Job

Daniel J. Estes

Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton

General Editors

Rosalie de Rosset

Associate Editor

BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2013 by Daniel J. Estes
Illustrating the Text sections © 2013 by Baker Publishing Group

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Estes, Daniel J., 1953-
Job / Daniel J. Estes.
p. cm. — (Teach the text commentary series)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8010-9206-0 (cloth)
1. Bible. O.T. Job.—Commentaries. I. Title.
BS1415.53.E88 2013
223′.107—dc23 2012040326

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2007.

Scripture quotations labeled NJPS are from the New Jewish Publication Society Version © 1985 by The Jewish Publication Society. All rights reserved.

The internet addresses in this book are accurate at the time of publication. They are provided as a resource. Baker Publishing Group does not endorse them or vouch for their content or permanence.

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

To Rev. George Hattenfield:
faithful pastor,
wise mentor,
and beloved friend,
who through forty-two years of ministry
at Clintonville Baptist Church and Linworth Baptist Church
has demonstrated what it means
to shepherd the flock of God.

1 Peter 5:1–4
Luke 6:40

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Contents

Welcome to the Teach the Text Commentary Series ix
Introduction to the Teach the Text Commentary Series xi
Abbreviations xiii

Introduction to Job 1
Job 1 8
Adversity of a Righteous Man
Job 2 14
Turning Up the Pressure
Job 3 20
Job Shatters the Silence
Job 4 26
How Eliphaz Explains Job's Adversity
Job 5 32
Eliphaz Thinks He Knows the Answer
Job 6 38
Job's Frustration with His Friends
Job 7 44
Job's Complaint to God
Job 8 50
Bildad Has the Answer (He Thinks!)
Job 9 56
Job Considers a Legal Dispute with God
Job 10 62
What Job Wants to Tell God
Job 11 68
Zophar Rejects Job's Complaints
Job 12 74
Job Presents Evidence against the Retribution Principle
Job 13 80
Job Turns to Speak to God
Job 14 86
Job Tries to Hope, but Ends Up in Despair
Job 15 92
Eliphaz Turns Up His Criticism of Job
Job 16 98
Job Feels under Attack by God
Job 17 104
Job Finds No Hope in Life or in Death
Job 18 110
Bildad Again Beats the Retribution Drum
Job 19 116
Job's Hope against Hope
Job 20 122
Zophar's Final Words for Job
Job 21 128
Job Destroys the Friends' Major Argument
Job 22 134
Eliphaz Condemns and Counsels Job
Job 23 140
Job Feels Both Confidence and Terror
Job 24 146
Job Asks Why God Allows Sin to Continue Unpunished

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Job 25 152
Bildad's Final Attempt to Answer Job
Job 26 158
Job Hears the Whispers of God's Works
Job 27 164
Job Speaks in Place of Zophar
Job 28 170
But Where Can Wisdom Be Found?
Job 29 176
Job Recalls the Good Old Days
Job 30 182
From the Heights of Honor to the Depths of Humiliation
Job 31 188
Job's Final Oath of Innocence
Job 32 194
Elihu Makes His Appearance
Job 33 200
Elihu Urges Job to Listen
Job 34 206
Elihu Argues That God Always Acts Justly
Job 35 212
Elihu Describes God as Too Distant and Detached to Listen to Job
Job 36 218
Elihu Points to the Corrective Benefit of Suffering
Job 37 224
Elihu Finishes with a Flourish
Job 38 230
Yahweh Speaks as the Master Teacher
Job 39 236
Yahweh Asks Job about Animals
Job 40 242
Yahweh Directs Job's Attention to Behemoth
Job 41 248
Yahweh Points Job to Leviathan
Job 42 254
Job Comes to a Good End

Notes 261
Bibliography 263
Image Credits 265
Contributors 266
Index 267

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Welcome to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

Why another commentary series? That was the question the general editors posed when Baker Books asked us to produce this series. Is there something that we can offer to pastors and teachers that is not currently being offered by other commentary series, or that can be offered in a more helpful way? After carefully researching the needs of pastors who teach the text on a weekly basis, we concluded that yes, more can be done; this commentary is carefully designed to fill an important gap.

The technicality of modern commentaries often overwhelms readers with details that are tangential to the main purpose of the text. Discussions of source and redaction criticism, as well as detailed surveys of secondary literature, seem far removed from preaching and teaching the Word. Rather than wade through technical discussions, pastors often turn to devotional commentaries, which may contain exegetical weaknesses, misuse the Greek and Hebrew languages, and lack hermeneutical sophistication. There is a need for a commentary that utilizes the best of biblical scholarship but also presents the material in a clear, concise, attractive, and user-friendly format.

