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## The Book of Job: A Drama of Supreme Faith

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the Book of Job as a work of literature and as a work of faith.



ANCIENT MOUND AT NINEVEH, SEEN FROM THE SOUTH AFTER CROSSING THE TIGRIS RIVER

Photo Underwood & Underwood

# THE

To bear with a valiant front the full brunt of every stroke and onset of Fate, were still the fairest and best of things. (From an ancient Arabian poem.)

**T**HOMAS CARLYLE once wrote:

I call the Book of Job one of the grandest things ever written with a pen. It is our first oldest statement of the never-ending problem—man's destiny and God's way with him here in this earth. There is nothing, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit. Job was a poet and sage who lived possibly after the downfall of Judah in the sixth century B.C. But the time matters little. He was truly a religious soul in ancient Israel and gave to the world what Victor Hugo called "The greatest masterpiece of the human mind."

The Book of Job is one of the greatest books of all time. Written centuries before Christ was born, it takes its place with the masterpieces of ancient days as well as those of today. It deals with the most profound problem of life—a problem which every living soul has thought about: "Why do the righteous suffer?" This question has been asked with passionate intensity by thinking men of every generation and race. The grandeur of the old Hebrew religion is its powerful idea of right and wrong, good and evil, which makes it the most spiritual and moral religion of its day. Some writers think that Job was a wealthy man of some Arabian tribe, who had influence and power. He may have been a Hebrew in exile, or may have lived in some vale of Palestine with his flocks and herds, and come in contact with the merchants of the Far East, as they brought their wares to the Mediterranean Sea by way of the old trade routes. He knew the tribes of the

desert and the cities of the plains, and had possibly seen the tombs and pyramids of Egypt, and knew the customs of the people of far-off India and China. A man of extensive learning, he could have known about the great libraries of Nineveh in Assyria and the extensive irrigation system of Babylon and Chaldea. The Book of Job shows him to have been a man of character and noble outlook on life—a religious man whose sole object was to work his way back to God.

He knew the arduous strife, the eternal laws to which the triumph of all good is given—high sacrifice, and labour without pause, even to the death.

Among his many possessions were fine horses and we imagine his driving his chariots down to Egypt and to other foreign countries. The horses of those days were large and strong if we judge them by the pictures shown on the old Assyrian sculptures and the description given in the thirty-ninth chapter of the Book of Job:

Hast thou given the horse his might?  
Hast thou clothed his neck with the quivering mane?

Hast thou made him to leap as a locust?  
The glory of his snoring is terrible.  
He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength.

He goeth out to meet the armed men.  
He mocketh at fear and is not dismayed;  
Neither turneth he back from the sword.  
He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage;

Neither standeth he still at the voice of the trumpet.

As oft as the trumpet soundeth he saith,  
Aha!

And he smelleth the battle far off,  
The thunder of the captains and the shouting.

## FROM WEALTH TO POVERTY

**T**URNING to the first chapter of Job, we read about the trials and sorrows that came to him. In words of pure eloquence, the tragedy of his life is seen.

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.

His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them.

And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.

And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?

Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?

Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the

# BOOK OF JOB

## *A Drama of Supreme Faith*

*By President Levi Edgar Young*

OF THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE SEVENTY

work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.

And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:

And there came a messenger unto Job, and said: The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them:

And the Sabeans fell upon them and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. . . .

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:

And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped.

And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.

In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

The old Judaic conventional idea of life was that virtue and goodness are rewarded by wealth and honor, while evil and wrong are punished by Jehovah. If a man suffered sickness or misfortune, he must be a sinner; if he enjoyed all the blessings of this life, he was good and virtuous. The poem of Job is a protest against this convention of theology. Job, a rich man and blessed with a large family, was suddenly stricken by misfortune. His sons and daughters perished in a storm, which wrecked the house where they were assembled; a thunderbolt destroyed his sheep; while his camels, oxen, and asses were carried off by robbers. He himself was smitten by leprosy, so that he became loathsome to his friends and even to his wife. His faith in God, however, was always steadfast. When he heard of his losses, he said: "The Lord giveth and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Even when his wife bade him curse his Maker, he replied: "What! Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall not receive evil?"

Job asked the Lord why he had to suffer. God did not explain, but he did give to the anguished spirit such a "sense of the divine greatness questioning ceased in the peace of submission." He did not answer the interrogation of the mind, but he satisfied the profound yearnings of the spirit. Job finally found out what life's true meaning is. In his sufferings he caught a vision of the power and wisdom of God. He found life by giving his life.

THREE of Job's friends come to visit him, for they had heard of his sorrows and trials. It is hardly worth while to individualize these men. While there were minor differences, they were all unanimous in the conviction that Job had committed some terrible crime and would not confess it. But in their words to Job, he was compelled to talk, to defend himself, and thus made the last chapters of the book a sort of spiritual autobiography. His thoughts are couched in words soaring and grand.

