

# **JOB, GOD'S MAN OF TRUE FAME: HANDLING THE UNEXPLAINABLE**

By  
Paul Grant

## **PREAMBLE**

This two-part presentation looks at the story of Job. It is an attempt to bring together insights that span 60 years of reading and reflection on this epic. For the writer the book is still as fascinating as it is profound; timeless and apt; revelatory and transformative. It is a scintillating jewel of multi-coloured truths. It is a rich lode of ore inviting a faith dig. Its treasures have incalculable worth for instruction in those areas where eternity and time interface. It's magnificent!

The book of Job is up there as one that is especially favoured. In 1947, the first year of my lifetime of Christian ministry, I took it on as one of my earliest books to study. I had seen that the effectiveness of a pastor is directly related to the quality of his/her devotional life. I wanted to have a devotional life that would become a bank of resources for ministry. Firstly, that it would build into me a sturdy foundation of truth, and secondly, that by means of these formative disciplines my character would shine and burn as it did with Abraham, Moses, John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul.

So began what would prove to be both an odyssey and a rhapsody!

My 1947 approach was an initial dig. I gained an overview. Job 2:9-10 fastened itself upon me and became what has remained an enchanting, gripping reference. What faith! I began to relate the meaning of mystery to everyday Christian living. Perspective was enhanced each time I read the book. In 1987 I wrote a devotional interpretation of the book as part of assessment requirements in graduate studies at Fuller Seminary. This "product" is the second part of the presentation. It is included to complement the first part.

Now, in 2007, I am giving it new attention. This time it comes in the form of a blend of prose and poetry. It is a mini epic! This sounds like a contradiction as epics are usually longer. But it comes to you as something that reflects in part the wonder, majesty and mystery of our Lord. It does not pretend to be a theological work in the classical scholarship sense – that is not my area of primary gifting. Focus is mostly selective for there is so much more than this brief review can give. I have majored on getting the general sense of the message and putting it into contemporary thought and language. It is a labour of love that I trust will be a help along the way for any who may read.

As electricity needs to be earthed in order to be safe and effective in the human world, so the Truth of God. God "earthed" himself. "The Word became flesh". Truth as it is in the Job treasury, can be earthed in our daily walk with Jesus. I have sought to relate the clusters of truth, discoverable in Job, to the every-day worlds of the Jesus-follower whose aim is to "know him ... and the power of his resurrection". I hope you will have meals, snacks, and nibbles that will go on feeding you with those particular nutrients that the book of Job can impart. Please be free to use it and quote it as God leads.

## PREFACE

The book of Job in literary terms is an epic : a narrative poem. It's fascinating and it's baffling. It is a scenario that probably took place between 2000 and 1500 BC; before the days of Moses and the Law. An inspiring saga, it is the story of a man's odyssey into the realms of mystery. Acknowledged by Jewish scholars as authentic, they saw it as relevant to the revelation God had subsequently given to Israel as his chosen people.

This is a story that deals with theodicy, the tensions between good and evil; human suffering and Divine justice. Why does God allow evil to coexist with the good? Or, why does God permit wrong to prevail? How can the justice of Almighty God be understood, explained, and defended in the light of evil and the suffering of the innocent?

Job's suffering was an enigma. To him. And to following generations. The epic is an oracle that centres upon a special miracle : God's wisdom and power to hold a man in his faith through immense loss and suffering. Then, to vindicate him and present him as a victor. Satan assaulted Job's faith, seeking to drive a wedge between him and God. But God used Job to humiliate him.

Job's counsellor friends, while orthodox in their theologies, were unable to provide him with answers to his dilemma. Interpretations, yes. But answers, no. Job was taunted but remained undaunted. In the process he endured distress, coming near to total collapse. But he held to his integrity. He learned that in God an ordeal is not a raw deal. Rather, it can give locomotion and promotion to faith.