This commentary is designed for that purpose—to provide a ready reference for the exposition of the biblical text, giving easy access to information that a pastor needs to communicate the text effectively. To that end, the commentary is divided into carefully selected preaching units, each covered in six pages (with carefully regulated word counts both in the passage as a whole and in each subsection). Pastors and teachers engaged in weekly preparation thus know that they will be reading approximately the same amount of material on a week-by-week basis.

Each passage begins with a concise summary of the central message, or "Big Idea," of the passage and a list of its main themes. This is followed by a more detailed interpretation of the text, including the literary context of the passage, historical background material, and interpretive insights. While drawing on the best of biblical scholarship, this material is clear, concise, and to the point. Technical material is kept

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

to a minimum, with endnotes pointing the reader to more detailed discussion and additional resources.

A second major focus of this commentary is on the preaching and teaching process itself. Few commentaries today help the pastor/teacher move from the meaning of the text to its effective communication. Our goal is to bridge this gap. In addition to interpreting the text in the "Understanding the Text" section, each six-page unit contains a "Teaching the Text" section and an "Illustrating the Text" section. The teaching section points to the key theological themes of the passage and ways to communicate these themes to today's audiences. The illustration section provides ideas and examples for retaining the interest of hearers and connecting the message to daily life.

The creative format of this commentary arises from our belief that the Bible is not just a record of God's dealings in the past but is the living Word of God, "alive and active" and "sharper than any double-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12). Our prayer is that this commentary will help to unleash that transforming power for the glory of God.

The General Editors

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Introduction to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

This series is designed to provide a ready reference for teaching the biblical text, giving easy access to information that is needed to communicate a passage effectively. To that end, the commentary is carefully divided into units that are faithful to the biblical authors' ideas and of an appropriate length for teaching or preaching.

The following standard sections are offered in each unit.

1. *Big Idea*. For each unit the commentary identifies the primary theme, or "Big Idea," that drives both the passage and the commentary.
2. *Key Themes*. Together with the Big Idea, the commentary addresses in bullet-point fashion the key ideas presented in the passage.
3. *Understanding the Text*. This section focuses on the exegesis of the text and includes several sections.
   a. The Text in Context. Here the author gives a brief explanation of how the unit fits into the flow of the text around it, including reference to the rhetorical strategy of the book and the unit's contribution to the purpose of the book.
   b. Outline/Structure. For some literary genres (e.g., epistles), a brief exegetical outline may be provided to guide the reader through the structure and flow of the passage.
   c. Historical and Cultural Background. This section addresses historical and cultural background information that may illuminate a verse or passage.
   d. Interpretive Insights. This section provides information needed for a clear understanding of the passage. The intention of the author is to be highly selective and concise rather than exhaustive and expansive.
   e. Theological Insights. In this very brief section the commentary identifies a few carefully selected theological insights about the passage.

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

4. *Teaching the Text*. Under this second main heading the commentary offers guidance for teaching the text. In this section the author lays out the main themes and applications of the passage. These are linked carefully to the Big Idea and are represented in the Key Themes.
5. *Illustrating the Text*. Here the commentary provides suggestions of where useful illustrations may be found in fields such as literature, entertainment, history, or biography. They are intended to provide general ideas for illustrating the passage's key themes and so serve as a catalyst for effectively illustrating the text.

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Abbreviations

b.	born	NASB	New American Standard Bible
ca.	circa	NIV	New International Version
cf.	*confer*, compare	NJPS	*The Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*
chap(s).	chapter(s)	NKJV	New King James Version
e.g.	*exempli gratia*, for example	*T. Job*	*Testament of Job*
esp.	especially	v(v).	verse(s)
ESV	English Standard Version		
KJV	King James Version		
MT	Masoretic Text		

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Introduction to Job

Authorship, Date, and Setting

The book of Job does not identify its author or indicate the date when it was written. The story is set outside of Israel, likely in the land of Edom, so the historical narratives in the Old Testament cannot be used to determine specifically when the action occurred. In addition, the date when the book was composed may not have been the same as the literary setting of the action, because authors often set their texts in historical periods different from their own. Furthermore, the theme of suffering that dominates the book of Job is a common subject discussed by humans in every age.

Because of these uncertain factors, interpreters throughout history have arrived at a wide variety of opinions concerning who wrote this book and when.[1] The Jewish Babylonian Talmud attributes the book to Moses, but various rabbis suggest numerous other alternatives. The early church father Eusebius asserts that the book contains accurate transcripts of speeches that were recorded at the time they were spoken, which he believes was around the time of Abraham. Other interpreters have suggested dates throughout Israel's history, with some dating Job as late as the postexilic period (sixth century BC and later).

