

**THE MISSIONARY
MESSAGE OF
JOB:
GOD'S
UNIVERSAL
CONCERN FOR
HEALING**

The Book of Job has more to say to the modern world than how to handle suffering, or to explain why bad things happen to good people. Job provides very powerful, and very important teachings about human pain and suffering, teachings that humanity desperately needs. But Job also provides a message to those who are not suffering, who are not in pain. This is the missionary message of Job.

The missionary message of Job is the same message as that of the entire Bible: God wants to heal the nations of the disease of sin. Genesis 3:1-7 explains how every human being became infected with the disease of sin. Genesis 3:15 presents God's first promise to provide a remedy, a medicine, for the disease of sin. Rev. 22:2 reveals that God will ultimately provide healing for all his redeemed people. The unique contribution of Job is that it presents the cry of the human heart at the time of the Patriarchs for more knowledge of God, for a better revelation of God.

The Book of Job demonstrates that even a person as upright and righteous as Job did not know enough about God to satisfy his deepest longing for God. His repeated cry is for a referee, a go-between, or a mediator. He wanted someone who could stand between him and God so that Job could learn what God was like and what God demanded of a righteous human being. Job consistently defended his integrity and righteousness, and confessed that he was not as perfect as God. But having done all that he knew to do, his cry to God still was "What more do you want from me?!" Therefore, the thesis of this essay is that Job represents the cry of humanity in the days of the patriarchs for a better revelation of

God. At a time in human history when accurate knowledge of God was fading, Job cried out for such knowledge — like all nations of that time. God's answer was to call Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans so that he and his descendants would become the means by which humanity would be able to know exactly what God demands of humanity. This is the missionary message of Job.

The missionary message of Job is the same as that of the entire Scriptures, but it presents an aspect of humanity's need for healing that is vital for the Caribbean church to understand today. It is vital for Caribbean church because this message calls the church in the Caribbean to be God's means of healing a diseased and suffering world. To understand the missionary message of Job and its relevance for the modern Caribbean church, four points will be addressed.

- The Preamble to the Book of Job
- The Pattern of Worship in the Book of Job
- The Problem for Humanity in the Book of Job
- The Provision for Humanity in the Book of Job

The Preamble to the Book of Job

In order to understand the missionary message of Job, we must understand what is known about who wrote it, when it was written, and why it was written.

Author

There are a number of theories about the date and authorship the Book of Job because "scholarly efforts to date and place the author . . . have not yet achieved a consensus" (Janzen 5). Atkinson takes a similar line when he writes:

We do not know who wrote the book of Job, nor anything about the author beyond what we can glean from the text. Neither do we know when the book was written, though it is possible that an ancient folk tale was picked up and woven into this masterly epic poem (16).

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Anderson fully concurs with the view that the author is, and will remain, unknown (61).

Some commentators argue that the text is a composite of "many different hands and minds," even though the superb quality of the writing "suggests the influence of a single personality" (Pope, XLI). Matthew Henry suggests that Elihu, one of Job's friends who tried to comfort him in his distress (Job 32:1-37:24), wrote the account, and that Moses added the first two chapters and the conclusion to aid the Hebrews in understanding its message (3:1). Others argue that Elihu wrote the entire account (Rawlinson xvi; Hunt 798; Zuck 8).

Many hold the view that Moses wrote the book during his ministry to Israel as a word of comfort during the wilderness wanderings. This is supported by the Jewish traditions of Aben Ezra and the Talmud. Variations on the theme include suggestions that Moses met Job during his Midian exile, and received historical and family records from Job. Moses later used the documents to write the account, either during the Israelite wilderness wanderings or before returning to Egypt (Rawlinson xv-xvi; Halley 241; Henry 3:1).

Zuck presents a strong case for the view that Job himself wrote the story.

The details of the lengthy conversations recorded in the book of Job give the impression that it was written by an eyewitness. Certainly Job, who was so intensely involved in the narrative, would recall perhaps as well as or better than other eyewitnesses what happened and what was said. In the 140 years he lived after being restored to health, he would have had ample time to compile the work. This view is as plausible as or more plausible than the view than an author hundreds of years later compiled what had been handed down by oral tradition over many centuries (8-9).

Date of Events Depicted

When did these events take place? The question is not, when was the text written? The key point is when did the events described occur?

Anderson notes that the text could have been written anytime from Moses to Ezra, but does not comment on when the events themselves

occurred (63). Janzen argues that the text was written during the Jewish Exile to explain why evil had befallen the nation, but that the events depicted occurred “long ago and far away” (5). These opinions are reached by comparing the language, events, descriptions and world view in Job with the known historical developments of the Hebrew language and thought, known historical events and institutions, and the known historical development of theological ideas (Anderson 62). Anderson himself, however, recognizes the weakness of this approach (63).

