

THE DATE OF THE EVENTS IN JOB

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Introduction

Attempting to determine the date of the events in Job proceeds assumes that the book is more than a piece of literary art. The poetic form of most of the book has led some to regard it as less than historical, but form does not speak to historicity. Writers use poetry to tell the events at the Red Sea (Exodus **15**) and the story of Sisera's defeat (Judges **5**). Prose fiction, on the other hand, appears constantly in modern authors. Whereas skillful writers of contemporary literature do produce remarkable works about fictitious people and happenings, it is doubtful whether that happened among the ancients. Their literature appears to have been at least a development of some kernel of historical truth, including the sophisticated poetry extant from the later Greek tragedians. Furthermore, Job is both poetry and prose, so the idea that poetry points to fiction and prose to non-fiction does not apply consistently.

A study of the date of the events in Job, however, proceeds on more than the supposition that Job contains only a kernel of truth, because without the evidence from internal details no solution of the dating problem is possible.

Fiction, when written with a judicious choice of details, can attain a high degree of verisimilitude, and someone uninformed about the author's intention may be unable to distinguish it from a serious account of actual occurrences. But anyone who views Job from a biblical perspective must view it, not only in a way consistent with its own contents, but in conformity with the attitude toward it by inspired writers. From Ezekiel **14:14, 20** it seems clear that Job was as historical a person as Noah and Daniel, with whom he appears in the words of God himself:

*"And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, 'Son of man, when a land sins against me by committing a trespass and I stretch out my hand upon it and break the staff of the bread thereof and send famine upon it and cut off from it man and beast, though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they would deliver but their own souls by their righteousness,' says the Lord Jehovah . . . ' Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out my wrath upon it in blood to cut off from it man and animal, though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live,' says the Lord Jehovah, 'they should deliver neither son nor daughter; they should but deliver their own souls by their righteousness'" (Ezekiel **14:12-14, 19-20**; cp. Jeremiah **15:1**).*

With these passages as the deciding factor, an interpreter observes that Job names an appropriate number of places and peoples, and speaks of several events, so the historical setting is fairly definite, especially in light of the fact that the book consists almost completely of poetic dialogue devoted to a religious and philosophical problem: the suffering of the righteous. Extra-

biblical evidence from Babylonian and Arabic literature and tradition confirms the conclusion that an ancient historical figure named Job lived somewhere close to the Arabian Desert.

The mention of a nation or tribe must succeed the ancestor it descended from. By investigating the biblical date for the sources of the people Job names, we can establish a *terminus a quo* for the date of the person Job within a reasonable span of years after the least ancient forefather. We can establish something of a *terminus ad quem* by the great age of Job, since he lived much longer than people in the later millennia. Confirmation for the solution those arguments yield appears in the cultural situation evident in the book and in the ancient additions to the book in the Septuagint and Arabic translations. The study concludes with an evaluation of alternate suggestions. See the summarizing charts below.

The Date of the Events in Job

I. *Terminus a quo* (earliest time)

A. Evidence

1. Shuhite שְׁחִיטָה; 2:11; Bildad the Shuhite one of Job's friends

a. Not Shuah (Shua) שְׁוֹא; Genesis 38:1, 12; 1 Chronicles 2:3; a Canaanite of Adullam, who became the wife of Judah

b. Not Shuah שְׁחִיטָה; 1 Chronicles 4:11; a descendant of Caleb, a male Israelite living in Palestine, not Uz

c. Shuah שְׁוֹא; Genesis 25:2; 1 Chronicles 1:32; sixth son of Abraham by Keturah

2. Chaldeans כְּשִׁדִּים; 1:17; one of the groups of marauders in Job, who stole Job's camels and killed his servants.

*a. Chesed כְּשִׁדָּה; Genesis 22:22; fourth son of Nahor and nephew of Abraham

b. Ur of the Chaldees is mentioned in connection with an earlier time in Genesis 11:28, 31; 15:7. Here the author of Genesis may be identifying a place by the name correct at his own time. If not, the unknown ancestor from whom the Chaldeans came would be much earlier than the time of Shuah (see above), and hence of no significance in further determining a *terminus a quo* for the occurrences in Job.