Many of the details in the book seem to fit best in the patriarchal age of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For instance, the old divine names El, Eloah, and Shaddai are used throughout most of the book. Also, Job's possessions closely resemble the holdings of the patriarchs, and his life span is comparable to theirs. However, the themes of the book of Job are related best to the Old Testament wisdom books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, as Job and his friends wrestle with the traditional wisdom teaching that God blesses the righteous but punishes the wicked.

When all these factors are considered together, it may be best to regard the book of Job as written by an unidentified wisdom teacher, likely during the period when

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

wisdom flourished in Israel, beginning in the time of Solomon (tenth century BC) and continuing at least through the time of Hezekiah in the eighth century BC (cf. Prov. 25:1). Making use of a story set in the ancient patriarchal period but outside of Israel, the writer addresses the age-old, universal issue of human suffering in the context of the infinite wisdom, authority, and righteousness of Yahweh.

Unity and Structure

Many interpreters of the book of Job have argued that it is composed of disparate texts that have been stitched together by one or more editors.[2] In particular, they claim that the portrayal of Job as a model of patience in the prose framework of the book clashes with the defiance of Job in the central, poetic section. Often, the poem praising wisdom in chapter 28 and the speeches of Elihu in chapters 32–37 are regarded as later additions, and some of the speeches in the third cycle (chaps. 22–27) are reconfigured and reassigned to different speakers.

It must be recognized, however, that the actual manuscript evidence supports the arrangement of the book as we now have it, and there is no textual data that corroborates the hypothetical reconstructions of Job. In fact, when the book of Job is read closely, it renders a coherent and profound development of thought. Following numerous examples in both ancient and more recent texts, the book of Job wraps a prose prologue and epilogue around an embedded poetic center. The prose framework refers to data in the poetry. The poetry assumes knowledge of the prologue, and its conflicts are resolved in the epilogue.

In the prologue (chaps. 1–2), Job's righteous character is repeatedly described by the narrator (1:1) and by Yahweh (1:8; 2:3). The challenge by the adversary about the motivation that prompts Job's righteous behavior is disclosed, as well as Yahweh's permission for the adversary to bring calamity into Job's experience in order to test the sincerity of his commitment to Yahweh. The adversary proceeds to wreak destruction on Job's possessions, family, and body.

The lengthy poetic section begins with Job's opening lament (chap. 3), and then his three friends try to explain to Job why he has experienced this adversity and what he needs to do to resolve his miserable condition. Job and the friends go through three

The landscape of the land of Edom, possible setting for the book of Job

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

rounds of speeches in chapters 4–27, with everyone becoming more agitated, so that at the end of the section their communication falls apart.

At this point, the narrator interjects a poem in praise of wisdom in chapter 28, which serves to refocus attention on the key theme of the fear of the Lord, the foundational principle of wisdom (see Prov. 9:10). Job then speaks in chapters 29–31, culminating with a challenge to God to answer him (31:35). A young man, Elihu, then unexpectedly speaks up in chapters 32–37, in a valiant but vain attempt to provide youthful insight where the older wisdom teachers have failed. Finally, Yahweh breaks his silence, in chapters 38–41. By posing more than seventy unanswerable questions to Job, Yahweh brings Job to the realization that although he is innocent of sin, he is ignorant of the ways of Yahweh. In the final chapter of the book, Job withdraws his legal claim against Yahweh, and then Yahweh restores Job's reputation, his fortune, and his family.

Literature

The writer of Job so masterfully combines grand themes with exquisite language and intricate structure that this book is rightfully regarded as one of the best literary texts ever written. It does not fit any specific literary type; rather, it combines the best of proverbs, hymns, laments, nature poetry, and legal rhetoric into a unique and brilliant composition.

A debated interpretive question for this book is its relationship to factual history. Does it record the literal account of the calamity that overwhelmed a man named Job at a specific time and place, along with transcripts of the actual words spoken by Job and his friends as they endeavored to come to terms with his tragedy? Or, rather, does the book communicate theological truth through the means of imaginative literature? Scholars who hold to the Bible as the inspired and inerrant Word of God have taken different positions on this issue.

The historicity of the book of Job must not be rejected on a priori grounds. The biblical references to Job in Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and James 5:11 refer to him just as a historical figure would be indicated. The question of the historical factualness of the book of Job, then, must be decided by a careful scrutiny of the textual data in the book.

