

JOB: WHEN LIFE JUST ISN'T FAIR

(Danny Hays in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook*)

In Proverbs we learn that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. Most of us like this theology of Proverbs because it presents us with a world that makes sense, a world in which all events have logical causes, a world that runs by tight rules of fair play. And indeed, much of the time the world is that way. But occasionally we are slapped in the face with some great incongruity of life, something that is just not fair or just not right, something that contradicts Proverbs. A two-year-old child of godly parents is killed in a car wreck, or the most righteous and giving person we know comes down with terminal cancer. These events rattle our faith and leave us searching futilely for answers that make sense. Why do these things happen?

The story of Job grapples with this issue and provides us with insight on how to cope with these difficult questions of life.

What Is the Setting for Job?

There is nothing in the book of Job that tells us specifically who wrote the book or when it was written. On the one hand, there is no mention of anything from Israel's history that would assist us in determining a date for the book. The actual setting of the story appears to be quite ancient, perhaps during the patriarchal period, well before the settlement of Israel in the land. On the other hand, the book of Job appears to allude to other parts of Scripture (Genesis 1–3 and Psalm 8, for example), and the friends of Job seem to espouse a theology developed from Proverbs and Deuteronomy. This tends to point to a later date, at least for the composition of the book. A plausible setting for the composition of Job is during the reign of either Solomon (971–931 BC) or Hezekiah (716–687 BC), since both were very interested in wisdom literature. Yet no one really knows for sure.

What Is at the Heart of Job?

The book of Job is not a list of theological statements that can be taken individually as doctrinal statements. It is a story. This story has a few narrative sections, most notably at the beginning and at the end, but most of the story is told through dialogue. The context of each dialogue is important, and each statement must be placed in the overall context of the book. The point of the story, as with most stories, doesn't really emerge until the end of the book.

The book of Job deals with the difficult question of how we as wise, godly people are to handle great tragedies in our lives that seem to be unfair or without any logical explanation. There are four interrelated theological conclusions emerging from the book of Job: (1) God is sovereign and we are not; (2) God knows all about the world, while we actually know very little; (3) God is always just, but he does not always explain his justice to us; and (4) God expects us to trust in his character and his sovereignty when unexplained tragedy strikes us.



The story of Job unfolds according to the following outline:

- The Testing of Job: An Unexplained Tragedy (1:1–2:10)
- The Search for Answers and the Slide into Accusation (2:11–37:24)
 - Job curses the day he was born (3:1–26)
 - Job and his three friends search for answers (4:1–26:14)
 - Job accuses God of injustice (27:1–31:40)
 - Elihu's hot-air speeches (32:1–37:24)
- God's Verbal Response to Job (38:1–42:6)
- God's Restoration of Job (42:7–17)

What Makes Job Interesting and Unique?

- Job is one of the few Old Testament books in which Satan actually appears.
- Job deals with one of the most troubling questions of life: why do bad things happen to good people?
- God himself appears in this book, both at the beginning and at the end.
- Toward the end, God delivers two long speeches to Job.
- When God speaks to Job, he speaks in highly polished Hebrew poetry.
- Job challenges the way God runs the world; God rebukes him mildly and gently.
- God never actually tells Job what caused his time of affliction.