The best evidence supports the view that Job lived in the Prepatriarchal or Patriarchal period, i.e. c.2000 B.C. (Aharoni and Avi-Yonah 28; Hunt 798; Henry 3:1-2). Pope cites extensive rabbinical support for placing the events at the time of the patriarchs, which he dates as 2100-1550 B.C. (xxxii). Rawlinson places the events of Job at the end of the patriarchal period (xv). There is general agreement that the time of the events depicted predates the exodus, based on the absence of mention of that event in the text. Further, the general depiction of life in the text points to a period predating Abraham or the time of Abraham. Job is depicted as a contemporary of Abraham and Melchizedek, worshiping God in the same manner they did — presenting offerings and sacrifices for the family and clan as the their spiritual leader.

Zuck provides an extensive twelve-point rationale for dating the events of Job at the time of the patriarchs:

- Job’s estimated life span of 200 years fits with that of Terah, father of Abraham, and exceeds that of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and later generations.
- Job’s wealth was based on livestock, as was the case for Abraham and Jacob.
- After the patriarchal period the Sabeans and Chaldeans abandoned the nomadic life.
- Job acted as priest for the family and clan, which was common in the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Melchizedek.
- The Hebrew word used for “a piece of money” in Job 42:11 is used only two other times in Scripture — both times referring to Jacob.
- The musical instruments mentioned in Job were common in the days of the patriarchs.
- Job’s daughters were to receive an inheritance along with their brothers, but this was not the case under Mosaic law.

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- Works similar to Job were produced in Mesopotamia in patriarchal times.
- The text of Job contains no references to the events of Moses's life, ministry or legacy.
- The Hebrew name for God, *Shaddai*, is used extensively in Job and in the days of the patriarchs, but rarely otherwise.
- Names and places used in Job are common in the patriarchal period.
- The literary style of Job parallels that of "Ugaritic literature" dating to the patriarchal period (9-11).

Identity of Job

Who was Job? Some argue Job was a descendant of Nahor, the brother of Abraham (Henry 3:1). Some argue that he was the husband of Dinah, Jacob's daughter (Pope xxxii). Others claim he was Jobab, second king of Edom and the great-great-grandson of Abraham mentioned in Genesis 36:33 (Halley 241; Pope xxxii).

Summary

This leads to the conclusion that the Book of Job presents events that happened to a real human being who lived about the time of Abraham and Melchizedek, c.2000 B.C.. The story was retained in the memory of the clan until it was written down by someone who lived between Moses and Ezra—probably Moses himself during the wilderness wanderings of Israel.

The Pattern of Worship in the Book of Job

Job presents a general picture of the relationship between God and the nations which is typical of the patriarchal period. It presents a picture of how humanity of that day viewed God, and their desire to know God. Worship of God was marked by two things: Sacrifice as the means of communicating with God, and God as a distant, powerful being.

Sacrifice as the Style of Worship

Worship was directed by the tribal chieftain or sheikh and consisted of offering sacrifices. Sacrifice as a means of communicating with God was introduced by God himself when he made garments of skin for Adam and Eve (Ge 3:21). Cain and Abel continued the practice after coming to adulthood. Abel faithfully brought a blood sacrifice to God, in line with what God taught Adam and Eve, but Cain refused to bring a blood sacrifice, and this led to the murder of Abel (Ge 4:1-8). Seth, his son, Enosh, and their descendants, having learned from Adam and Eve the proper way to communicate with and worship God consistently, "began to call on the name of the Lord," (Ge 4:26 NIV). They called on God in worship, proclaimed his names to the nations who witnessed their worship, and were identified his name as his people.¹ This way, or manner, of worship was practiced by Noah, and taught to his children after the flood (Ge 8:20-22).

Abraham regularly offered sacrifices to God as key points in his spiritual life. He built an altar and offered sacrifices at the "Oak of Moreh" (NAS) when God first promised that he would give that land to Abraham and his descendants (Ge 12:7). He offered sacrifices twice at Bethel (Ge 12:8, 13:4). He again offered sacrifices at the oaks of Mamre in Hebron after the confrontation with and separation from Lot (Ge 13:18). At the time God promised Abraham a son from Sarah and the possession of Palestine, Abraham worshipped God by means of a sacrifice (Ge 15:9-21). At the time of Abraham's greatest test, after Isaac was removed from the altar, Abraham worshipped God by offering a ram in place of Isaac (Ge 22:13). God expected Abraham to teach his family and household to worship God in this way (Ge 18:19). As head of the family, it was his responsibility to lead the family and all the members of the household, or clan, in worship, and to teach them to continue this way of worshipping God.