The opening words in the book of Job are similar to the expressions in both 1 Samuel 1:1, which introduces the historical narrative of the birth of Samuel, and 2 Samuel 12:1, when Nathan begins to tell David an imaginary story about a poor man and his lamb that is stolen by his rich neighbor. The setting of the book is outside of Israel, in the land of Uz, and Job is not presented as a member of the covenant family. The narrator proceeds to describe Job and his initial situation in ideal terms, followed by a series of catastrophes that destroy virtually all that Job owns and loves. As Job and his friends dialogue about

Outline of Job

1. Prologue (1–2)
2. Dialogue: first cycle (3–14)
   a. Job (3)
   b. Eliphaz (4–5)
   c. Job (6–7)
   d. Bildad (8)
   e. Job (9–10)
   f. Zophar (11)
   g. Job (12–14)
3. Dialogue: second cycle (15–21)
   a. Eliphaz (15)
   b. Job (16–17)
   c. Bildad (18)
   d. Job (19)
   e. Zophar (20)
   f. Job (21)
4. Dialogue: third cycle (22–27)
   a. Eliphaz (22)
   b. Job (23–24)
   c. Bildad (25)
   d. Job (26–27)
5. Interlude (28)
6. Job (29–31)
7. Elihu (32–37)
8. Yahweh (38–41)
9. Epilogue (42)

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Job has been placed in the genre of wisdom literature. In order to understand Job more fully, scholars have looked for Mesopotamian parallels. The Mesopotamian text shown here, known as Ludlul bel Nemeqi ("I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom"), also features a pious, though not blameless, man who endures suffering and calamity yet praises his god.

his situation, they take turns speaking through three cycles, in language that seems to suggest conscious artistry rather than being the transcripts of real, extemporaneous responses. The resolution in the epilogue neatly addresses and rights many of the conflicts raised in the dialogue.

In the Bible, there are numerous examples of historical narratives that describe actual events in time and space, and this could be the case in the book of Job. On the other hand, there are also frequent uses of fictional stories, such as the parables that Jesus told in the Gospels, and Job could plausibly be read in that way. It is evident that in the Bible the Holy Spirit employed both historical narrative and imaginative literature to teach divine truth; what is not so clear is which kind of literature is represented in the book of Job.

Purpose

The book of Job does not state its purpose in explicit terms, but it does provide several clues about why it was written. Even a cursory reading of the book indicates that it is a supplement to wisdom teaching like that found in the book of Proverbs. The predominant theme of Proverbs is that Yahweh blesses those who are wise and righteous, but he punishes those who are foolish and wicked; this teaching is known as retribution theology. In Job, retribution theology is tested to see how far it can be legitimately applied. Job's friends insist that retribution is a fixed formula that applies to every case, so Job's suffering indicates that he must have sinned. Job is confused, because he is confident that he is innocent, and yet he is suffering terribly. A major purpose of the book of Job is to demonstrate that though retribution is true as a general pattern, Yahweh's sovereign rule of the world cannot be reduced to a rigid retribution formula.

This book is also written to teach that humans are limited in their knowledge of what Yahweh is doing. Most of the book is acted out on the earthly stage, as Job and his friends discuss his adversity and its probable cause. The reader, however, learns from the prologue that there is much more going on than the humans realize. Yahweh has clearly affirmed the righteous character of Job, and the adversary has accused Job of insincere motivations for his pious actions. At the end of the book, Job comes to the realization that what he knows as a human is minuscule compared with what the omniscient Yahweh knows, so Job yields to him.

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

The book of Job also reveals that Yahweh, as the Sovereign Lord, is free to act in ways that may seem surprising to humans. Even though his standard mode of operation is retribution, as taught in Proverbs, Yahweh is not bound by the retribution formula. He may allow a case like Job's, in which a righteous person suffers adversity, for purposes that are known only to him. On the other hand, Yahweh is also free to act in grace, granting blessing to those who deserve nothing but divine judgment.

The book of Job, then, serves to supplement the traditional wisdom taught in Proverbs by directing the reader to trust in Yahweh, even when he does not seem to act according to his standard pattern. Because Yahweh is righteous, he may be trusted to act according to his holy character. However, his knowledge surpasses what humans can understand, and he is free to act in ways that humans may not be able to comprehend with their finite perspective. Humans can trust Yahweh even when they cannot understand his mysterious ways.

Theme

In its themes, the book of Job touches upon many important subjects. One of its primary topics is the infinite wisdom of Yahweh, which transcends what humans are able to comprehend. Job and his friends discuss Job's condition as though they could understand how Yahweh governs his world. When Yahweh speaks to Job, however, his numerous unanswerable questions demonstrate that his knowledge far exceeds what any human can understand. The book of Proverbs discloses many features in Yahweh's world that are observable to humans, but the book of Job explains that beyond all that can be known there are vast areas that Yahweh knows perfectly but that remain mysterious for humans.