"From his first word to his last," says Dr. Alphonzo Smith, "he holds us in a sort of spell not merely because he speaks for us, but because he is endowed with a range and adequacy and wizardry of utterance beyond the reach of any mortal that ever traversed that dim region of half lights and tried to tell what he saw." Pain, grief, sorrow are given in words that stir the reader to the depths, and anyone who has become conversant with Christian literature will hold in his heart forever such sayings as:

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.

My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.

For I know that my redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.

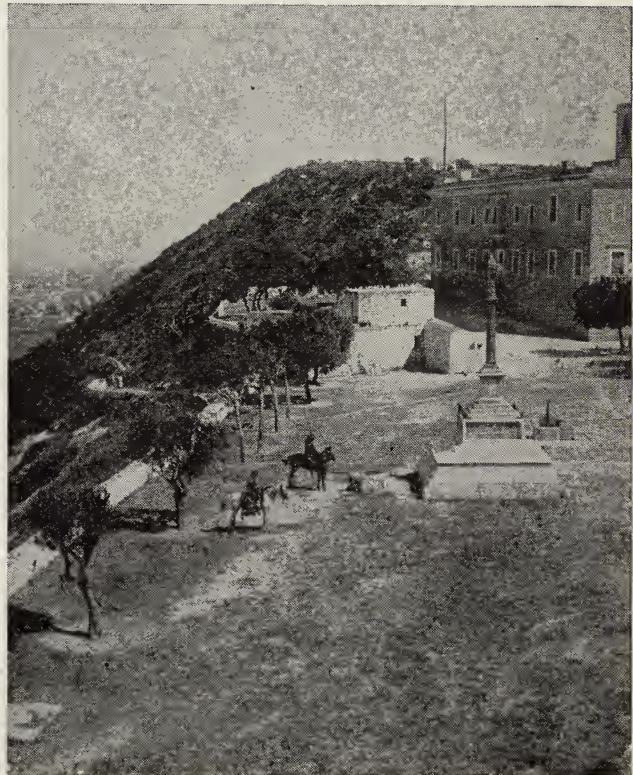
And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

But he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.

(Concluded on page 125)

HAIFA AND THE  
BAY OF AKKA,  
PALESTINE

Photo Underwood  
& Underwood



## BRIGHAM YOUNG'S DEED

Together with all the rights, and privileges, and appurtenances thereunto belonging or appertaining. I also covenant and agree that I am the lawful claimant and owner of said property, and will warrant and forever defend the same, unto the said Trustee-in-Trust, his successors in office and assigns, against the claims of my heirs, assigns, or any person whomsoever.

Brigham Young

Witnesses:

Daniel H. Wells  
Joseph Cain  
Albert Carrington

Territory of Utah  
County of Great Salt Lake

I, Elias Smith, judge of the Probate Court, for Great Salt Lake County, certify that the signer of the above transfer, personally known to me, appeared this eleventh day of April, A.D. 1855, and acknowledged that he of his own choice, executed the foregoing transfer.

E. Smith

## THE BOOK OF JOB

(Concluded from page 79)

Herein has Job reached the height. Each is a victory in itself and all together make a sort of system of faith triumphant. Job was alone, for even his friends had not understood him. Jesus often felt this same loneliness in his life, and looking forward he solemnly declared: "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." Job's loneliness was turned into a holy and blessed sacrament and his knowledge of life's problems was deep and comprehensive. He knew the oppression of the poor; he knew sorrow and trouble—"man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble." The eternal does not answer our insistent questions. God does not explain, but he does give to the anguished spirit a sense of the divine greatness when questions cease in the peace of submission. "He does not answer the interrogations of the mind, but he does satisfy the profound yearnings of the spirit."

WE come now to the sublimest part of the Book of Job, the speech of God out of the storm. "Nowhere in all the world's literature is there so majestic a picture of the glory of God." All nature is full of mystery, and yet it is all the part of divine providence. So are the moral mysteries of life a part of the same inscrutable divine providence. The final need is "To trust in God; believing where we cannot prove." In the end Job caught the vision of the power and wisdom of God. Divine love penetrates and binds together all human experience. "Through shadows to reality; through the temporal to the eternal—this is the meaning of all life greatly lived." The mind of Job became calm, and he discerned the ways of God which bring the righteous man safely home to him. He had suffered everything, and yet he knew that God lives, the all-loving God, who convinces Job of his mighty works:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,

Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

Who hath laid the measure thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?"

Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the corner stone thereof;

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?  
(Job 38.)

The Lord stood by Job and gave him comfort. Job had found God through his faith. Death and sorrow, sin and pain shrink into nothing if faith be fixed in the ways of God. Job was restored to health, and greater prosperity than ever before. He had more sons and daughters and lived to a good old age. The closing words of the book are its key and its culmination:

Then Job answered the Lord, and said,  
I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

Hear I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: But now mine eye seeth thee.

\* \* \* \*

Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold.

So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses.

He had also seven sons and three daughters.

And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Keren-happuch.

And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren.

After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations.

So Job died, being old and full of days.



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