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# Lesson 1

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## Background of Job

**W**hy suffering and catastrophe fall upon good people has puzzled mankind throughout the centuries. In our study of Job we will learn what God wants His children to know about this vexing problem, and how they can find perfect peace.

Before we study the text itself, let us look into the background of the book. This is the best procedure to follow in studying any book of the Bible. We will proceed according to this basic order of study: (1) background and setting; (2) survey of the entire book; and (3) analysis of the individual parts.

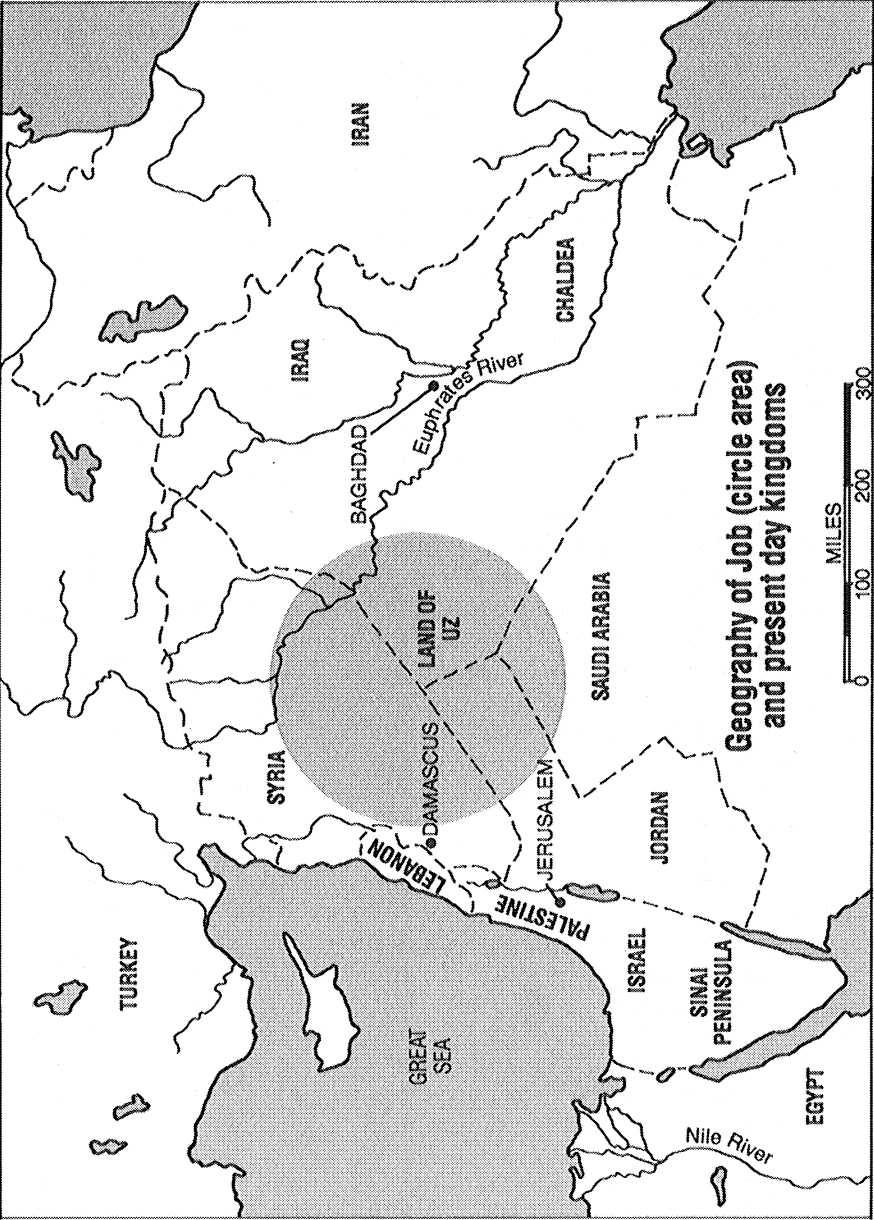
Lesson 2 is devoted to survey, and the remaining lessons concentrate on analysis, which is the core of Bible book study.