The book also amends retribution theology to account for Yahweh's transcendent knowledge and his sovereign freedom. The blessing that Yahweh restores to Job in the epilogue indicates that retribution is a valid general pattern of how Yahweh rules in his world. In the specific details, however, there are aspects of life in which retribution must not be pressed into a rigid and absolute formula. There are other factors at work that alter the typical pattern of cause and effect in life. For that reason, a good person like Job may suffer adversity, and evildoers may succeed, but Yahweh will bring things to a proper resolution in his own time, way, and purpose.

Although the book of Job does not formally address the problem of evil, which asks why innocent people suffer in a world governed by a God who is all-good and all-powerful, it does provide several insights that relate to the issue. The book teaches that suffering is not always attributable to personal sin. It also indicates that factors beyond human control can intrude, such as the suffering that Job experienced at the instigation of the adversary. Job's final response reveals that suffering can result in instruction and growth, as God brings good out of evil. Ultimately, the book of Job brings the reader to realize that the explanation for why good people suffer must be left in the realm of divine mystery, but that Yahweh can be trusted, even when humans cannot comprehend all of his ways.

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Works Based on the Book of Job

Many literary and art works have been based on and refer to the book of Job. Notable among them is the Pulitzer Prize–winning verse drama *J.B.* (1958) by Archibald MacLeish (1892–1982). MacLeish frighteningly recasts the sufferings of Job in the modern world. More crucially, MacLeish's attitude toward what he perceives to be the basic question involved—the question of why humans suffer—is one not confined to Old Testament tradition. MacLeish is not affirming traditional faith; he suggests that a new faith is needed, one that many people in the contemporary world find attractive. A comparison with *J.B.* could be used substantially throughout a study of Job to show the difference in perspective between the traditional view of Job taken in this commentary and MacLeish's. (*J.B.* has been specifically referenced a few times in the "Illustrating the Text" sections.)

A second literary work is a short story by William Humphrey (b. 1924) called "A Job of the Plains" (1965). This story tells Job's account from the perspective of an earthy, hardworking farmer named Dobbs. It contains irony and a touch of cynicism.

Finally, the renowned British poet William Blake (1757–1827) published a book of twenty-two engravings of the book of Job (*Illustrations of the Book of Job*, 1826). They are considered masterpieces.

Teaching and Preaching Job

When the book of Job is taught or preached, it should be communicated in a way that is true to its intended meaning. The book must be read as a complete unit, with the prose prologue and epilogue framing the poetic speeches in the main body of the work. The framework, reinforced by the narrator's interlude in chapter 28, provides the interpretive clues that enable the reader to evaluate what Job, the friends, and Elihu say. Yahweh's speeches are crucial for bringing Job and the present reader to an understanding of the transcendent divine knowledge and the mystery that humans must accept.

It is helpful to begin a study of Job with an overview of the book as a whole. The prologue should be analyzed in detail to provide an interpretive lens through which to view the rest of the book. As the speeches unfold in the long dialogue section, they should be related back to the synthesis of the book. If this is not done, then the faulty statements and arguments by Job and the other speakers can be wrongly taken as truth, when in fact a careful consideration of what the entire book teaches unmasks them.

The book of Job is primarily ancient poetry, which presents some significant challenges for the modern teacher or preacher. Poetry makes use of many figures of speech that may be difficult for the contemporary reader to grasp. A good tool for unlocking the meaning of the images in Job is the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (InterVarsity, 1998). The book of Job also alludes to many ancient customs that were understandable to its original audience but are unfamiliar to people today. Two useful guides to these topics are the *IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (InterVarsity, 2000), and the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Zondervan, 2009).[3]

It is also important to read the book of Job within its larger biblical context, because other passages of Scripture can fill in the picture that is only sketched in Job. While one must not read later New Testament teaching back into Job in uncritical ways (for example, turning Job's words in 19:25 into a clear anticipation of the resurrection of Christ, as in the famous aria in Handel's *Messiah*), it should be recognized that later passages in the Bible may well be relevant in explaining the significance of features in Job (for example, subsequent biblical revelation about the character and career of Satan

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

may illuminate the action narrated in Job 1–2). For assistance in understanding the wider theological dimensions of Job, a helpful resource is the *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (InterVarsity, 2008).[4]

The book of Job has too often been neglected in the teaching and preaching of the church. This is regrettable, because Job addresses important questions that people in the contemporary church are asking. Its powerful literature and compelling story combine to direct the reader to trust the Lord, who alone knows and controls all that affects the lives of humans in his world. This marvelous book is the word of God and by all means should be studied carefully and communicated clearly. The purpose of this commentary is to equip pastors, teachers, and students to do just that.

