

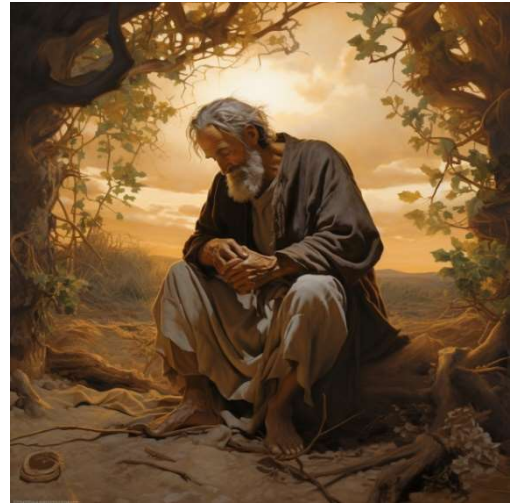
JOB

PSALMS (1-72)

The Book of Job recounts the life and sufferings of a man who experiences prosperity, disaster, depression, and finally, restoration. One of the most popular Old Testament wisdom writings, the Book of Job treats directly the problem of evil and the justice of God. It teaches us that pain and suffering are a mystery of divine wisdom; that the truly wise man knows **“the fear of the Lord is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding”** (Job 28:28).

The author is unknown, but believed to be a Jew of the late 400s B.C., who was familiar with the writings of the Prophets and other wise men of Israel. Job himself is a Gentile, not a descendant of Abraham. Job believes in God who continues to offer sacrifices despite great sufferings.

The Book of Job is structured much like a play, with a prologue and an epilogue that frame the “action” of six characters, including God Himself (3:1-42:6). Dramatic highlights include the “courtroom” scene (chap. 31) in which Job asserts his innocence and pleads for his acquittal, and when God appears in a whirlwind to speak to Job (chap. 38).



Prologue and first test

Chapters 1-2 introduce the characters. Job is pious, blameless, happy and content. After God asks Satan “Have you considered” Job’s righteousness, Satan argues that Job’s virtue is not genuine and that he is only righteous because of his many material blessings (1:8). So God permits Job to be tested. Blow after terrible blow falls upon Job, depriving him of his children and possessions. After losing everything dear to him, Job mourns but remains faithful (1:20-22). Job is terribly shaken but remains a model of piety and an example of complete surrender to God’s providence.

Second test (2:1-10)

Satan appears again and God points out that Job has not wavered in his righteousness. Satan insists that should Job suffer physically, then his righteousness will evaporate and he will curse God (2:5). God consents to this test and Job is struck with a terrible, disfiguring skin disease. Now even Job’s wife says that he should simply go ahead and **“curse God and die”** (2:10). Job refuses, declaring his complete abandonment to divine providence (2:10).

Dialogue (3-42:6)

At this point three friends arrive to sit with Job and commiserate with him in silence. Ash-covered and sore-ridden, Job finally rises and curses the day of his birth. Job insists he is innocent and that his suffering is far greater than his faults deserve. Job speaks of Leviathan, a creature of ancient mythology. Does this faithful Jew believe in mythical creatures? More likely Job was using familiar names symbolizing evil and chaos which his readers would have understood. Job is not accusing God of being unjust, but that he simply cannot understand why God is sending him these sufferings.

One by one Job’s three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zohar) take a turn at intervention. At first Eliphaz speaks gently, inviting Job to admit his own fault and beg God’s forgiveness (4). Eliphaz acknowledges that while Job has himself been a great counselor, who has “instructed many,” no

one, not even angels, is righteous before God (4:3). Therefore Job should not be embarrassed to confess his sin (4:17-19). He tells Job that God's discipline—Job's suffering—should be seen as for his own good. But Job rejects Eliphaz' reasoning; that his suffering exceeds ordinary misfortunes.

By chapter fifteen Eliphaz abandons his gentle approach and accuses Job of being arrogant and stubborn (15:2-11). Finally, Eliphaz recalls the terrible fate of a wicked man he knew, making the point that that man's fate is strikingly similar to Job's; that Job should admit to whatever sin he has committed (15:17-35). By chapter twenty-two Eliphaz outright accuses Job of wickedness: overcharging his own relatives on loans, stripping clothes off the backs of the poor, and withholding food, drink, and other assistance from the destitute (22:5-9). Eliphaz insists that God's judgment is surely justified and Job should repent.