The book of Job was written long ago. In order to gain a thorough understanding of it, the modern reader must look into such matters as its setting, its author, the persons mentioned in it, and why it was written. It is true that you can profitably study the Bible without delving into this background information. Knowing it will, however, deepen your comprehension of the truths revealed in the Bible.

### **I. THE MAN JOB**

#### **A. Name**

There are two possible meanings for the name *Job*. If the name's origin is in the Arabic language, it means "one who turns back (repents)". If its origin is Hebrew, it means "the hated (persecuted) one." It is interesting that both of these meanings are reflected in experiences of Job as recorded in the book bearing his name.



## B. Biography and Descriptions

Job was a real person, not a fictitious character, as some critics contend. Read Ezekiel 14:14-20 and James 5:11 for clear evidence of this. Since we have little biographical information about Job, we can make only a few general statements about his background.

1. Job was a native of the land of Uz (1:1). This region was located northeast of Palestine, near desert land (1:19), probably between the city of Damascus and the Euphrates River. This would place the region near the borders of modern Iraq and Saudi Arabia. (See map, Chart A.) Read 1:3 and note that Job was from an area called “the east.”

2. Job probably lived before or around the time of Abraham. This is suggested by the fact that the book of Job does not mention Israel’s covenant relationship with God, which is the core of Hebrew history from the call of Abraham (Gen. 12) onward.<sup>1</sup> Also there is no reference to Hebrew institutions (e.g., the law). The kind of sacrifice described in 1:5 was practiced before or outside the Mosaic order of worship, according to which only the priests sacrificed offerings brought by the people (Ex. 20:44).<sup>2</sup> We may say, therefore, that the man Job lived between the construction of the Tower of Babel and the call of Abraham, or shortly thereafter.<sup>3</sup> Read Genesis 11:9–12:1 to fix in your mind this chronological setting. Then read the words of God in Job 39 and note the different kinds of animals, including the horse, with which Job was familiar. Man’s habitat has not changed radically during the long course of world history.

3. Some have suggested that Job had reached the age of sixty when the events related in this book took place. Whatever his age, we know nothing of his earlier life. Questions that remain unanswered include: Who were his parents? From whom did he first learn about God? How widespread was his witness for God?

4. Job was very wealthy. Read 1:3, 10. He and his sons were homeowners in a large city of the region (cf. 1:4; 29:7). Archaeologists have discovered the ruins of more than three hundred ancient cities in the area of Uz, which indicates that a flourishing civilization existed in those early days.

5. He was a respected and popular judge and benefactor of his fellow citizens (29:7-25).

1. If Job was a contemporary of Abraham, or lived after him, then he was a believer outside the covenant family of Israel. (Cf. Acts 14:17.)

2. The “burnt offerings” of 1:5 are not Levitical offerings, according to this view.

3. References to a Job appear in extrabiblical texts dated as early as 2000 B.C. The footnote in the *Berkeley Version* at 42:16-17 reads, “His many years suggest the period of Abraham.”

6. He was righteous in God's eyes. Read 1:1, 5, 8. Compare also Ezekiel 14:14-20 and James 5:11. What does the last phrase of Job 1:5 suggest about his relationship to God?

7. He lived to a ripe old age. If Job was as old as 60 when he was first tested (chap. 1), then he was at least 200 years old when he died (42:16-17). Compare this with the ages of the people listed in Genesis 11:10-26 (cf. also Gen. 25:7).

As you study the book of Job, you will become better acquainted with Job as a person.

## **II. THE BOOK OF JOB**

### **A. Title**

The book is named for its main character, not for its author. The book of Ruth is an example of another writing so named.