William Blake's drawing of Job and his family, plate 1 from the *Book of Job* (ca. 1825)

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Adversity of a Righteous Man

Big Idea *In the face of severe adversity, Job lives up to the Lord's confidence in his character.*

Understanding the Text

The Text in Context

Job 1 and 2 serve as a prologue for the book. The initial chapter introduces the protagonist, Job, as a man of exemplary character. Both the narrator (1:1) and Yahweh (1:8) describe Job as blameless, righteous, and God-fearing. The rest of the book is intended to be read with this introduction in mind. Under the intense pressure that he faces, Job will make some statements that sound harsh toward God, but the prologue makes it clear that Job is a profoundly righteous man.

Both the prologue (Job 1–2) and the epilogue (42:7–17) are written in prose, but the rest of the book is predominantly poetry. The prologue and epilogue, then, function as a literary and interpretive framework for this long and intricate book. In fact, without the prose framework, it would be difficult to read the rest of the book as a coherent story with a beginning, development, and resolution.

Historical and Cultural Background

The ancient Near Eastern religions outside of Israel were polytheistic, and most of these systems of thought pictured a divine council that made major decisions affecting humans.[1] Job 1 depicts a gathering of beings who are called "the sons of God," and this entourage includes a figure called the *satan*, a Hebrew term that refers to an adversary or accuser. Rather than being their equal, however, Yahweh is clearly presented as superior to the sons of God. They all have to answer to Yahweh, and they must work within the limits he places upon them. The *satan*, then, is not independent of Yahweh or equal to Yahweh; he is a heavenly creature subservient to the one true God.

Interpretive Insights

1:1 *This man was blameless.* Usually in the Old Testament when a major figure is introduced, his genealogy is traced. In the case of Job, however, it is his exemplary character that is prominent. In the first verse of the book the narrator describes Job in glowing terms: "This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil." Later, in 1:8 and 2:3, Yahweh repeats this description, affirming Job's impeccable character as a man of integrity and piety. As a sterling example of biblical wisdom, Job loves what Yahweh loves, and he avoids

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

what displeases Yahweh. This is not a claim that Job is morally perfect as Yahweh is perfect, but rather, within the bounds of human fallenness, the righteousness of Job is commended by Yahweh.

1:3 *He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.* By every tangible measure, Job is prosperous. When this description is read against the background of the book of Proverbs, Job is indeed living, at the very highest level, the good life that wisdom promises as a blessing from Yahweh (Prov. 10:22).

1:6 *Satan also came with them.* In the New Testament, Satan is the leader of the forces of evil who endeavors to thwart the will of God. Satan is portrayed as unsuccessfully trying to tempt Jesus (Matt. 4:1–11) and as resisting the rule of God (Rev. 12:9; 20:2, 7–8). Elsewhere in the Old Testament, aside from the references to Satan in 1 Chronicles 21:1 and Zechariah 3:1–2, the Hebrew term *satan* is translated as a descriptive expression (e.g., "adversary" in 1 Kings 5:4; "accuser" in Ps. 109:6) instead of as a personal name (Satan) for the enemy of God and his people.

In Job 1–2, the Hebrew expression includes the definite article before the term *satan*, which means an adversary, or in a legal context, an accuser. Because the *satan* here seems to be included in the heavenly group of the sons of God, many scholars have concluded that this is a member of Yahweh's assembly who does not maliciously assault Job but rather only expresses doubt about God's policy of rewarding righteousness. In this view, he functions as a prosecuting attorney who raises concerns about Job's motives in being pious before God.

Key Themes of Job 1

- Yahweh commends Job's righteous pattern of life.
- The adversary questions Job's motives behind his practices.
- Job's adversity is caused by factors well beyond his control.
- Job responds to his calamity with deep pain but also with unshaken commitment to Yahweh.

This could be true, but one should also consider that the same Hebrew term is used frequently in Old Testament narratives and in the Psalms to refer to enemies who make verbal accusations against the righteous. Also, of the thirty-four New Testament references to Satan, twenty-eight use the definite article when they speak of him (e.g., in Rev. 20:2, 7, when the Lord defeats his ancient enemy, Satan, and binds him for one thousand years). In the Old Testament, the definite article is also sometimes used in this fashion, as for example when "the God" refers to God or "the baal" refers to the Canaanite deity Baal. In view of this, there appears to be significant evidence for viewing the adversary in Job as an antagonist to Yahweh and his servant Job.