3. Buzite בְּזִיטָה; 32:2, 6; the people Elihu descended from

a. Not Buzi בְּזִיטָה; Ezekiel 1:3; father of Ezekiel

b. Not Buz בְּזִיטָה; 1 Chronicles 5:14; man of the tribe of Gad

*c. Buz בְּזִיטָה; Genesis 22:21; second son of Nahor and nephew of Abraham (note Jeremiah 25:23)

4. Ram רם; 32:2, 6; the family of Elihu

a. Not Ram רם; Ruth 4:19; 1 Chronicles 2:9, 10; son of Hezron and great-grandson of Judah

b. Not Ram רם; 1 Chronicles 2:25, 27; firstborn of Jerahmeel, the son of Hezron above

c. Not (?) Aram ארם; Genesis 10:22, 23; 1 Chronicles 1:17; third son of Shem

(1) Ram (רם) can equal Aram (ארם) on the analogy of Arammim (אַרְמִיִּם) in 2 Kings 8:29 for Rammim (רַמִּיִּם) in 2 Chronicles 22:5.¹

(2) Elihu is said to be a Buzite of the family of Ram. “Family” (מִשְׁפָּחָה) has a general meaning like tribe, or clan, or even “nation” (Ezekiel 20:32; Jeremiah 8:3; 25:9; Micah 2:3). Although it occasionally occurs in a loose sense to mean tribe (Joshua 7:17, cp. 7:16), it usually designates a subdivision of a tribe—“family.”²

(3) The text in Job reads as if “the family of Ram” meant a subdivision of the Buzites, or a family descended from someone contemporary with the Buzites. These circumstances do not fit a man like Aram, son of Shem, who lived only three generations after the flood.

*d. (?) Aram ארם; Genesis 22:21; the son of Kemuel the son of Nahor the brother of Abraham³

(1) This Aram was the nephew of Buz, the second son of Nahor, Abraham’s brother. Although he is a generation later than Buz, he is not his direct descendant, whereas the Aram in Job would seem to be a subdivision of the Buzites.

(2) Perhaps Buz was more important than his brother, and Ram was more important than his father Kemuel, so Aram’s descendants came to be considered Buzites. It is of note that Aram is the only grandson of Nahor in scripture, which may indicate some special importance.

e. (?) Ram רם; an unnamed son, or close descendant, of Buz

Note that Jerahmeel named his firstborn son Ram even though he had a brother by that name (1 Chronicles 2:9-10, 25).

5. Tema תֵּמָא; 6:19; “*Caravans of Tema*”; a place name also in Isaiah 21:14 and Jeremiah 25:23. The name probably comes from תֵּימָא grandson of Abraham through Ishmael; see Genesis 25:15 and 1 Chronicles 1:30

6. Sabeans אֲשַׁכְּזִים; 1:15; a marauding band that stole Job’s oxen and donkeys and killed his servants.

a. (?) Sheba שְׁבָא; Genesis 10:7; 1 Chronicles 1:9; grandson of Cush. His descendants may have been traders traveling between their home in Ethiopia and the East. If so, it does not affect the date of Job so far determined.

b. (?) Sheba שְׁבָא; Genesis 10:28; 1 Chronicles 1:22; a fourth-generation descendant of Shem. If so, it does not affect the date of Job so far determined.

*c. Sheba שְׁבָא; Genesis 25:3; 1 Chronicles 1:32. grandson of Abraham by Keturah. That name seems to fit best the general era established by the names so far.

7. Temanite תִּמְנִי; 2:11; 4:1; 15:1; 22:1; 42:7, 9; the people of Eliphaz, one of Job's friends

a. Not Teman תִּמְנִי; Genesis 36:42; 1 Chronicles 1:53; an Edomite chief. In both references Temanites are mentioned just previously (Genesis 36:34; 1 Chronicles 1:45).

b. Teman תִּמְנִי; Genesis 36:11, 15; 1 Chronicles 1:35; grandson of Esau (Note Genesis 36:34; 1 Chronicles 1:45; Jeremiah 49:7, 20; Ezekiel 25:13; Amos 1:12; Obadiah 9; Habakkuk 3:3.)

8. Uz עוֹז; 1:1; the land where Job lived

a. (?) Uz עוֹז; Genesis 10:23; 1 Chronicles 1:17; a great-grandson of Noah and at least seven generations before Abraham. If the land of Uz was named after this man, he lived too early to affect the results of the study thus far.

b. (?) Uz עוֹז; Genesis 22:21; a nephew of Abraham. If the land of Uz was named after this man, he lived too early to affect the results obtained thus far.

c. (?) Uz עוֹז; Genesis 36:28; 1 Chronicles 1:42; a grandson of Esau (Note Jeremiah 25:20; Lamentations 4:21.) This Uz was the son of Dishan (Genesis 36:28) and brother of Timna (36:22 + 20), who, according to Keil and Delitzsch, was possibly the same as Eliphaz's concubine (36:12).⁴ The man is then four generations after Abraham, about the same time as Teman (b) above. Since this is a place name, it may be that the writer used the geographical title current at the time of writing in place of the one used at the time of Job.

