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## §1 Introducing Job (Job 1:1–5)

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**1:1** / The first chapter serves as a prose prologue to the dialogue sections that form the core of the book. The focus from the very first word is on the main character. Hebrew word order (lit., “a man there was in the land of Uz”) intentionally emphasizes the **man**, Job. This word order signals that the reader should pay particularly close attention here to the introduction of this man and his circumstances, for he will play an important role in what follows.

Because the OT elsewhere associates Uz with Edom, the words **in the land of Uz** do more than locate Job geographically; they associate his story and the book’s wisdom with *non-Israelite* wisdom. It should not surprise us that Israel included foreign wisdom texts in its Scriptures. Wisdom is a peculiarly universal take on life that frequently seems to stand outside the particular religious belief system of the sage. Since wisdom analyzes the observations and experiences of life rather than the special revelations of God that make up the beliefs and expectations of the Torah and Israel’s covenant faith, wisdom observations could pass without prejudice across national boundaries in the ancient Near East. Israel is aware of foreign wisdom (Gen. 41; Jer. 49:7; Dan. 1–2) and appreciates it (1 Kgs. 4:30; Ezek. 28:12).

Although Job’s story and words are non-Israelite in origin, his experience and concerns are universal and so have appealed to those of many nationalities and faiths throughout the centuries. In the Wisdom literature of ancient Israel, this material speaks to Israel’s particular concerns—especially during the period of the exilic Diaspora. The biblical text clearly has resisted any temptation to cloak Job in the guise of Israelite respectability, and has allowed him, rather, to stand as an example of a wise man by referring to him as “the greatest man among all the people of the East.” This suggests that his narrative is intended, from the outset, to have significance beyond the narrow national

confines of Israel—however broadly conceived—and is understood to speak to the deepest issues of the human condition.

**Whose name was Job.** The similarity of Job’s name (*ʿiyob*) to the Hebrew word for “enemy; opponent” (*ʿoyeb*) has led some to suggest a symbolic interpretation of the name. In this view, which undermines the historicity of the book’s central character, Job is the literarily conceived “opponent” who confronts God. There are examples of the name in various forms in early ancient Near Eastern texts, however, so a symbolic understanding of the name is not *necessary*. It is perfectly reasonable to conclude that the name of this individual was Job. This ought not to obscure the fact, however, that the narrative at different points exploits the name and its meaning to emphasize the hostility between Job and his God. In 13:24, for example, Job considers God an “enemy” (*ʿoyeb*) and treats him as an “opponent” (*tsar*) in 16:9 and 19:11.

The resumptive phrase **this man was** repeats the opening words with only slight variation and reestablishes that we are to focus on this man, Job—and not his location or his name. Three descriptive phrases then emphasize Job’s integrity, which, as we will see, dominates the rest of the book’s discussion and argument. First, Job is **blameless and upright**. The Hebrew for “blameless” (*tam*) describes not sinless perfection, but a person who is “whole” and “complete” and who has taken pains to maintain right relationships with God and others. In Psalm 19:13, the psalmist equates “blamelessness” with avoiding “great transgression.” Israelite faith assumed the sinful nature of humans, and the sacrificial system provided a way to break down the barrier between sinners and a holy God. The “blameless” person was the one who took measures to restore and maintain right relation with God. The Hebrew term translated “upright” (*yashar*) has the sense of “straightness” or “directness.” Job is not twisted, crooked, or convoluted in his dealings with God and humans. Rather, he is straightforward and direct in deed and speech. These two words occur repeatedly throughout the book—both together and separately—to emphasize and reemphasize the integrity of Job that is at the core of the book’s discussion and message.

As well as being able to maintain right relationship with God and straight dealings with fellow humans, Job also **feared God**. This invisible, inward relationship to God is at the core of Israelite faith and practice. According to the sages, the “fear of the LORD” is the starting point of true knowledge (Prov. 1:7a), and true wisdom leads one to “fear God and keep his command-

ments”—the essential duty of all humanity (Eccl. 12:13). Fear of Yahweh is more than simple terror (see, e.g., Exod. 20:20), or even reverent awe at the “otherness” of the deity. It is the appropriate humility with which humans recognize and accept their absolute dependence on God for life, forgiveness, restoration, and salvation. Abraham is said to “fear Yahweh” when he is willing to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, trusting that God will still fulfill his promise of descendants (Gen. 22). That Job “feared God” indicates far more than that he paid scrupulous attention to religious piety and was straight in his dealings with others. The foundation of Job’s outer piety is complete trust and reliance on God. The events that follow will put this inward attitude to the test.

Because of Job’s trust in God, he **shunned evil**. Relying on God and being firmly established on the “way” of obedience, Job was able to avoid those tempting side-paths that lead to sin and disorientation. Job, then, is like the “blessed” one in Psalm 1:1 who will not walk, stand, or take up residence with those persons who characterize the God-forsaking life of evil (the “wicked,” “sinners,” and “mockers”).

**1:2–3** / Job is not only righteous, but he is wealthy as well. He has **seven sons and three daughters**. Seven, made up of four (the points of the compass and thus the earth) and three (indicating divinity or the heavens), is the number of completeness, of all heaven and earth. Job, then, is blessed with a perfect complement of sons and daughters.

