

# JOB 1-3

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## **Job 1:1-5**

The narrative begins by telling us about Job's character and wealth. The scriptures describe Job as a man who has integrity ("perfect"), has a relationship with God ("fears God"), and avoids doing harm to others ("eschewed evil"). Job is a good person, and he seems to be well compensated for this. Although Job is a good person, the book as a whole teaches us that Job still has things to learn about life and particularly about his relationship with God. We get an idea of how Job sees his relationship with God in this section.

Job has been immensely blessed with both material possessions and a wonderful family. He hopes to prevent any kind of misfortune from befalling his family by constantly offering sacrifices. He hopes that his righteousness and his relationship with God will stop misfortune from happening in his children's lives, and by extension, his own. We can find this commendable since Job cares deeply about his children's welfare and knows that God is the only one who can ensure their safety. However, we can also see this as evidence that Job still has something to learn about life and about his relationship with God. Job assumes that his relationship with God will shield him and his family from misfortune as long as he is righteous. Job is in danger of treating his relationship with God as a transaction. Job's obedience also manifests an anxiety about uncertainty and possible suffering. The narrative describes Job as consumed with preventing anything bad that might happen in the future. By the end of the narrative, Job deals with both uncertainty and suffering and faces the future in a very different way.

## **Job 1:6-12**

After having introduced us to Job, the text shifts focus to God in His heavenly court. This heavenly court is often referred to by scholars as the divine council. This council is composed of the "sons of God," who

help God govern the earth. Throughout the Old Testament, the sons of God are described in ambivalent ways. Sometimes they work alongside God (see 1 Kings 22:19–23), and other times they are negligent of their duties (see Genesis 6:1–4; Psalm 82). The sons of God who compose the divine council were thought to be represented by the stars (see Job 38:7; 1 Kings 22:19). This is why the book of Revelation describes the dragon (Satan) as taking a third of the stars and bringing them to earth (see Revelation 12:3–4).

The scene here in Job presumably describes the sons of God reporting on their actions in helping God to govern the earth. Many Latter-day Saints have been bothered by the fact that Satan would be among this group that would come before God and, further still, that God would make a deal with him. Readers have a few options for how to deal with this difficulty. The most recent seminary manual offers the possibility that this is merely a storytelling device and that this did not actually occur. Additionally, the word *satan* in this story may not be a proper name but a description of the duty for this particular son of God. The Hebrew word *satan* means “opposer” or “accuser.” Some scholars think that this was a member of the divine council who was tasked with ferreting out wrongdoing.

God steers the conversation toward Job and confirms that he is a good person, as the narrative has told us. Satan pushes back and asks, “Doth Job fear God for nought?” (Job 1:9). This translation is a bit unclear; it might be better translated as “Does Job’s relationship with God come at no cost?” Satan thinks that Job’s relationship with God is just a transaction. God constantly blesses Job and prevents misfortune from befalling him. But Satan suspects that as soon as Job’s relationship with God stops being so one-sided and God starts demanding things of Job, Job will walk away. There is something to this line of thinking. Real relationships are not transactions; they demand things of us, sometimes things that are difficult. However, that sacrifice is what creates love—when we choose to do hard things for others, we develop love for them. So, if Job’s relationship with God does not cost him anything (or rather, if he is not asked to go through hardships for God), can he really have a meaningful relationship with Him? God entertains the possibility that Job’s relationship may need to grow and allows Satan to test Job.

### **Job 1:13–21**

Some readers may find this section confusing. Satan was given leave to test Job, but Satan uses this delegated authority not only to deprive Job of his material wealth but also to kill his children. For modern readers, this is hard to reconcile with the loving God we worship; however, the very fact that this is a tough pill to swallow is important to the entire message of the book of Job. Job, like others in the Old Testament, sees everything as God’s doing. So when he is told of all the terrible things that have happened, he knows without being told so that God has done it. Job will spend most of the book wrestling with these events. Job feels completely betrayed by God. Remember, Job has built his life around the fact that God

will bless him and prevent misfortune from happening. The events of this day shatter this illusion. Job initially takes things well. He states that “the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away” (Job 1:21), and the narrative tells us that Job had not sinned. However, by the time that chapter 3 rolls around, Job’s pain and loss has become so unbearable and his need for answers so acute that such platitudes ring hollow for him.