Job acted in similar fashion. Job offered regular sacrifices for his children (Job 1:5). He acted as the head of the family, household and clan,

¹For an extended discussion of the meaning of the Hebrew *qara* see Keil and Delitzsch (1:120), Wenham (116), Youngblood (71), Henry (1:46), and Murphy (162-163, 165).

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just as Abraham did. He led them in worship of God, and taught them to do the same. The pattern of worship demonstrated by Job was very similar to that demonstrated by Abraham.

The Name of God

In Job, God is seen as the Almighty (*Shaddai, El Shaddai*), the powerful ruler over all people. The name means “all mighty” or “all powerful.” It is used 48 times in the Old Testament, 31 of which are in Job (cf. Job 5:17; 6:4, 14; 8:5; et al). It was a name used by God when revealing himself for covenantal purposes to Abraham (Ge 17:1), Isaac (Ge 28:3) and Jacob (Ge 35:11, 43:14, 48:3). God also identified himself to Moses by this name prior to revealing the new personal name, Yahweh, at the burning bush (Ex 6:3) (Harris, Archer and Waltke 2:907).

The emphasis is on the power and supremacy of God. He is seen as the sovereign ruler of the universe, and of all peoples in Job 34:20-30; 36:20-31. All nations are under his scrutiny. He is responsible to establish righteousness and justice among the nations by appointing wise rulers over the people. This was the extent of humanity’s knowledge of God in the age of the patriarchs. He was the transcendent All Mighty One. He was not a deity who was close to humanity, who could be known by humanity. Sin had alienated the race from God. Time and the machinations of the Enemy had caused the knowledge of God to be lost. This leads to the general problem faced by humanity in the time of the patriarchs.

The Problem for Humanity in the Book of Job

Job recognized that God was righteous, just and holy — the Almighty. Job also recognized that humanity (including Job) was sinful. Job also recognized that he was living as righteously as he knew how. The Book of Job presents Job’s anguished cry to God “I am doing the best I can and he still destroys me! What more does God want from me?!”

Job's Complaint

Job's complaint consisted of two points. First, in ch. 31 Job explained that he had lived righteously, supporting his claim that "I am doing the best I can!" He presented the evidence of his righteousness based on what people of that day thought demonstrated righteousness. Job asserted that he did not live in sexual lust or commit adultery (vv. 1-5, 9-12). He did not practice deceit and falsehood (vv. 5-9). He did not abuse his slaves (vv. 13-15). He did not abuse the widow, orphan and stranger (vv. 16-23, 32). He did not gloat over his wealth (vv. 24-28) or the fall of his enemies (v. 29). In each instance, Job not only denies evil practice, but also asserts that he had aided those in need. He presents a strong case, providing both positive and negative examples of righteousness. His case is made even stronger when God's endorsement is considered (Job 1:8). Job was indeed a righteous man. Yet, Job did not understand God's nature, ways or purposes. He needed, and wanted, a better revelation of God.

Second, Job wanted to present his case to God and say, in effect, "I have not lived an evil life! I am better than those around me. Why am I condemned? Why are you punishing me this way? What more do you want from me?" But he could not do so because he could not find God. In Job 23:1-9, Job complained that he had no way of meeting God other than through the sacrifices, and this left him ignorant of God. In Job 13:20-24, Job complained that even if he could find God, he would be so terrified of him that he would be unable to speak. Job realized that God was so awesome he could never speak in his own defense. God would overwhelm him. In Job 9:1-20, Job expressed his desire for an "umpire" (NAS) or "daysman" (KJV) that could mediate between them, to help him understand what God wanted (9:33).

The only way Job had to communicate with God was through a sacrifice. He could worship God, but he could not hear from God. It is as if Job were saying, "What are you like, Lord? We have ideas about you, but how do we know if they are correct?" Job wanted a revelation of God!

Humanity's Problem

In essence, this is the cry of humanity in the days of the patriarchs for a revelation of God. They no longer knew who he was, what he was like, or

what he demanded of them. They were forced to rely on burnt offerings and sacrificial ceremonies, but these things did not satisfy. They did not fill the "God-shaped vacuum" in the heart of every human being. The knowledge of God given to Noah was lost, and Job represents humanity's cry to know its creator.

In the absence of clearer data, the Enemy provided alternative answers to humanity's questions. The Enemy provided paradigms and information leading to the development of animism, paganism, Hinduism, Taoism, and other explanatory systems. The general problem for humanity was that they no longer had adequate knowledge of God, and no sure means of hearing from God. Job represents humanity's anguished cry to God.

God's reply was given in Genesis 12:1-3, and throughout the Bible! God acted in Job's day to make himself known to the nations of earth. He called Abraham to be a means of ensuring that the knowledge of God for which humanity longed would be available to all nations.