### **B. Author and Date**

The human author is anonymous and the date of writing uncertain.<sup>4</sup> Such is the case for many books of the Bible. Among those suggested as writer are Moses, Solomon, a contemporary of Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 4:29-34), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, a prophet of the captivity, and Job. Most scholars agree that the author lived at a time later than Abraham. If he was a contemporary of Solomon, an approximate date of writing would be 950 B.C. One writer supports an early date before the prophets:

The grandeur and spontaneity of the book and its deeply empathic re-creation of the sentiments of men standing early in the progress of revelation point to the early pre-Exilic period, before the doctrinal, especially the eschatological, contribution of the prophets.<sup>5</sup>

Chart B shows the historical context of possible dates for the man Job and the book written about him.

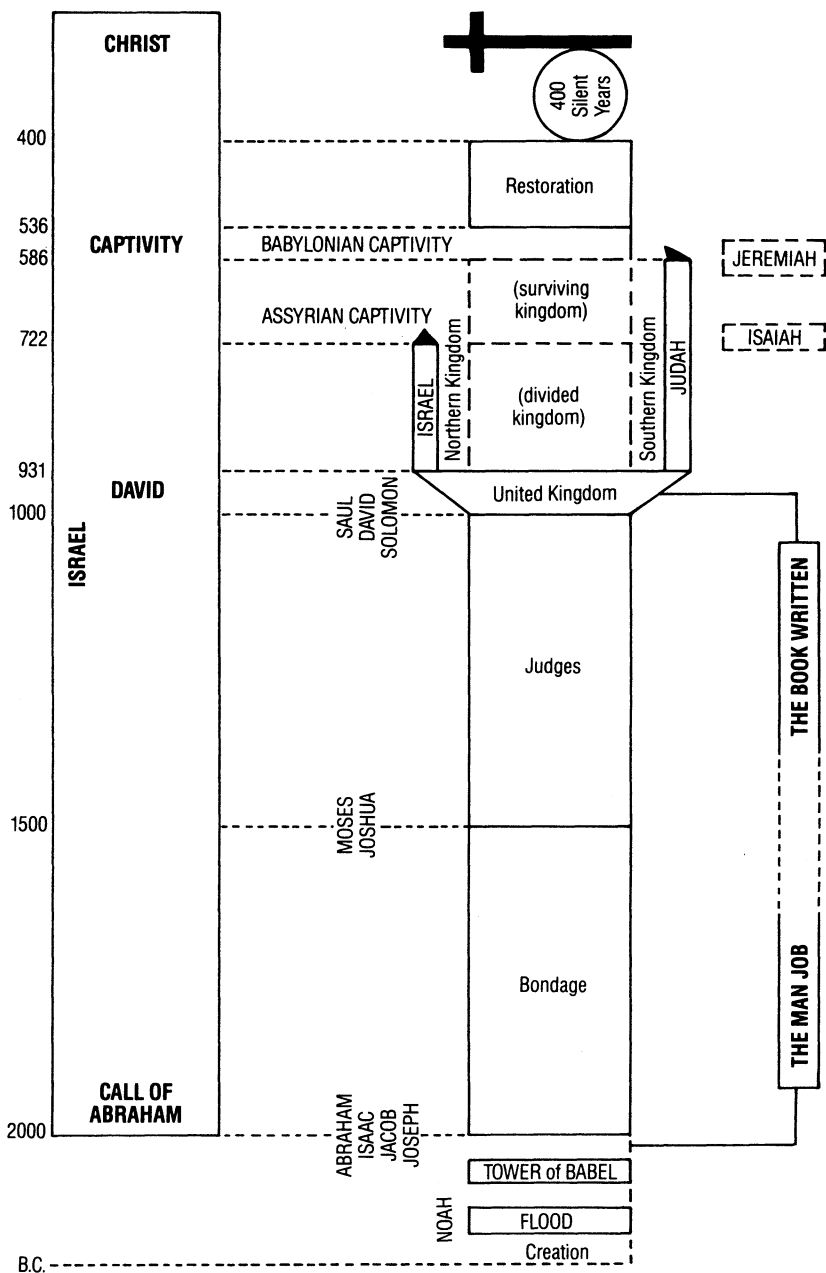
The book's authority and dependability rest not on human authorship but on divine authorship. Only God could reveal the conversation between Himself and Satan, recorded in chapters 1-2.

