

When did Job live?

Job is legendary for his exemplary response to great suffering. We know little about the dates and settings pertaining to Job, but many scholars believe the book of Job is one of the oldest in the Bible. That does not mean that Job himself lived before anyone else in the Bible—he most certainly came after Adam! But there are hints that Job lived in a truly ancient time: Job offered sacrifices himself for his family, instead of relying on a priest (Job 1:5; 42:7-8), and his wealth was measured in livestock, not gold (Job 1:3). It is likely that Job lived sometime between the flood and the time of Moses. Many scholars place Job in the patriarchal period, around the same time that Abraham lived (Genesis 11:28-29).

It seems clear that Job lived prior to the giving of the law, since the book of Job makes no mention of a tabernacle or temple, priests, or the law given to Israel. If Job's life indeed pre-dated the law, he may have lived sometime around 2200 BC, making him a contemporary of Abraham, Lot, and Isaac. Another clue that places Job in the time prior to Moses is the fact that Job gave his daughters "an inheritance among their brothers" (Job 42:15). Under the Mosaic Law, a father passed his inheritance to sons only, unless he had no sons (Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-13). A righteous man such as Job would have followed that law in obedience to God; in Job's case, the law had not yet been given.

The longevity of Job is another clue that he lived around the time of the patriarchs. At that time, it was common for people to live a couple of centuries. Lifespans gradually decreased, until, by the time of the judges, lifespans were typically under a hundred years old. By adding up the years implied by the following facts, Job probably lived to be over 200 years old:

- He lived to marry and become “one of the greatest of all the men in the east (Job 1:3).
- He lived long enough to have sired ten children (Job 1:2).
- His children were old enough to have their own homes (Job 1:4, 13).
- After his tragic loss of everything, he lived long enough to father ten more children and amass even greater wealth (Job 42:10-13).
- He lived an additional 140 years after “all these things,” seeing his children and grandchildren to four generations (Job 42:16-17).

The Alexandrian Septuagint contains an addition to Job 42:16 stating that Job died at the age of 240.