In one respect God's sovereign plan and purpose in Job's experience of obedience points forward to the greater suffering of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Jesus chose to undergo the sufferings of bewilderment with the Father's will for him to suffer and die. "Why?" was the question uppermost in his mind as he faced the cross. "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me". Yet above and behind the curse of the malign Jesus saw the plan of the Divine. "Not my will but yours be done". Jesus faced down the Devil and rose as the Victor. He has become our Hero. Job's faith in a time of extreme ordeal two milleniums before can be seen as foreshadowing that of our Saviour. Job, of course, was human. Jesus, Divine. Jesus became human, yet not once did he seek to take up his own divine powers to do what the Father had called him to do. He submitted. He had come to prevail, not fail.

This great, unique epic teaches me that I can handle the unexplainable, relate to the mysterious, and triumph in adversity in all sufferings of whatever intensity or range. Job is up there as one of my greatest heroes! Job dared to probe mystery. We are beneficiaries of his example and findings.

## INTRODUCTION

How can we get our minds around these 42 Chapters?! This presentation seeks to extract and explain core elements in the drama. Short prose comments will provide a lead-in to the verse form. It's a basic commentary on the book of Job that seeks to focus on key insights that will help the believer engage with the mystery of suffering.

We shall look at the book of Job as the score or words of a maxi play. Let's see it as a drama with six major scenes. We will set each scene and bring on their characters and their speeches in turn. Music often uses a motif or recurring theme within a whole piece. The motif in Job we will listen to is the presence of Divine majesty in a believer's life in times of great adversity and suffering. We need to keep in mind that God uses bad situations to bring about good. Also, that in our sufferings he is present to give us buoyancy and faith to carry us through.

**SCENE 1.**  
**JOB : THE MAN AND HIS CRISIS**  
**(Chapters 1-3)**

This section sets the stage in a way that shows God as the choreographer or arranger. Or, as the maestro or conductor. This is close to being the basic motif of the book. God Almighty is the Sovereign One who signals and animates every activity in human affairs. Nothing could or would take place unless God said so. Even disaster and personal tragedy. He either directly sets it going or he permits it to occur. But it is always under his direction. Job is a book that helps us understand and accept the inscrutable ways of God as being part of our existence and – as Job clearly shows – development in faith. We need the mystery of suffering. And we need to remember that mystery is not the absence of meaning but the presence of a meaning too great for us to fully understand. Yet, one day, we will. Hence, faith.

In Chapters 1-2 Job exhibits a sublime faith. Then in Chapter 3 he is overwhelmed as any human ever can be. He sinks into despair. He curses his birth and existence, wishing he had never been born. Dreaded realities he had feared and against which he had set a prayer-watch, had taken hold of him. Confused, disoriented, and totally perplexed he vents a deep and angry hopelessness. He is in a state of emotional breakdown. In his outpourings of despair he raises the ancient and modern question: Why did this happen to me? What does this mean? Or, How could God do this to me?

Job was a distinguished patriarch,  
Blameless and upright, honoured by God,  
Regarded as an exemplary monarch  
He was not a man who ruled by the rod;  
Rather, in godly, paternal care  
He daily covered his children in prayer  
Yes, he was exceptionally affluent,  
But that was not his basis of trust,  
Even though his wealth was abundant  
His heart was towards a God who is just.  
Satan, however, had his own opinion,  
He would bring Job under his dominion.  
God sent a summons to every angel  
To appear before him to give their report,  
There in that place of Divine tribunal  
Satan responded with a brazen retort :  
“Strip Job of what he possesses,

He'll soon deny what he professes!"  
 God did just that with certainty,  
 He gave to Satan the authority  
 To destroy the whole of this man's family,  
 But only under his sovereignty,  
 That out of human extremity  
 God would shape a man for eternity  
 God had given and taken away,  
 In submission Job worshipped sublimely,  
 Nor did he sin or once gainsay  
 The purpose of the Almighty.  
 In word and attitude he remained blameless  
 Before his God he was seen to be guiltless  
 His profound confession while in pain  
 Was his acceptance of suffering,  
 Not as punishment but rather gain,  
 He believed in a God of blessing.  
 Rebuking his wife, he stayed on course,  
 Both trials and joys were from the same Source  
 God said of Job, "There is no one like him",  
 This is something we need to acknowledge,  
 For God's assessment is not like a whim,  
 He'd been shaping Job into his image.  
 God's plan was to put Job on display  
 Anointed with grace as his protege  
 Notice that the events in this section  
 Were initiated by God's foreknowledge.  
 If we take care to make closer inspection  
 It's clear Satan had no advantage.  
 Satan's activities and volition  
 Were only functional under God's permission  
 The section closes in Chapter Three  
 With Job in bitter anguish,  
 Is he the man whose pedigree  
 Had hardly a trace of blemish?  
 Yes, but look, he's crushed and broken  
 Questioning now the faith he had spoken