The Provision for Humanity in the Book of Job

God acted to meet the need of humanity, to answer their cry for an immanent God, not merely a transcendent one. God's reply was to speak to Abraham, send him to Canaan with the promise that through him all nations on earth would be blessed (Ge 12:1-3).

The world wanted information about God, as depicted in Job's cry for an umpire. God responded by ensuring that through Abraham the knowledge of God would always be available to all nations on earth. Israel's job was to "call upon" the Lord in worship and "proclaim" Yahweh as El Elyon, El Shaddai and Yahweh so that all nations could know him.

Ultimately, God revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ so that all people of the earth can know exactly what God is like. So they can know that there is one God and one umpire between this holy God and sinful human men and women, that is, the man Jesus Christ. There is no reason to wonder, "Why is this happening to me? What does God want of me?" John 1:14 teaches that God became a human being and lived among us so that we could know him. John 1:18 teaches that no one has ever seen God, but that in Jesus Christ, God revealed himself to us so that we can

know exactly what God is like and what he wants of us! He wants all nations to know him He wants the nations that know him to make him known to the nations that do not know him.

The Challenge for the Caribbean Church

Many nations in the world today still have a deep longing for knowledge of the true Almighty God. The Caribbean church today is God's answer to the cry of the nations for a knowledge of God. Consider the situation in Gambia.

There are five tribes in Gambia that are considered unreached people groups. These are the Fulani, Mandinka, Maure, Soninke, and Tukolor people groups (Unreached Peoples Prayer Profiles).

The Fulani

Numbering 175,200 in 2000, the Fulani are 98% Malikite Muslim and 1% "Ethnic religionist," or animist. There are only 152 known church members. There are some Scripture portions in their language. The *Jesus* film is available in their own language, and there are some Christian broadcasts in their own language. However, there are only two mission agencies working among this people. As far as is currently known, only 5,400 (44%) of the Fulani have heard the gospel. Thus, 86,400 (56%) have never heard the Gospel. It is doubtful that they ever will hear unless someone from outside Gambia takes the message to them.

The Mandinka

Like the Fulani, the Mandinka are predominantly (98%) Malikite Muslim. Numbering 513,200 in 2000, there are only 445 known Christians among them. The New Testament and the *Jesus* film are available in the Mandinka language, as are Christian broadcasts. However, only three mission agencies are working among this people. Only 173,900 (40%) of the population have heard the gospel. This means that 270,800 (60%), have never heard of peace with God through Jesus Christ.

The Maure

The 19,400 Maure are 100% Malikite Muslim. There are no known Christians among them. There are no Scripture portions in their Hassani language, but the *Jesus* film is available in this Maure language. Only 1,700 (10%) Maure have heard the gospel, leaving 15,100 (90%) who are yet to hear. This will be very difficult since no mission agency or church is currently working among them.

The Soninke

There are 94,300 Soninke, speaking their own Silabe language. Nearly all, 99.9%, are Malikite Muslim. There are only sixteen known Christian Soninke. None of the Scriptures have been translated into Silabe, and there are no Christian broadcasts in the language. The *Jesus* film is available in Silabe, however. To date, 14,700 (18%) of the Soninke have heard the gospel, leaving 67,000 (82%) yet to hear of the love of God for them. Again, it will be difficult for them to hear because there is no known Christian group working among them.

The Tukulor

The 86,000 Tukulor speak their own language, Pulaar. Some portions of the Scriptures have been translated into Pulaar. The *Jesus* film and some Christian broadcasts are also available in Pulaar. There are only 22 known Christian Tukulor, as 99.9% are Malikite Muslims. Only 24,600 (33%) Tukulor have heard the gospel, leaving 49,900 (67%) to be evangelized by the one mission group working among them.

The Caribbean Church

The Caribbean Church is one way God wants to answer the anguished cry of these tribes of Gambia for knowledge of their creator. No one in the Caribbean is unreached with the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are so many

churches and denominations in the Caribbean that anyone who desires to hear the gospel simply needs to walk down the street to find a church, a chapel or a Christian lay person who can explain the gospel to him. It is time that the Caribbean Church begin to use its vast resources to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Fulani, Mandinka, Maure, Soninke and Tukolor.

Conclusion

There are billions in the world today like Job. They want to hear a true word from God, but they do not know where to find it. Many will never hear that true word unless someone from outside their land travels to them, learns their culture and language, and becomes the voice of God for them. Job wanted to know God, and God sent Abraham, Isaac and Jacob into the world with the message of peace with God. Later, God sent Jesus Christ as the perfect messenger of God's love for humanity. Today, he sends the Caribbean church.



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