4. The uncertainty regarding human authorship and date does not limit our study of this remarkable Old Testament book.

5. Meredith G. Kline, "Job," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 460.

Chart B

POSSIBLE DATES OF JOB IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT



### **C. Purposes**

Job is a book about a physical and spiritual experience of an ancient patriarch whose faith was tested to the uttermost. Its main purposes are not to teach Israelite history, messianic prophecy, the ABC's of salvation, or the mission of the church. These are the big tasks of other parts of Scripture. The underlying purposes of Job are the following:

1. To reveal who God is.
2. To show the kind of trust He wants His children to have. (For example: Trust God even though you cannot fully account for your circumstances.) Approval by God means "tried and true" (cf. Rom. 16:10, *Berkeley*).

3. To reveal His favor toward His children and His absolute control over Satan.

4. To answer man's questions about why a righteous person may suffer while an evil man may enjoy health and prosperity.

The entire book of Job is concerned with the problem of pain. The answer to the problem that is stated in number 4 above is contained in the first three statements: who God is determines what He does; therefore we must trust Him without reservation.

### **D. Doctrinal Content**

The book of Job makes reference, directly or indirectly, to most of the key doctrines of the Bible, including God; man; Satan; sin and righteousness; affliction, discipline, and blessing; justice; faith; and nature. Many references to God's creation appear throughout the book. Included are astronomical facts, such as names of stars and constellations (38:31-32), suspension of the earth in space (26:7), and the spherical shape of the earth (22:14). (Scan chaps. 38 and 39, which are filled with similar references.)

The contents of the book are surveyed in Lesson 2. Does it surprise you that such a great variety of truth was revealed to men of God even before the Scriptures were recorded?

### **E. Style**

Job is classified as dramatic poetry. The book is recognized even in the world of secular literature as a magnificent dramatic poem. Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish essayist and historian (1795-1881), wrote, "There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit."

Poetry is the language of the heart. Thus Job describes the innermost thoughts of men, more so than their actions. The poetic section of the book (3:1–42:6) uses a poetic device called parallelism. The three most common kinds of parallelism are:

1. Synonymous: a thought is stated in the first line, then repeated in similar language in the second. (Most parallelism in Job is of this kind.)  
Example: “By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed” (4:9).
2. Antithetic: the statement in the first line is followed by a contrasting statement of the second line.  
Example: “My friends scorn me:  
But mine eye poureth out tears unto God” (16:20).
3. Synthetic: a number of related thoughts expand on the statement of the first line.  
Example: Read 4:19–21.

In drama, not everything spoken by the actors is necessarily true. Likewise in the book of Job. For example, Job’s three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, give their own interpretations of Job’s afflictions. Later they are rebuked by God for not speaking “the thing that is right” (42:7). (The speeches of Job’s three friends take up eight chapters of the book.)

## **F. Relation to Other Books of the Bible**

Job is the first of the five poetic books of the Bible. The books before it, from Genesis to Esther, are for the most part historical in nature. If Job lived before or outside the Abrahamic setting, as suggested earlier in this lesson, an interesting comparison may be made between the poetical and historical books. This is shown on Chart C.