## **SCENE 2.** **DIALOGUES, MONOLOGUES, AND REFLECTIONS** **(Chapters 4-25)**

This section is crammed full of Job's exchanges with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. These men were friends of Job who attempted to bring him counsel and help in his severe experience of grief.

In these 22 Chapters Eliphaz gives 3 speeches; Bildad, 3; and Zophar, 2. Job is recorded as making 11 responses. These three counsellors seem to be genuine in their attempt to bring Job comfort and encouragement. They do their best. With Job they too raise

questions and in other ways as well show that Job's predicament is to some extent a mystery to them. At times they are superior and each one makes reference to the probability that Job had sinned and brought judgement on himself. It is interesting to note that we may easily see our own reflections in some of the things each counsellor says. For example : in their cross-examinations and theologising; and in Job's moods and vehement statements of defence in asserting his innocence.

The following verses contain references to a few issues raised by the friends and to some of Job's responses. These are simply a sampling.

Chapters four to twenty five  
 Is a scene of interaction,  
 Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar strive  
 To discover contradiction  
 In Job's interpretations,  
 His perceptions and reactions  
 Emotions surge, charges are laid,  
 Job with vigour makes his defence;  
 Tempers rise, allegations made,  
 He maintains his innocence.  
 In broken-hearted supplication  
 He pleads for his Maker's vindication  
 Job declares some amazing insights,  
 From these debates here are some highlights :  
 God wounds but he also binds up  
 He injures but his hands also heal<sup>1</sup>.  
 Though he slay me yet will I hope<sup>2</sup>  
 .  
 For the hand of God has struck me<sup>3</sup>  
 I know that my Redeemer lives<sup>4</sup>  
 In my flesh I will see God  
 I myself will see him<sup>5</sup>  
 He knows the way that I take;  
 When he has tested me  
 I shall come forth as gold<sup>6</sup>  
 I have not departed from the commands of his lips;  
 I have treasured the words of his mouth  
 More than my daily bread.  
 He stands alone and who can oppose him?  
 He does whatever he pleases<sup>7</sup>  
 So this scene is quite extraordinary  
 Bringing us revelation  
 Well beyond the imaginary  
 Yet imparting inspiration.

---

<sup>1</sup> Job 5:18

<sup>2</sup> Job 13:15

<sup>3</sup> Job 19:21

<sup>4</sup> Job 19:25

<sup>5</sup> Job 19:26-27

<sup>6</sup> Job 23:10

<sup>7</sup> Job 23:12-13

Scene two, therefore, is a disclosure  
 Of God's way to Job's later composure  
 At times it seems that these three men  
 Engaged in psycho-analysis  
 Investigating the whys and hows and when  
 Of Job's exceptional crisis;  
 Alas! Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar  
 Could really only go so far!  
 There seems to be a deficiency  
 In their joint approach to the questions,  
 While indeed they showed sympathy,  
 They gave opinions and suggestions.  
 Interpretations of Job's great crisis  
 Called for a different exegesis  
 Yes, it seems they did their very best  
 And in the next section there is more,  
 This was for them a singular test  
 They drew on sources of traditional lore.  
 Job is seen to be defiantly strong  
 Would they ever see he was not in the wrong?

