

Job

*This is part of an ongoing series of short articles designed to help us understand what scripture is and what is **in** each book of scripture. Previous articles can be found at www.openarms-communityofchrist.org.*

The last section of the Hebrew canon of scripture is generally identified as the “Writings”—books that contain a wide variety of literature. Job is the first of three books in this section called “wisdom literature.”

It is often described as a “crisis of faith”—an attempt to explain the mystery of suffering or to answer the question “Why do bad things happen to good people?” But it might more accurately be described as a look at “faith in crisis.” What allows some individuals to deal with difficult situations still trusting in God?

Rather than an actual event, Job is generally considered to be a folk tale, written about the time of the Exile (the 6th century BC).

The main characters are Satan (in this case, described as “accuser” and not devil), God, Job, and Job’s three friends. Satan suggests to God that Job is faithful to him only because everything in Job’s life is going well, but that if he has to deal with crises, he will lose his faith. God gives Satan permission to test Job by creating a series of crises in which he loses everything except his life.

When Job’s friends hear of his troubles, they come to sit with him. When Job eventually laments what has happened to him, his friends respond by lecturing him about divine justice and question him as to what he has done to deserve these catastrophes. Job defends himself, and the conversation becomes heated. Finally Job directly addresses God, challenging what God has done to him. God responds, asking Job questions impossible for him to answer. He draws him deeper into the mystery of who God is, until Job has a deeply personal experience with God. He does not receive answers, but it is enough for him that God has chosen to be present with him.

The emphasis of the book is on a God who is at work in the universe, even in the midst of evil situations. God is willing to be present with human beings, and God also desires for human beings to worship and serve God out of their own choice, not just because things are going well in life.