His wealth is no less complete, consisting of massive herds including **seven thousand sheep and three thousand camels**. Together Job’s herds add up to ten thousand, as do his yokes of **oxen** (500) and **donkeys** (500). Job also commands the services of a **large number of servants**. The numbers do not lie! This man was so blessed that the narrator sums up his stature with unrivaled superlatives: **He was the greatest man among all the people of the East**.

**1:4–5** / A single example of his almost compulsive caution and scrupulous attention to religious detail illustrates Job’s piety. Job’s sons and daughters engage in a continuing round of feasting, to which Job responds with concern and religious care. The word for **feasts**, *mishte*, comes from the root *shatah*, “drink.” Together with the emphasis on the sisters being invited **to eat and drink** with their brothers (see also 1:13; 18), the implication is that drinking was the most prominent feature of these gatherings.

While these are probably joyous celebrations of sibling unity there is certainly nothing religious about them, and it is striking that there is no mention of the brothers inviting Job and his wife. Had Job been present at the feasts, he would not have had to wonder whether his children had offended God in their inebriation. After each feast, Job **would send** (another indication he was not himself present) **and have them purified**, performing ritual actions to bring them into a state of holiness fit for service to God. The **burnt offering** he offered on behalf of each child was an *‘olah*, or “fully burned” offering, used most often to atone for sin and restore right relationship (see, e.g., Num. 29:36; also Job 42:8).

Job performed this sacrificial ritual **early in the morning** as a sign of his seriousness and diligence, not allowing anything to intrude to inhibit his purpose. He was concerned for the spiritual welfare of his children, who may have **sinned and cursed God** during their festivities. The sin of cursing God, of course, plays an important role in the book of Job and becomes the crux of the test proposed by the Satan later in this same chapter: will a suffering Job curse God to his face as the Satan suggests (1:11; 2:5)? Here Job takes great care to respond with effective sacrificial precautions to even a hint of a possible curse (**in their hearts**). Verse 5 concludes with the assurance that such scrupulousness characterized Job’s **regular custom**.

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### Additional Notes §1

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**1:1** / The Hebrew word order in Esther (2:5) gives similar weight to the central character, Mordecai. Lit.: “a man, a Jew, there was in Susa the capital.” See also Nathan’s rebuke of David (2 Sam. 12:1). Lit.: “Two men there were in a single city.”

The **land of Uz** occurs elsewhere only in Jer. 25:20, in a list of foreign dignitaries (“the kings of Uz”), and in Lam. 4:21, which links it with the land of Edom. Uz is a personal name in genealogies in Gen. 10:23; 22:21; 36:28; 1 Chr. 1:17, 42. Two of these passages, Gen. 36:28 and 1 Chr. 1:42, relate Uz to Edom (in lists of descendants of the Horite kings of Seir/Edom). The final two chapters of Proverbs bear introductory superscriptions (30:1; 31:1) attributing the material to non-Israelite sages—Agur and Lemuel. Both of these superscriptions use the term *massa*<sup>3</sup>, which often describes a prophetic “oracle.” However, since “king” Lemuel is unknown among the kings of Israel and Judah some have concluded that the term *massa*<sup>3</sup> here is a place name, and Lemuel is “king of Massa<sup>3</sup>,”

a foreigner. If this is the case, then Agur by analogy is most likely a foreigner as well. The NIV follows the prophetic, rather than geographic, interpretation. The literary relationship between Prov. 22:17–24:22 and the Egyptian wisdom text of Amenemopet also demonstrates that the editors of the Wisdom literature were not afraid to adapt such texts to their own beliefs and purposes. For an ET of the Amenemopet text, see “The Instruction of Amen-em-Opet,” in *ANET*, pp. 421–25.

Other, less persuasive suggestions for a symbolic rendering of the name **Job** include: “the penitent one” (compare the Arabic *ʿwb*, “return, repent”), foreshadowing Job’s dramatic shift toward the end of the book; and “Where is my [divine] father?” (*ʿayya-ʿabum*), a possible reference to Job’s fierce determination to call God out of hiding and into public confrontation. See the discussion in Hartley, *Job*, p. 66.

**Blameless and upright** occur together only three times in Job (and nowhere outside this book), always describing Job (1:1; 1:8; 2:3). The Hebrew *tam* appears at Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; 8:20; 9:20, 21, 22—almost half of its total occurrences in Scripture. All but 8:20 either confirm or protest the integrity of Job (similarly, see also the adjectival form *tamim* in 12:4).

Proverbs 1:7 employs the more particular phrase “fear of *Yahweh*,” where the distinctive name of Israel’s covenant God appears. On the other hand, Ecclesiastes uses the more generic designation *ʿelohim*, “God.” The reference in Eccl. 12:13 to “keep his commandments” makes it clear, however, that it is *Yahweh* who is intended in both instances.

**1:3 / People of the East** suggests again that Job is not an Israelite. The “East” (Heb. *qedem*) is for Israel a description of what lies “before” (*qedem*) one when facing the rising sun. By extension, the term also describes the lands on the “other side” (to the east) of the Jordan to the borders of Mesopotamia.