### **SCENE 3. PERSONAL INTROSPECTION AND CONFESSION (Chapters 26-31)**

This section is Job's last speech. (After this, over six chapters, Elihu, a fourth counsellor, makes his contribution). But now, Job in his summation, reaffirms his integrity, protests his innocence (27:5-6; 31:6), acknowledges and yearns for God's wisdom declaring that the fear of the Lord and refusal of evil is the way to acquire it (Chapter 28). He recalls beautiful memories of his earlier days in a flood of powerful nostalgia (Chapter 29). He laments the mockery of younger and ignorant men, deploring the loss of the dignity he was once given (Chapter 30). And finally, in Chapter 31 he examines his ways and again maintains his integrity.

In the format of Chapter twenty six  
 Job makes use of the form of derision  
 As he engages with Bildad's polemics,  
 Seeing his words as blurring true vision.  
 It seems he uses the words of his critic  
 To show the Almighty God as majestic  
 Although Job under stress may declare  
 That God has denied him justice,  
 He does not say that God is unfair  
 Nor deal with him in malice.  
 Job held to righteousness not letting go  
 Defending his innocence before his foe  
 He sees the acquiring of wisdom  
 As mining for silver and gold,  
 In statements of holy stoicism

He remains true, unwavering, and bold.  
 God is the fountain of true wisdom  
 He reveals it to those who fear him  
 In memory Job recollects his family  
 He remembers his prosperous days,  
 "When God's intimate friendship", so lovely,  
 Was like a perpetual bouquet.  
 A stand-out sage of acknowledged influence,  
 A man of renown and God-given affluence  
 But now he is seen in isolation,  
 A subject of contempt and mockery,  
 Sitting near a dump in degradation,  
 A humiliated, suffering identity.  
 In Chapter thirty one he examines his ways,  
 Catastrophe has come at the end of his days  
 With deep, persuasive eloquence  
 He points to his blameless history,  
 Again he affirms his innocence  
 Overwhelmed by suffering's mystery.  
 If in fact, he had offended God  
 He would submit himself to the rod.  
 This was the end of his oral defence  
 Elihu now would give his appraisal,  
 Job was resigned, his grief immense  
 But God would soon show his approval.  
 Endurance, steadfastness, and bravery,  
 He made his adversity a university

#### SCENE 4. AN ANGRY YOUNG MAN AND HIS THEOLOGY (Chapters 32-37)

We are now introduced to Elihu. These six chapters comprise a package of observations and interpretations that add to what Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar brought to Job. He was a younger man who seems to show considerable capability as a kind of barrister. He comes in with a vigorous argument that Job has tried to justify himself (32:2). He is angry (32:2,3,5). Perhaps he thought his arguments would bring an answer or resolution to the issue. We do not know. But if so, he would have been confronted later with God's vindication of Job (Chapter 42:7-17). And if so, did he revise his theology?!

Human logic and reasoning of any cultural kind can never adequately explain the ways and dealings of God. ("... the world through its wisdom did not know him..." 1 Corinthians 1:21). Elihu may have been mentally acute but he did not discern what God was up to. In practical terms his theology was sterile. It did not carry a life-imparting impulse. This, of course, was also true of the other counsellors. Yet other patriarchs like Abraham and Moses acknowledged that God, though inscrutable in many ways, could be understood but on God's own terms. They enjoyed intimate friendship with God (Genesis 18:17-19).

Let's say that Elihu's emphasis on Divine sovereignty, while correct in some respects, did lead the way into the self-revelation that God made to Job in Chapters 38-42. This section reminds us that a finely presented theological interpretation is never the answer to people enduring deep suffering. Elihu's summation in 37:23-24 is correct. But it is a statement of fact. It was not a life-giving force.

We now meet a man of younger age  
 A man of considerable knowledge,  
 Elihu appears at centre stage  
 With oratory of impressive usage.  
 His theology is a philosophy  
 That focused on God's sovereignty  
 He misinterpreted Job's predicament  
 Concluding that Job, in pride,  
 Was adamant in his argument  
 To claim he was justified.  
 Self-justification was not Job's intention  
 He was yearning for God's intervention  
 Elihu refers to the activity  
 Of the Holy Spirit's presence,  
 He refers to "the breath of the Almighty"  
 In giving life and substance.  
 Although in manner he was condescending  
 In his thinking he was penetrating.  
 Job's dilemma remained unresolved  
 The Scriptures do not give his reaction,  
 Four counsellors had each been involved  
 The situation called for new traction.  
 Then the breakthrough came from the blue,  
 It was God intervening! A Divine debut!

