

# Preface

The book of Job is certainly worth the effort of discussion in your study society. After deciding to study the book of Job as a group, you will need to limit yourselves. Discussion of each chapter separately is not practical and will not satisfy you. These eight outlines seek to give a total overview of the whole book. The intention is that in eight study sessions, you will better understand the book of Job as a whole.

The title *Job's Perseverance* is taken from James 5:11b.  
*You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.*

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# **The debate about the righteous one**

Job 1:1-2:10

## **1. Introduction**

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*The book of Job: place, time, form*

According to Jewish tradition, the book of Job belongs to the third and last part of the Old Testament, the so-called *Writings* (like the Psalms and Proverbs, for example).

About the age of the book, little can be said with certainty. Job probably lived in the time of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. How much time had passed before the speeches of Job and his friends were written down and collected into a book is not known. Neither do we know who was (were) the author(s) of this book.

The book of Job is part of the *wisdom literature* in the Bible (as are Proverbs and Ecclesiastes). The book consists mainly of (orations in the form) of poetry. Only the beginning (chapters 1 and 2) and the end (chapter 42:7-17) are in prose (history in story form). However, the poetic orations are always introduced by one or more lines of prose; the longest introduction in prose we find in chapter 32:1-6.

*The book of Job: aim, authority, contents*

The *aim* of the book of Job is to teach a lesson of wisdom. Many commentators of our time assert that the history described in this book would not really have happened. We disagree, believing that the lesson is connected to the actual life of someone who really existed. Job is no fictional teaching-model, no figure from a fairy tale or sage, but a man, who at one time lived somewhere on earth. God used that man and his life to give this part of his revelation to the world.

According to our religious conviction, the book of Job belongs to the Word of God. Through this book God himself speaks with authority. That does

“Fearing God” points to the source of all things: Job feared God, he showed respect to his Creator and Master. The outward result of this fear is his shunning of evil; in his heart he reckoned with God, therefore he avoided evil (sin). *All* of this is a laudable testimonial, and it is a *true* testimonial, because it is the LORD himself who declares this (1:8 and 2:3).

Next, Job’s riches are introduced to us in 1:2,3; he had been richly blessed, more than any other man in the East. Job was a unique figure in all respects. No one was as righteous and at the same time as wealthy as he was. Yet, we maintain that Job was no fairy-tale character, but a living man of flesh and blood. At a time when knowledge and service of God were dying out among men, God created for himself this excellent man, to be his servant for a special purpose. God wanted to use Job to reveal his justice to the world (see the expression “my servant Job” in 1:8 and 2:3).

In 1:4,5 we are given another example of Job’s piety: he acted as priest for his family, and sought atonement for the unconscious sins of his children. Job did this continually, i.e. it was his lifestyle.

### **3. The Legal Action in Heaven**

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#### *The first round in the process (Job 1:6-12)*

The narrative switches to heaven in 1:6-12 and also in 2:1-6. The LORD holds court, like an Eastern potentate who summons his vassals to his court. Among them also is Satan, the adversary, who is not God’s opponent on an equal level, but a rebellious servant. Modern commentators hasten to declare that these scenes in heaven naturally did not really take place; they are only stories.

However, we do not have any reason to doubt the truth and reliability of what we are being told here. We must realize that history takes place in heaven, just as it does on earth. The history taking place in heaven is hidden from people on earth. However, here a corner of the veil is lifted.

We see the establishment of a legal action. At the time described here, the rebellious servant Satan still has access to heaven (later on he no longer does, see Revelation 12:7-9). He acts as public prosecutor (Satan is called “the accuser”, Revelation 12:10). He challenges the LORD in the case of Job the righteous. The LORD himself invites this (v.6), and consequently also agrees to the case (v.12). In his accusation, Satan charges the

## **5. The Triumph of God's Justice**

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Thus in two rounds Job's righteousness has been tested and proven reliable. To this point, Satan has lost. God's work has shown itself equal to Satan's evil accusations. We may certainly say that the LORD went to the limit. Now the triumph of his justice shines more gloriously. However, the battle has not yet come to an end. In the distance three friends approach. Through them, Satan opens a new offensive. That is what the continuation of the book of Job deals with.

## **6. Direction for the Scripture Reading**

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In addition to this passage, read Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 10; Belgic Confession Article 13, and Canons of Dort, chapter V.

## **7. Questions and Points for Attention**

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1. Like every other human being, Job was conceived and born in sin. Yet he was more upright than any other man (1:1,8 and 2:3). Thus the statement: "We are all terrible sinners" does not do justice to reality. According to the Bible there are righteous people and sinners (heathens); just read the Psalms and Proverbs. How do we explain these apparent conflicts?
2. In the story of Job, Satan receives power to inflict Job with robbers, lightning, storms and malignant disease. Can you say that the power of Satan is also today manifest in diseases, accidents, disasters and wars?
3. His suffering made Job sorrowful, but not rebellious. He does not reproach God, at least not yet. Note also how in his suffering he still has concern for his wife. When for a moment she threatens to fall away, and wants to drag him with her, he lifts her up again with a loving admonition. Also in the relationship with his wife, Job shows himself to be righteous.
4. Is Job's righteousness a "works righteousness" or is it righteousness through faith? (Compare Romans 3:28; 4:2; Galatians 2:16.) Perhaps we should say that the LORD takes everything away from Job and makes him utterly helpless, in order that it might become clear that his righteousness is not a righteousness of works, but through faith alone.
5. How is the story of Job related to the gospel of Jesus Christ? We could call Job a foreshadowing of the Christ, in as far as Job is subjected to suffering because of Satan's accusation (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-23). However, Christ suffered as a substitute (1 Peter 2:24 and 3:18), and Job did not. Christ suffered also for Job! We can call Job's suffering a foreshad-