9. Naamathites נַעֲמָתִי; 2:11; the tribe name of Zophar, one of Job's friends, not mentioned elsewhere

10. Barachel בָּרַכְיָאֵל; 36:2, 6; father of Elihu, Job's fourth friend; not mentioned elsewhere

B. Conclusion

1. The latest names come from the fourth generation after Abraham: Teman and Uz. If we allow two generations after Teman for the writer to speak of Temanites, the *terminus a*

quo for Job is some sixty or seventy years before the second generation after Teman. He must have been about seventy when Eliphaz the Temanite came to visit him. (See Chart A.)

2. Zerah in Genesis 36:33 may equal Zerah son of Reuel in 36:13, 17. Keil and Delitzsch note that the kings of Edom listed in 36:31-39 are probably contemporary rulers over the princes listed previously.⁵ Teman was then a cousin to Zerah, whose son Jobab was a king of Edom succeeded by Hushan “*of the land of the Temanites*” (36:34; cp. 1 Chronicles 1:45); consequently, by about two generations after Teman there were not only Temanites, but a “*land of the Temanites*.”

3. The conclusion seems to be that Job was an early contemporary of the seventh generation after Abraham. (See Chart B.) That conclusion accords with a possible mention of the flood (38:8), the existence of writing (13:26; 19:23; 31:35), and the absence of anything associated with the kingdom period in Israel. Job 18:15 may refer to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

II. *Terminus ad quem* (latest time)

A. Evidence

1. Job's great age

a. Masoretic text

(1) 42:16. The Hebrew original closes the account of Job by saying that he lived 140 years “after that.”

(2) 29:1-25. In Job 29, he “*went forth to the gate into the city . . . I prepared my seat in the street*.” In other words, he was an elder of the city, a position held by the older men of a town (cp. 11-17). Verse 8 speaks of even the aged men rising up and standing when he arrived; the princes did the same. Since these words refer to a time before his calamities, a number of years add to the 140 in 42:16. (Note in contrast 14:1ff).

(3) 12:1-25 and 30:1? Were Job's friends also judges (12:20), but younger than he (30:1)?

(4) 1:2-4. At the time of Job's affliction, he already had ten grown children. If the youngest of these was fifteen, the oldest would have been nearly thirty. If Job married by age thirty (note: there is nothing about his own sons' being married at that age), he would have been sixty or more by the time Satan tried him. According to this evidence, Job must have been over two hundred years old when he died (140 + 60).

b. Septuagint

(1) The Septuagint reads “170” instead of “140” in 42:16. The reason for the difference is that the Hebrew says, “*After that he lived 140 years,*” which immediately follows the account about receiving double all the cattle he had before as well as seven more sons and three daughters. The Septuagint says, “*After that he lived 140 years,*” which immediately follows the account about receiving double all the cattle he had before as well as

seven more sons and three daughters. The Septuagint says, “*After the plague he lived 170 years.*” The time for regaining his property and ten grown children was thirty years, a realistic figure.

(2) An added statement says that “*he lived two hundred (and) forty-eight years.*” These figures make him seventy-eight at the time of the tragedy (248 minus 170), a conclusion in accord with the internal evidence of the Masoretic text. Job lived nearly 250 years. In other words, he received double in all things (except the number of children), including the length of his life.

2. Job’s priestly function

Job acted as a priest for his sons (1:5) and for his friends at God’s command (42:7-10). Such an activity confirms that he lived during the patriarchal dispensation, where the family head carried out the priestly function. In this respect he resembles Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jethro, and Melchizedek. (Note the enigmatic statement in 12:19, where God leads “priests away stripped”; could he be referring to himself as a judge-king-priest?)

- a. absence of a central shrine
- b. absence of a priesthood

3. God’s direct speaking

God’s speaking to Job out of the whirlwind (38:1) is reminiscent of his speaking to Moses from the burning bush. To Moses God spoke directly, but to others he spoke in a dream or a vision (Numbers 12:5-8). Is it possible to say that after the time of Moses God ceased speaking “face to face,” but always through visions, dreams, Urim and Thummim, and so on, and that before this time divine communication was more direct? Was Moses the last patriarch defined in terms of direct speaking? If so, the events in Job suit a pre-Mosaic era better.

4. Job’s faith

- a. God’s description of him in 1:18, “*none like him in all the earth,*” seems not only to be a note of tremendous praise, but
- b. an indication of the breadth of scope in God’s religious dealings with people: “*all the earth,*” not “*in all Israel*” (Luke 7:9); and
- c. may imply that there were relatively few people that God could use as examples of righteousness (1:18; 2:3). Perhaps such a circumstance fits better a time before the servants of Yahveh were greatly multiplied by his dealings with Israel incorporated as a theocracy.