**SCENE 5.**  
**GOD SPEAKS. AND HE TAKES JOB TO THE ZOO!**  
**(Chapters 38-41)**

God who created all things is the Divine Ecologist and Environmentalist. This is the longest, single recorded speech of God in the Bible. This is Divine confrontation at the ash heap of Uz. The God of surprises breaks directly into Job's life and takes him back to the Genesis 1-2 scene. As tour Guide he sets out to conduct Job on a panoramic survey of the planet and the cosmos. What on earth did God have in mind? This is his way of answering Job's many questions for Chapter 38:1 says : "The Lord answered Job out of the storm".

But God did not answer Job's questions in what we would call the usual or classic way. He takes him along to view the wonders of his creation. It was better than a giant-size plasma screen! And on the tour he gives him a running commentary on some of the extraordinary aspects of the universe. Why?!

Now that we are talking about "climate change" and "global warming" in what we call the "space age", our minds have been stretched to realise that we are mere specks in



dimensions of distance and space and time beyond human understanding. Mere specks we may be, but we are special specks uniquely created to reflect in microcosm the very nature of the Creator himself. Job was now to be humbled by the enormous scope of God's handiwork explained by the Divine Architect-Engineer himself.

When God shows us who he is and what he has done our reaction is to shrivel into inconsequence. God doesn't answer Job's questions or even explain his mysteries. He simply puts himself on display. He's an in-your-face God whose confrontations – if we are humble and willing – are as overwhelming as they are indisputable and formidable. God poses some challenging questions to Job (40:1-14). He points out that Job's attitude and complaints were virtually an offence because he was calling God into question about his actions. "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (Verse 8). Heavy stuff! Dangerous waters! God's reprimands are as important as his commands. And, as necessary!

Job saw God as he really is. It silenced his questions and totally engulfed the man with immeasurable dimensions of the sheer power of God. This would have made his complaints appear a gross intrusion of insignificant pin-pricks. Little surprise that Job said, "I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth". What does my arthritis really matter in the light of the enormity and magnitude of God's character and infinite wisdom?! We only gain a true sense of proportion when we bend before God and accept him for who he shows himself to be.

So these first four verses of Chapter 38 show us God putting Job in his place. He commands him to stand up and answer the remarkable range and quantity of questions that would be put to him. Humbling beyond description!

Out of a violent storm the Lord spoke  
 But not with malediction,  
 Graphic and vivid, an amazing stroke  
 To get the patriarch's attention.  
 Intervention beyond any scale,  
 The revelation of God's nature would prevail.  
 Now it is God who asks the questions  
 For which Job does not give answer,  
 God is not one who makes suggestions  
 For he is the infallible Master.  
 In showing Job marvels of his creation  
 He opened the door to revelation  
 The mysteries of nature and astronomy  
 Are messengers of the Almighty,  
 Meteorology, zoology, and ornithology  
 Are languages of the Trinity.  
 By means of these wonders Job was shown  
 That his case was under the rule of God's Throne  
 Ordeals, trials, sufferings, and woes  
 Along with life's strange, mysterious events  
 Present a challenge to perceive and know  
 While they baffle the mind and confuse the sense.  
 God seemed to say : 'Behind these phenomena  
 Is my sovereign will, presence and honour'.  
 He who set the stars in space,

He who gives every creature its place,  
 He who met with Job face to face  
 Is the Saviour-God of amazing grace.  
 Nature and the cosmos in unison declare  
 'Do not despair, God takes care, and you are his heir'.

### **SCENE 6.** **JOB'S PENITENCE AND GOD'S MUNIFICENCE** **(Chapter 42)**

Of all endings or epilogues in literature – especially in epics and sagas – this Chapter would have to be in the top bracket! God knows how to tidy things up! He is not only the Omega – the “ending” – but also, the End-er. He brings the cosmos and all human affairs to completion. He is the Complet-or. The Judge of all the earth will do right. The books were opened and Job's case finalised by the initiative of God.

