

## Job (August 19)

### Reading Job

Stubs of pillars and walls interrupt the graceful arcs of hills throughout the Near East. At twilight, silhouettes of these ruins meld with the hills like permanent features of the landscape. But in truth, they testify that nothing here is permanent. All things and all people suffer decay in our sin-broken world. The life and world of every person ends in ashes, dust, and ruins.

The prophet Job sat in ashes and dust for seven days and considered the ruins of his once-great estate. Neither mourning nor the wisdom of his friends offered comfort. In fact, Job's friends accused him of bringing ruin upon himself and his family.

### Author

Although most of the book consists of the words of Job and his counselors, Job himself was not the author. The unknown author probably had access to oral and/or written source materials from which, under divine inspiration, he composed the book that we now have. Of course the subject matter of the prologue had to be divinely revealed to him, since it contains information only God could know. While the author preserves much of the archaic and non-Israelite flavor in the language of Job and his friends, he also reveals his own style as a writer of wisdom literature. The literary structures and the quality of the rhetoric used display the author's literary genius.

### Date

Two dates are involved: (1) the date of the man Job and his historical setting, and (2) the date of the inspired writer who composed the book. The latter could be dated anytime from the reign of Solomon to the exile. Job himself appears to have lived in the second millennium BC (2000-1000), and probably late in that millennium.

### Theme and Message

The book provides a profound statement on the subject of theodicy (the justice of God in light of human suffering). But the manner in which the problem of theodicy is conceived and the solution offered (if it may be called that) is uniquely Israelite. In the speeches of chapters 3-37, we hear on the one hand the flawless logic but wounding thrusts of those who insisted that Job's suffering came from being guilty in the eyes of God, and on the other hand the writhing of soul of the righteous sufferer who struggles with the great enigma of a loving God who still allows evil.

In summary, the author's pastoral word to the godly sufferer is that his righteousness has such supreme value that God treasures it more than all. And the great adversary knows that if he is to thwart the purposes of God, he must assail the righteousness of man. At stake in the suffering of the truly godly is the outcome of the struggle in heaven between the great adversary and God, with the all-encompassing divine purpose in the balance. That the suffering of the righteous has a meaning and value commensurate with the titanic spiritual struggle of the ages.

### Blessings for Readers

Despite Job's lack of understanding and inability to explain his suffering, he clings to his belief that God is still his Redeemer. The book of Job teaches that suffering is not simply God's judgment for sin (though it certainly can be that); suffering may be a trial permitted by God for our good or for the good of another. Most important, human suffering is part of God's redemptive plan for the salvation of all. Job trusts that a Mediator-Redeemer will justify him. And in the end, God leads Job to sincere repentance and renewed faith in his mercy.

As you study Job, pray for the patience, wisdom, and faith shown by this saint. No matter what you may suffer, confess your Redeemer and call on him. He will deliver you!