5. קֶשֶׁטָה 42:11; this monetary unit is mentioned elsewhere only in Genesis 33:19 and Joshua 24:32.

6. Representation of Sabeans and Chaldeans as marauding nomads

B. The age of men gradually reduced about 70% between the flood and the confusion of tongues. Noah lived 950 years (Genesis 9:29) while Peleg, at the confusion of tongues, lived 293 years (Genesis 11:18). The reduction continued so that Terah, Abraham's father, was the last man recorded in scripture to live more than two hundred years. Abraham lived 175 years (Genesis 25:7-8), Isaac 180 (Genesis 35:25), Jacob 147 (Genesis 47:28), Levi 137 (Exodus 6:16), Joseph 110 (Genesis 50:26), Kohath 133 (Exodus 6:18), Amram 137 (Exodus 6:20), Moses 120. Psalm 90:10, written by Moses, says that a person's life is x eighty years at most. The conclusion from the evidence for Job's living at least two hundred years—perhaps as much as 248—dates him as early as other evidence allows.

III. Septuagint addition to the *Book of Job*

A. Translation

"This book is-translated from a-book of the Syrian dwelling in the Land of Ausitis by the mountains of Idumaea and Arabia. And his name was-formerly Jobab. But taking an Arabian wife, he begat a son whose name [was] Ennon, and his father was Zerah, a son of the sons of Esau, and from the city of Bozrah so that he was fifth from Abraham. And these are the kings who reigned in Edom, where also he-ruled a country. First [was] Balak, son of Beor, and [the] name of his city was Dennaba. And after Balak was Jobab, called Job. And after him [was] Asom who was ruler of the Temanite country. And after him [was] Hadad son of Barad who cut off Midian in the plain of Moab, Geththaim [was] the name of his city. And the friends who came to him were Eliphaz, a Temanite king of the sons of Esau, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Minaian king."

B. Evaluation of the testimony

1. We cannot determine the credibility of this appendix. It appears in the earliest copies of the Septuagint text; so it traces back to the manuscript tradition the Septuagint translators used during the second to third centuries before Christ.

2. There are some peculiar affinities with Genesis 36:31-25:

a. That Balak (= Bela son of Beor) was the first king of Edom, a fact not essential to the apparent purpose of the appendix: the establishment of the source of the *Book of Job*. The same might be said of those kings who succeeded Jobab, the man with whom Job is identified: Asom (= Husham) and Hadad.

b. The historical notations attach to the kings that are mentioned:

- (1) The name of Bela's city: Dinhabah;
- (2) The fact that Hadad smote Midian in the plain of Moab

We might be inclined to write off this supplement as something dependent on the Genesis account, but

3. There are also marks of independence.

a. Whereas the Masoretic text names Avith (אַוִּית) as Hadad's city, the Septuagint reads Geththaim (Γεθθαιμ)

b. It supplies the name of Jobab's son Ennon.

c. It calls Zophar a Minaian king rather than a Naamathite (see also 2:11).

4. Favorable notations

a. It provides a plausible association between Zerah the father of Jobab in Genesis 36:33 and Zerah the grandson of Esau in 36:13. That identification fits with Keil and Delitzsch's contention that the kings of Edom were contemporary over-rulers of the princes in the earlier verses.

b. It presupposes that the period had ended during which the listed kings of Edom ruled prior to the monarchy in Israel, not by the reign of Saul, but by the time of writing.

C. Testimony regarding the identity of Job: that he was the Jobab of Genesis 36:33.

1. Linguistic assessment

a. "Job" is spelled in Hebrew אִיּוֹב, one persecuted, as if from the root אָיַב, to persecute, on the analogy of יָלֹד one born, from יָלַד to bear; or perhaps from אָוַב, to turn.

b. "Jobab" is spelled in Hebrew יוֹבָב, outcry, from the root יָבַב, to cry aloud.⁶

c. Possible interpretations of evidence

(1) That the man had two names

(2) That the Genesis and Job accounts are independent transliterations of an Aramaic original, and hence, do not trace to seemingly unrelated roots in Hebrew

2. The time factor

a. From the birth of Jacob and Esau to the death of Moses is 600 years. (Jacob lived 147 years; it was 413 years from his death to the exodus;⁷ Moses died forty years after the exodus; $147 + 413 = 600$). Hadar may be the last-mentioned king of Edom because he was ruling when Moses wrote. (It does not say he died.) If so, the period from Esau's birth till the midst of Hadar's reign must also be 600 years.