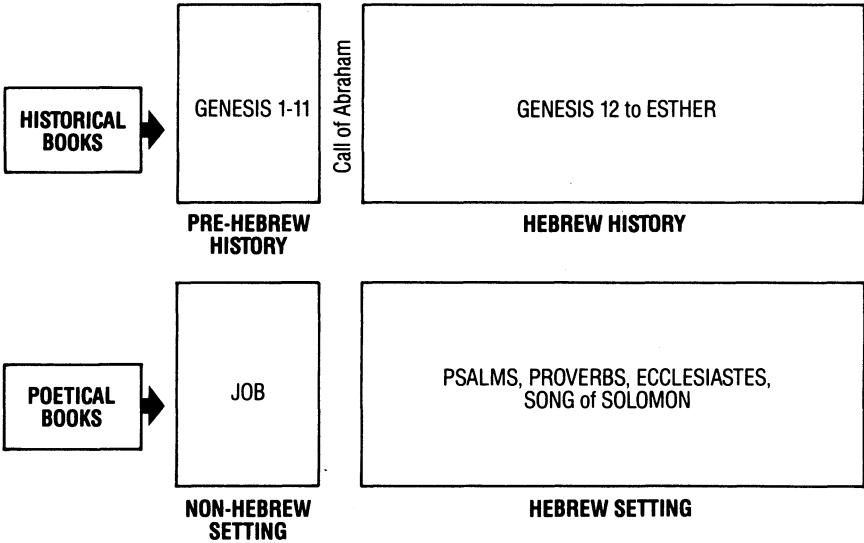
The book of Job is intimately related to the New Testament, even though it is explicitly quoted only once (1 Cor. 3:19 quoting Job 5:13). The problems and questions of the man Job are answered completely and perfectly in Christ. G. Campbell Morgan cites nine such answers and confirmations of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Read the verses listed below and ponder the blessed truth that Jesus is the complete and only answer to every need of modern man.

6. G. Campbell Morgan, *The Answers of Jesus to Job*, p. 5.



THE NON-HEBREW SETTING OF JOB

Chart C



Subject	Book of Job	Answered and Confirmed in Jesus
1. Cry for a daysman (mediator)	9:33	1 Timothy 2:5
2. Inquiry about life	14:14	John 11:25
3. Witness in heaven	16:19	Hebrews 9:24
4. Living redeemer	19:25	Hebrews 7:25
5. Quest for God	23:3	John 14:9
6. Challenge to God	31:35	Hebrews 12:22-24
7. Discovery of self	40:4	Matthew 16:26; John 3:16
8. Discovery of God	42:5-6	Matthew 4:17
9. Sense of solution	23:10	James 1:12

The New Testament gives the complete and final revelation concerning doctrines that appear in the ancient book of Job. The prominent doctrine about suffering is an example. Not all suffering experienced by Christians today is the outcome of a “meeting” of Satan and God, as recorded in Job. Various New Testament passages teach that some suffering is penal, some is remedial, and some is for other purposes. Read the following verses and observe what they teach about suffering: John 9:1-2; 1 Corinthians 11:29-32; Hebrews 12:7-11; 1 Peter 4:12-14. You can extend this study to include other New Testament verses.

It is clear that the ministry of Christ is the culmination and interpretation of all Old Testament history. Were it not for the atoning work of Christ, neither the faith of Job nor that of any other Old Testament saint would have availed to bring him into the heavenly city, which is mentioned in Hebrews 11:13-16:

These men of faith I have mentioned died without ever receiving all that God had promised them; but they saw it all awaiting them on ahead and were glad, for they agreed that this earth was not their real home but that they were just strangers visiting down here. And quite obviously when they talked like that they were looking forward to their real home in heaven. . . . And now God is not ashamed to be called their God, for **he has made a heavenly city for them** (TLB,<sup>7</sup> bold added).

\* \* \*

## REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. What is the value of studying the background of a biblical book before analyzing its text? Did the original readers of each book know the background of the writing addressed to them?
2. What are the two possible meanings of the name “Job”?
3. What are the evidences that Job was a real person?
4. What do you know about Job’s native land?
5. Give reasons to support the theory that Job lived shortly before or around the time of Abraham.
6. How did God describe Job’s spiritual condition before his affliction?
7. Account for the title of the book of Job, assuming that Job did not write it.
8. State some of the views concerning the authorship of the book.

7. *The Living Bible*.

9. In your own words, what are the main purposes of the book of Job?

10. What are some of the outstanding subjects discussed in the book?

11. Compare the contents of Job with that of other poetical books.

12. Cite biblical passages that show Jesus is the perfect answer to the needs of men like Job.

13. What, in your opinion, are some of the Christian graces that may be strengthened through suffering and adversity?