

# JOB'S RESPONSE TO MISERY

## *Introduction*

**PRIMING THE PUMP: Why do bad things happen to good people?**

### References

1. *Job, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Marvin H. Pope, Professor of Northwest Semitic Languages, Yale University, 1965
2. *Job, A New Translation*, Edward L. Greenstein, Professor Emeritus of Bible, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, 2019

**Why do we speak of the patience of Job?**

1. "You have heard of the patience of Job." James 5:11 (KJV)
  - a. But Job was anything but patient
  - b. "Let the day perish in which I was born" (Job 3:3)
  - c. "Why did I not die at birth?" (Job 3:11)
2. "You have heard of the endurance of Job." James 5:11 (NRSV)

### Background

1. The book of Job probably took its final form during the Persian period
2. The prologue (Chapters 1-2) and epilogue (42:7-17) may have been part of an ancient folktale
3. The Elihu speeches (Chapters 32-37) were probably added by a later editor
4. The prologue and epilogue are prose; most of the book is poetry
5. Hebrew poetry is not about meter and rhyme, but about parallelism
  - a. Synonymous parallelism  
"May my teaching drop like the rain,  
My speech condense like the dew." Deuteronomy 32:2
  - b. Antithetic parallelism  
"A wise son delights a father;  
But a foolish son is a mother's grief." Proverbs 10:1
  - c. Many other types of parallelism

### The Characters

1. Job, a righteous man with a wife and ten children
2. His "friends," Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar
3. A young man named Elihu
4. God
5. The Satan (*The Accuser*; Hebrew *ha-satan*)

### Structure of the Book

1. Prologue (Chapters 1-2)
  - a. Written in prose
  - b. Possibly, with the Epilogue, from an ancient folk tale
  - c. We learn about the characters and the reason for Job's misery

2. Dialogue or Symposium (Chapters 3-31)
  - a. Written in poetry
  - b. Job and his friends debate the cause of his afflictions
  - c. Not much of a dialogue
  - d. Some of the verses seem to be out of order
3. The Elihu Speeches (Chapters 32-37)
  - a. Written in poetry, except for the introduction (32:1-5)
  - b. The placement of this section is problematic
  - c. May have been added by a later editor
  - d. Elihu attempts to achieve what Job's friends were unable to do
4. Theophany (Chapters 38-42:6)
  - a. Written in poetry
  - b. As a voice from a whirlwind, God answers Job
5. Epilogue (Chapter 42:7-17)
  - a. Written in prose
  - b. Job's fortunes are restored

#### Literary Antecedents

1. Egyptian text, 2100 BCE (?)
  - a. A debate of a man with his soul as to the expediency of suicide
  - b. Solace in the life beyond was not available to the author of Job
2. Egyptian "Tale of the Eloquent Peasant," 1900 BCE (?)
  - a. A peasant is mistreated and robbed by a vassal of the Chief Steward
  - b. He risks his life by appealing to the Chief Steward himself
  - c. The issue here is social justice, not divine justice
3. Sumerian poem (fragments excavated at Nippur)
  - a. A man who had been prosperous and healthy is afflicted with disease and pain
  - b. Instead of berating his god, he pleads for mercy
4. Akkadian "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom," a. k. a., "The Babylonian Job"
  - a. A thanksgiving hymn for deliverance from misery
  - b. The hero is smitten with disease and forsaken by all
  - c. Prayers to Marduk result in healing

#### POINTS TO PONDER

Job had extraordinary faith in God, but it could also be said that God had extraordinary faith in Job. In what ways might the faith between humankind and God be a two-way street? What does that mean for us today?