Many people are surprised that Satan plays a smaller role in the scripture, especially in comparison to his role in the New Testament. Now that's not to say that he is non-existent in the Old Testament. We see in the Old Testament that he sometimes causes humans to do bad things, as he incites King David to conduct a census in 1 Chronicles 21:1. Satan also acts a heavenly prosecutor, bringing charges against sinners before God, truly earning him the title of adversary. For example, in Psalm 109:6 the author asks Satan to bring an enemy to trial. Also in Zechariah 3:1-2, Satan stands at the right hand of an angel to bring charges against the High Priest. As we have seen, Satan has a similar role in the opening chapter of Job, where he appears in the heavenly court of God to bring charges against Job. This role throughout the scriptures tells us one important thing. Satan has no power over us. We see this theme of Satan's lack of authority reflected in the New Testament as well. In Luke 22:31 we read Jesus saying, "Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat." What does this mean? That Satan has no real power over us. As any Christian knows, the only One who has ultimate authority and power over us is God Himself. Ultimately it is God's judgement, not Satan's to which we must submit.

5. What to make of it all

A. Job is one of the most difficult books in the Bible to understand. Why? Because it provides no clear-cut answer to Job's problems. In fact, the book has more questions than answers. Yet, this is part of the message of Job. Life is complicated and there will always be unanswered questions, questions to which you are not yet ready to understand the answers. There will be inexplicable suffering and unthinkable tragedy. The real question, therefore, is not **WHY** do the righteous suffer, but **HOW** will the righteous respond to their suffering? If people do right merely to be rewarded by God, then their righteousness is worthless. And, if people abandon faith because of hardship, then again righteousness is worth little. The true revelation to be gained from the Book of Job is that we should not question God's Judgement because we cannot truly understand His judgment. But we can put our faith in Him and accept His judgment.