1:9 *Does Job fear God for nothing?* When Yahweh points out Job's exemplary life, the adversary suggests that Job may be using Yahweh to get the material blessings he wants. Unstated, but perhaps hinted implicitly, is that Yahweh may be using Job to get the worship he craves from humans. If this is the case, then the adversary is making an accusation concerning the motivation that prompts Job's apparently exemplary piety.

1:10–11 *Have you not put a hedge around him?* The Bible often speaks about how God is the protector of his people (cf.

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Pss. 91; 121). Here, the adversary asks a question about the motivation for Job's piety, and then he boldly charges that if Yahweh were to remove this hedge from Job and allow Job's perfect life to be touched by calamity, then Job's worship would morph into cursing. Interestingly, the Hebrew term that the adversary uses for "curse" typically has the opposite meaning, "bless"; the same term also has the meaning "curse" in 1:5, when Job offers sacrifices for his children in case they have sinned and *cursed* God in their hearts.

1:12 *everything he has is in your power.* Because Yahweh alone is God and the supreme sovereign over all, he could reject the adversary's challenge outright. As a created being, the adversary is not Yahweh's equal and he cannot compel Yahweh to do anything. Yahweh, however, does not duck the challenge but allows the adversary to touch Job's possessions. At this time, Yahweh prohibits the adversary from afflicting Job's body. Job is totally unaware of this heavenly conversation that prompts the calamity that is to follow.

1:13–19 *I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!* Narrative literature in the Old Testament typically focuses on action and dialogue rather than description, which is certainly the case in Job 1:13–19. In this episode, the report of Job's adversity sounds like a newscast giving the stark facts of the calamity and omitting any reference to Job's feelings in the face of this immense human tragedy. The scene shifts from heaven (1:12) to earth (1:13–19) as four servants come to Job in rapid succession, each with devastating news. In just a few moments Job is reduced from riches to rags, from delight to disaster, from celebration to sorrow. Job knows nothing of the conversation in heaven between Yahweh and the adversary. All he can see is the devastation of his livelihood and his family. If the adversary is correct, then Job's faith in Yahweh will soon collapse as well. On the other hand, if Job's pious behavior is truly rooted in his heart, then his faith in Yahweh will survive amid the rubble of his experience.

1:20–22 *Then he fell to the ground in worship.* Job's response to this profound calamity is twofold. Feeling the full force of grief, he tears his clothing and shaves off his hair, which are customary rites of mourning in the ancient world (cf. Gen. 37:34; Isa. 15:2; Jer. 7:29). At the same time, Job also falls to the ground and humbly worships God. All that he owns has been given by Yahweh rather than gained by his own efforts, and all that he has just lost has been taken away by Yahweh rather than merely by the secondary agents who have inflicted damage on him. He

In 1:17, among the calamities that befall Job are the loss of his camels and the death of his servants by Chaldean raiding parties. This Assyrian relief shows a woman and a herd of camels seized during one of Tiglath-Pileser's military campaigns (central palace at Nimrud, 728 BC).

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

concludes by blessing Yahweh, not by cursing him as the adversary predicted in 1:11. The narrator puts a final exclamation point on Job's response: "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing" (1:22).

Theological Insights

Only on rare occasions does the Bible part the curtains so that the reader can catch a glimpse of what is happening behind the scenes of human history. In Ephesians 6:12, Paul says that Christians struggle against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly realms. The prophet Elisha prays in 2 Kings 6:17 that Yahweh will open the eyes of his servant to see the invisible divine forces protecting Elisha. Daniel 10 speaks of angelic conflict that affects the success of nations.

Although the book of Job may have been written as an imaginative parable rather than as literal historical narrative (see the discussion in the introduction), in either case the reference to the adversary in Job 1–2 may be compared to other biblical passages. If the adversary is a member of the divine council who assists Yahweh in the governance of his world, then he plays a role comparable to the spirit in 1 Kings 22:19–23. On the other hand, if his actions toward Job are malicious, then the concept of the adversary here could be viewed as a precursor to a more fully formed understanding of Satan, whose activity as the accuser of God's people is developed explicitly in the New Testament (Rev. 12:9–10).

Teaching the Text

Even though every person faces a unique set of circumstances, adversity is an experience that runs throughout human history. Some people face medical problems; for others the challenge may be financial, psychological, or interpersonal. Sooner or later, everyone experiences pain. The story of Job resonates with us, because Job walked down the same path of adversity that all humans do. Like Job, we too find ourselves asking why bad things happen in a world in which the good God is in control.