Job was deeply contrite over his stream of complaints and reactions. This contrition was triggered by the macro revelation of God's sovereignty, Job becomes a penitent confessing his wrong. He admits his defence was mere babble. He asks for forgiveness.

God directs him to pray for Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Rebuking these three men, God showed them their counselling was deficient, erroneous, unsound, and hurtful. It was humanistic in the basic sense of that word. They had interpreted God and his ways in terms of human understanding. Psychology was their theology. God reactivated Job in ministry by giving him a priesthood function. This occasion of sacrifice and prayer would have been God's route for these three men to follow and discover the true ways of counselling.

He had known of God, now, in a way not experienced before, Job knew God. God's “severe mercy” is to be preferred over the best of this world's blessings or advantages. God vindicated Job before his friends, family relatives, and all others. He was rewarded with twice as much in the way of assets. He was given seven new sons and three new daughters. He lived on to see four generations of children and grandchildren! “Then he died – an old man, a full life” (Message).

Nothing more is written about Satan. God paraded Job before him to show that he would both protect and honour the one he had chosen. This is true fame.

“Fame” is renown. The word derives from a Latin root, to speak. When we speak well of people we give them fame. In this case it was God who spoke well of Job in the process of vindicating him before his friends. God's approval outlasts the meteoric flashes of human praise. Job's example represents true enduring fame. “What you say about yourself means nothing in God's work. It's what God says about you that makes the difference” (2 Corinthians 10:18 Message)

“Munificence” is princely generosity. We can liken it to God's grace. God was magnificently munificent to Job! He is also the God of munificent grace to us.

Especially in times of trial and ordeal.

God's mercy has a severity

Grounded in righteousness,  
 Accepting the rebuke of Deity  
 Job displayed contriteness,  
 Those whom God loves he disciplines  
 But with it he also illumines  
 Job's interface with his Creator  
 On the basis of repentance  
 Moved the Lord as Judicator  
 To give him priesthood eminence.  
 He prayed for those who had opposed him,  
 Showing God's favour he freely forgave them  
 Then God restored Job's fortune  
 He doubled his previous assets,  
 He showed Satan it was opportune  
 That as adversary he should not forget  
 That God's sovereignty will not be defied  
 Nor his mercy vilified  
 God, in majestic, amazing wisdom  
 Had chosen Job to show us all  
 That an ordeal can bring heroism  
 When it's received under God's call.  
 It's a call we usually seek to evade  
 But one that can put us on parade  
 For God wants the universe to know  
 That human suffering is an arena  
 Where in his wisdom he can show  
 His power to give faith and stamina.  
 And it's there we gain an affinity  
 With Jesus who suffered with dignity  
 Thank you, Job, for your sturdy example  
 You stayed the course with determination,  
 And you triumphed at the sequel,  
 You transformed crisis into celebration.  
 You did God proud, of that we're sure  
 It's now for us to make our score

### A Concluding Poem

Amy Carmichael (1867-1951) spent 55 years of dedicated service in India never once returning home to Ireland for furlough. She was passionately committed to rescuing children from lives of depravity intended by others. She herself endured suffering and crisis many times over. She became a prolific writer.

Can we relate one of her poems to the issues of suffering as we have examined them in the life of Job?

From prayer that asks that I may be  
 Sheltered from winds that beat on Thee,  
 From fearing when I should aspire,

From faltering when I should climb higher,  
From silken self, O Captain, free  
Thy soldier who would follow Thee.  
From subtle love of softening things,  
From easy choices, weakenings,  
Not thus are spirits fortified,  
Not this way went the Crucified,  
From all that dims Thy Calvary,  
O Lamb of God, deliver me  
Give me the love that leads the way,  
The faith that nothing can dismay,  
The hope no disappointments tire,  
The passion that will burn like fire,  
Let me not sink to be a clod :  
Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.  
— Amy Carmichael

Should you wish to make use of this material please give acknowledgement of authorship: Paul E. Grant, 27 Aylton Street, Coopers Plains, Queensland 4108, Australia, (07) 3345 6031, Email : pauldulcieg@powerup.com.au.