Job never finds out in the narrative why this has happened to him, and that is an important part of the story. By the end of the narrative, Job chooses to trust God and forgive his unkind friends without being told why God has done this to him—and before being told that he will be blessed again. In some ways, it is also important for us as readers to wrestle with this uncertainty. One of the central messages of Job is that a true relationship with God is not a transaction based on certainty but a bond based on trust in the face of uncertainty.

### **Job 2:1–8**

The story shifts back to a scene in the heavenly court just after the events of chapter 1. Satan comes before the Lord, and God steers the conversation to Job once again. Job seems to be holding out just fine, but Satan is not satisfied. Satan suspects that if Job is struck with disease, he will end his relationship with God and walk away. God, again, entertains this possibility and allows Satan to test Job. Satan does so by afflicting Job with illness.

### **Job 2:9–13**

This section finishes off the calamities that befall Job and sets up the conversation between Job and his friends that will last for most of the book. His wife asks him, “Dost thou still retain thine integrity” (Job 2:9). She sees this misfortune as the result of a failure on Job’s part. To be fair to Job’s wife, this has really been Job’s perspective as well; Job hoped that his integrity and his righteousness would stave off just such a calamity. His wife, like his friends, assumes that Job has stumbled and that this misfortune is merely a result of his inability to be righteous enough.

Job’s three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, come with good intentions. The text tells us that they came “to mourn with him and to comfort him” (2:11). However, they forget their initial purpose and become more intent on correcting what they see as incorrect or even blasphemous thinking than on comforting and mourning with Job. In this way, the narrative begins with Job and his three friends meeting the calamities with constructive attitudes and behaviors, but as the story goes on, both Job and his friends find themselves lost in the dark as they grapple with the fallout.

## **Job 3:1–26**

At this point, the book of Job transitions from a prose narrative to a poetic dialogue between Job and his friends. For the most part, the story proceeds with Job speaking and then his three friends replying in turn. This is a difficult part of the book for many readers because it lacks a narrator to tell us what to think about the different characters' arguments and behaviors. By the end of the book, God provides some commentary on Job's words and describes them as "words without knowledge" (Job 38:2) while at the same time saying that Job has "spoken of me the thing that is right" (42:7). This forces the reader to carefully listen and weigh the statements made by Job (and his friends). In this way, the greatest value in the book of Job will not come by having a few verses to memorize but through the wrestle with the text. Even though Job's words were "without knowledge" to some degree, God heard them, and even though His reply did not answer all of Job's questions, Job strengthens and transforms his relationship with God. The same can happen to readers as well; we may not always accurately read or understand Job, but our struggle with the text will invite God into our lives.

When Job breaks his seven-day silence, he reveals his intense pain. In his pain, he wishes that he had never been born. He wishes that he had died in his mother's womb. From one perspective, we can understand Job's feelings as coming from a place of intense pain and suffering and can acknowledge what he has said as a way of expressing his suffering. Job's words also touch on a theme that is common through scripture: does the pain and suffering of life make it worth living? For example, when Laman and Lemuel find themselves suffering in the wilderness, they say of their wives, "It would have been better that they had died before they came out of Jerusalem than to have suffered these afflictions" (1 Nephi 17:20). Job's feelings seem similar to Laman and Lemuel's: it is better to avoid pain and suffering at all costs, even if that means not living.

We might see this as one of the great questions of mortality: is the journey worth it? The Book of Mormon teaches us that it is only through experiencing the bitter things of life that we learn to appreciate the sweet (see 2 Nephi 2:23–25). But it is hard to willingly experience hard things, especially when we want certainty that everything will be OK. Perhaps this was why a third of God's children chose not to come to earth; they feared that the reward was not worth the suffering.

Interestingly, Job finds himself experiencing the suffering he had feared and had spent his whole life attempting to avoid—he had spent so much of his time sacrificing animals on the off chance that his children *might* have done something wrong. Job's anxiety about suffering is so intense, we might say that his life is ruled by it. At this point, Job has nowhere to run and hide, and now he must sit with it and experience it. By the end of the book, Job will change his mind. As he grieves for the life—and lives—he lost, he will eventually decide that it was worth doing anyway. He will find truth in the old adage that it is better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all. He will start a new family but this time, with his

eyes wide open. Knowing full well that his relationship with God will not prevent misfortune in his life, he chooses to make himself vulnerable and to love again because the joys of love and life are worth the risk of suffering.

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