Job's final plea for divine justice (26-31)

In the end, Job's friends despair of changing his mind and fall silent. Job breaks the silence with a series of soliloquies or monologues, including a short oration mimicking his accusers. As if in a courtroom, Job utters a lengthy oath swearing his innocence of even the most subtle sins, such as prurient glances at young women, privately gloating over the downfall of personal enemies, or failure to confess sin in fear of public embarrassment (31). Then Job makes a dramatic plea accompanied by another oath: that the Judge hear his case and acquit him (31:35). Will God, Who has been silent thus far, hear the summons and answer Job?

Elihu's speeches and the mysteries of God (32-37)

While Job's oath hangs in the air, a young man named Elihu, unmentioned up to this point, interjects with a lengthy monologue. He says that he has remained silent until then to allow the older three friends to speak. But now he is frustrated with both Job and his friends; frustrated with Job's apparent arrogance in presuming to stand in judgment of God's actions, and frustrated with the three friends for being unable to refute Job's arguments effectively.

In the end, while Job's friends try to convince Job to repent of personal sins, Elihu tries to persuade Job that God's grace and wisdom are far beyond human comprehension and, therefore, Job cannot possibly pass judgment on God's justice. The implication is that to evaluate the justice of God, one must have knowledge of the workings of the universe. Human beings can never judge God because they do not possess the mind of God. Finally, Yahweh Himself enters into the discussion—and on Job's side. Now Job cannot find words; he feels so insignificant (42:2-6).

The divine speeches: God breaks his silence (38-42)

Appearing in a whirlwind, the Lord does not answer Job's questions directly but instead poses questions to him. In His first speech God questions Job about the creation and governance of the natural world, to show that Job has neither the wisdom nor the power to create and govern the cosmos. God is saying that Job cannot judge God's justice or providence.

In the second divine speech God presses further, asking Job whether he can control the malevolent beasts as God does. These two creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan, embody the forces of evil. God is asking if Job if he can control the forces of chaos and evil. In response, Job acknowledges his insufficiency, and that he had been presuming to judge God when he had neither the wisdom nor the power to do so (42:3).

Epilogue: the restoration of Job and his happy death (42:7-17)

Although Job admits he was foolish for questioning God's justice, in the end God passes judgment on Job's *friends* and vindicates Job. God says that the three friends “**have not spoken of me what is my right, as my servant Job has**” (42:7). Now the Lord's forgiveness of Job's friends depends on Job's intercessory prayer for them.

The central struggle for Job during his suffering is not the loss of his children and property, horrible and tragic as they are, but the experience of being alienated from God. It is this sense of being abandoned by God that draws out Job's deepest longing, as we read in the Book of Psalms: **"When shall I come in to behold the face of God"** (Psalm 42:2).

Finally everyone is forgiven and reconciled. God then restores Job's material prosperity to twice what it was before: blessing of wealth, children, long life and peace (42:17).

The moral is: God is not accountable to His creatures because man cannot grasp the mysterious ways of divine providence. God does not bestow earthly blessings simply according to one's merits. Everlasting reward is in the life to come. Therefore if God sometimes permits suffering to afflict the blameless, His purpose is to train him in the virtues in order to make his merits shine and become fit for the Kingdom.

Conclusion and summary

The Book of Job is a drama based on the life of a holy man in antiquity whose righteous suffering becomes legendary. The problem of evil and God's justice are the central issues. The book rejects the view that all suffering and evil are the direct result of personal sin, proposing instead that sometimes evil is a test of the integrity of the relationship between God and man. The book ultimately asserts that human beings are never in a position to judge God's justice or His reasons for permitting evil. To take all into account is beyond our capacity. Therefore humble trust in the midst of suffering, modeled by Job, is the best approach to the reality of evil in the world.

The Book of Job represents the best treatment of the problem of evil prior to the revelation of Jesus Christ. For the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ mark the definitive advance in man's ability to understand the role of suffering and evil within the plan of salvation. While the Christ's Resurrection, the afterlife and a final vision of God may be dimly seen in Job, these realities are fully revealed in the New Testament.

The Psalms: 1-72

The Psalms: the prayer of a believing people (1-72)

The Psalter (all 150 psalms) is the most treasured collection of religious songs used for centuries by the people of Israel. Originally many of the psalms were royal songs to honor the king. Tradition confirms that psalms, hymns and Canticles (songs) were sung in the synagogues. They "articulate" the teaching of the Old Testament and reflect the consciousness of an essentially believing people who, in spite of a troubled history, stayed faithful to God.