b. Reuel was born to Esau sometime after Esau was forty years old (Genesis 36:24). The time between Reuel's and Zerah's births is not given in the scripture, nor is the time between Zerah's and Jobab's (Job's) births. The generations may, however, be tentatively set at forty-year intervals, so there are approximately 120 years from the birth of Esau to the birth of Jobab. If Jobab lived 250 years, he would have died 370 years after Esau's birth, leaving 230 years to be filled out by the six kings who succeeded him in Edom (Genesis 36:34-39).

c. Only by an extremely long reign like Jobab's would have been in this scheme, could we account for the time period that transpired between the birth of Esau and the death of Moses; that is, if Zerah the father of Jobab is to be identified with Zerah the grandson of Esau and if Hadar was the king of Edom at Moses' death (see Numbers 20:14ff), it may be that the two Zerahs are not the same, and Keil and Delitzsch do not equate them. The Septuagint addition identifies them because it speaks of Job as being the "fifth from Abraham" (Abraham-Isaac-Esau-Reuel-Zerah-Jobab; see Chart B).

3. Advantages and disadvantages of Job's being identified with Jobab

a. If the kings of Edom in Genesis 36:34-39 were contemporary rulers over the princes mentioned 20-30, and if רָשָׁ (Job 29:9) is roughly equal to אֲלֹנִי in Genesis 36, a situation exists where Job is above the princes like Jobab was (Genesis 36:33).

"When I [Job] went forth to the gate of the city . . . The princes (רָשָׁ) refrained from talking and put their hands on their mouths" (Job 29:7a, 9).

b. The date of Jobab is in harmony with the *a quo* established by genealogies and the *ad quem* established by his age.

c. The Midianites are smitten in Moab by the second king after Jobab, a fact implying perhaps an allegiance between the Midianites and the Moabites as in Numbers 22. Hadad's smiting them would be about 150 years before the event in Numbers 22. On the other hand, the Midianites at the time of Gideon (Judges 8:28) vanished from history. Their presence at the time of Job helps set an *ad quem* for the events associated with him.

d. One disadvantage is the forty-year average reign of the last six kings of Edom: this number seems high. The judgeships in Judges averaged about half that long.

e. Job had brothers and sisters (42:11). Genesis and 1 Chronicles do not mention any brothers of Jobab. The importance of this may not be great, however, since Jobab is not listed in the genealogical list, which comes down only to Zerah his father, but mentions him separately, connecting him with the line of Esau only by naming his father Zerah.

IV. Evaluation of the suggestions of some scholars

A. Suggestions

1. In the descriptive note beside the references to Job, Robert Young in his *Analytical Concordance* speaks of Job as a contemporary of Abraham.

2. *The Pulpit Commentary* on Job places him between Eber and Jacob.⁸

3. Eusebius placed him "two ages before Moses," that is, about the time of Isaac.⁹

4. Gleason Archer feels that Job could have lived as late as the time of the monarchy in Israel.¹⁰

B. Criticisms

1. Placing Job before Abraham, or contemporary with him, is difficult to fit with the mention of later tribal peoples, especially the Temanites, who came four generations after the great Hebrew patriarch.

2. A time after Moses does not take due account of Job's extreme age, which at the very least would be slightly over two hundred years. Some adjustment to the force of the argument from age might come if Job's receiving double included the length of his life, for in such case he would normally have lived only 120 years, a lifetime compatible with the time of the exodus. Still, he would have been much older than David, who lived 70 years (1 Kings 2:11).

Conclusion

If the Septuagint's association of Job with Jobab is valid, Job must have lived from *cir.* 1890 to 1640 B.C., barely making him a late contemporary of Jacob, who lived down to *cir.* 1860 B.C. At any rate, Job's birth would have to come at least as late as the first generation after Teman, that is, during the fifth generation after Abraham. That is the case, because at the time of his afflictions (when he was about seventy) Eliphaz the "Temanite" visited him, and the text would probably not call Eliphaz a Temanite if Teman was his father. A generation or more probably lies between these two men. A date during the Egyptian bondage seems safe from these considerations.

¹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch, Vol. 1: Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. by James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), p. 254.

²William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. by Edward Robinson (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1844), p. 637

³Keil and Delitzsch (*Pentateuch*, Vol. 1, p. 254) make this identification.

⁴*Op. cit.*, p. 324.

⁵*Op cit.*, pp. 325-27.

⁶See Gesenius' *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* under יִבְבִּי.

⁷Keil and Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, p. 327, fnt. 1.

⁸See p. xv

⁹Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Bible Commentary*, p. i of the introduction to Job.

¹⁰Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), p. 441.