The book of Job sets the scene in chapter 1 by narrating how in the face of severe adversity Job lives up to the Lord's confidence in his character. Job's good character is evidenced by his righteous patterns of life. Both the narrator (1:1) and Yahweh (1:8) describe Job in glowing terms. Even though Job's wealth is impressive, that is not the focus. Rather, his résumé highlights his character more than his possessions, a stark difference from how our contemporary culture measures success and value. In his patterns of life Job demonstrates integrity, commitment to God's moral standards, reverence for God, and an aversion to evil, which in the Old Testament wisdom literature are the essential components of the wise and righteous life.

As the adversary questions God's policy of rewarding righteousness, he also calls into question Job's motives. Many people are interested in appearing generous, kind, thoughtful, and righteous, but they may be prompted by impure motives (compare Jesus's condemnation of practices done to be noticed by others [Matt. 6:1–6]). For example, a generous donation to charity may be given primarily for the tax benefit it provides. An apparently kind gesture may really be part of a marketing strategy to produce a sale. The adversary in the book

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

of Job argues that adversity will prove that Job's reputation for righteousness is only skin-deep, that it is not really Job's character at all but only his response to a flawed divine policy.

The adversities we experience can come from many sources. Some result from our own mistakes and choices. Others are beyond our personal control, such as many medical problems, financial issues caused by macroeconomic factors, or traffic accidents. The book of Job indicates that some adversities that humans experience may be rooted in cosmic issues that extend far beyond one's individual responsibility.

Job's initial response to his calamity reflects deep pain but also unshaken commitment to the Lord (1:21–22). Faith in God does not mean that we face pain with a stoic, unfeeling response. When adversity strikes our lives, we can and should feel the full extent of the pain. Faith does not deny pain, but rather it takes the pain to the Lord. The numerous psalms of lament, such as Psalms 3, 13, 22, 42, and 142, provide us examples of godly people expressing their deep pain to the Lord and then trusting him with their trouble. Like Job and the psalmists learned, our adversity can lead us into new frontiers in our knowledge of and confidence in the Lord.

Illustrating the Text

All humans face adversity in some form or another.

News Stories: Recent statistics about medical problems, financial difficulties, and natural disasters illustrate the principle that all people face adversity. The power of adversity to quickly reduce a person from prosperity to poverty was witnessed in the stock market crash of 1929, when wealthy people lost everything.

While reputation is often based on how one appears to others, character is what one is truly like.

Literature: *Sense and Sensibility*, by Jane Austen. In British writer Jane Austen's (1775–1817) first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Marianne Dashwood perceives John Willoughby as gallant, but in reality his actions prove him to be a man of poor character. Early on (chap. 10) she thinks of him, "When he was present she had no eyes for anyone else. Everything he did was right. Everything he said was clever." Another character, Elinor, finally notes, "The world had made him extravagant and vain—extravagance and vanity had made him cold-hearted and selfish. Vanity, while seeking its own guilty triumph at the expense of another, had involved him in a real attachment, which extravagance, or at least its offspring necessity, had required to be sacrificed. Each faulty propensity in leading him to evil, had led him likewise to punishment" (chap. 44).

Literature: *Paradise Lost*, by John Milton. The craft and malice of Satan are featured in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) on the grandest scale. In fact, Satan is so grand and larger-than-life in this epic that some critics have called him the hero of the poem, a contention C. S. Lewis seriously disputes in *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942). Nevertheless, few works anywhere so powerfully display Satan in all his demonic, fallen glory. Many passages bear reading; one suggestion would be from Book I, which describes

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

the fall of this huge, powerful being who chose to compete with God.

> Who first seduced them [Adam and Eve] to that foul revolt?
> Th' infernal Serpent; he it was, whose guile
> Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived
> The mother of mankind, what time his pride
> Had cast him out from Heav'n, with all his host
> Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring
> To set himself in glory above his peers
> He trusted to have equaled the Most High,
> If he opposed; and with ambitious aim
> Against the throne and monarch of God
> Raised impious war in Heav'n and battle proud
> With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power
> Hurled headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky
> With hideous ruin and combustion down
> To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
> In adamantine chains and penal fire,
> Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to arms.[2]

Art: Gustave Doré. French illustrator, sculptor, artist, and engraver Doré (1832–83) has illustrated *Paradise Lost*. Doré's images can reinforce the power of Satan to destroy and deceive.

Illustration of Satan being cast out of heaven (by Gustave Doré for John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 1866)

Daniel J. Estes, Job
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)