Much of the book was composed by King David, referred to as the **"sweet singer of Israel"** (2 Samuel 23:1). Some of the psalms are unattributed and others were composed by Asaph (Levitical singers in the tradition of King David's chief musician, Asaph, 1 Chronicles 16:5); others by the Sons of Korach, Moses' cousin (**"And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice,"** 2 Chronicles 20:19), and finally by King Solomon and Moses himself.

In the Gospel of Matthew psalms and hymns are sung after the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30). Some psalms were initially used outside the liturgy. For example, King David's Psalm 51 (the "Miserere") asks God's forgiveness for his sins. In time the psalms were brought into the liturgy and used as prayers by Israel. Other psalms were a kind of "catechism" formulated as prayer to preserve the knowledge and worship of the true God.

Because the Jewish people were always at risk of being tempted into idolatry by her neighbors, the psalms reaffirm their belief in one God—God Who is Creator, Judge and King of the universe. The psalms speak of God Who regulates the course of history. He is infinite, almighty and in need of nothing. His only purpose is His own glory. God has no rivals.

Although God is transcendent and invisible, He continually reveals Himself through His works and thus His attributes of holiness, goodness, justice, mercy, power and truth. Over one hundred times the psalms stress that God's mercy is always connected with God's faithfulness to His promises as Father. In this way the psalms for centuries nourished Israel's prayer. Through the inspired author God wanted to teach them to trust Him and abandon themselves to Him.

The psalms were also recited by Jesus and Mary, by the apostles and the first Christian martyrs. For centuries the Church has mandated them to be recited five times daily by priests and religious in the four-volume *Liturgy of the Hours*. Praying with the psalms Christians praise and thank God for revealing His inner life through His Son, Who by His death on the Cross has redeemed us, made us children of God and now blesses us with the Holy Spirit for our sanctification. This is the reason each recitation of the psalms concludes with the Trinitarian doxology glorifying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The messianic hopes about which the Psalmist sang have been realized. The Messiah has come; He reigns, and all nations are called to praise Him.

Why are the Psalms numbered differently in various Bibles?

Different Bibles have a slightly different numbering of the psalms because there are actually two ancient versions of the psalms. The psalms were originally written in Hebrew and used by the people of Israel. However two centuries after the Babylonian Exile, fewer Jews living in Israel could read Hebrew, and even fewer Jews living outside of Palestine understood it. In response, biblical scholars translated the Hebrew Scriptures into the more common Greek. This translation became the Bible for Jews living in the Roman empire at the time of Jesus and was the Bible used by the writers of the New Testament. Thus when New Testament writers quote the Old Testament, they are quoting the Greek Scripture translation of the Hebrew Bible. The reason the numbering of the psalms is different for different Bibles is because some Bibles follow the Hebrew numbering system and others follow the Greek. Most Catholic Bibles use the Hebrew numbering of the 150 psalms divided into five books, but note the Greek numbering in parentheses.

Book 1 – Introduction and the laments of King David (1-41)

Psalms 1-41 are mostly written by David and focus on God's ability to save those who fear Him. Psalms 1 and 2 introduce the entire collection of psalms, and are united by the theme of "blessed" or "happiness" (1:1; 2:12). That is, the way to achieve true happiness is by meditating on God's law (1:2) or by taking refuge in the Lord and his "anointed one" (2:12). In the psalms that follow begs for God's protection and asks for help against his enemies. Although there are hymns and thanksgiving psalms (8, 18, 28, 31), the mood of this collection is essentially a lament, especially in the beginning (3-7) and end (38-41). In sum, these psalms present the sufferings and trials of David at the hands of his enemies. Yet David is still confident of salvation even though he is still being persecuted and not yet delivered by the hand of God.

Book 2 – The triumphs of David (42-72)

Psalms 42-72 focus on God as mighty Judge and King. God is the executor of justice upon all nations, and the rescuer of those who delight in Him. Psalms 51-72 culminate in a glorious psalm about King Solomon's coronation (or perhaps its commemoration). Psalms 42-50 are significant because they were likely written not by David but by Levitical singers that David had appointed to serve the Jerusalem Temple. Few of these Psalms end with a plea for assistance than simply give praise. The end of psalms 42-72 may reflect upon David as he nears death, expressing hope for resurrection (71:9-20). Psalm 71 invokes the blessing of a glorious reign upon David's son and heir, Solomon. Finally, while in Book 1, David is crying out to God in distress, in Book 2, there is greater emphasis on the glories of David's rule and the transfer of the kingdom to Solomon.