

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

Job

Between Esther and Psalms, the Bible's 18th book has its shortest title and hardest problem: suffering. All 42 chapters confront the issue without a final solution.

Unusual book: Most of the Bible classifies easily: five books of law, 12 of Hebrew history, 17 prophets, four Gospels, and 21 epistles. Of the remaining seven, four are poetry or wisdom (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon); one is church history (Acts); one apocalyptic literature (Revelation). And then there is Job.

Job resists simple classification. It begins and ends with history, wrapped around a debate reproduced as poetry. Perhaps the whole is parable. Certainly it is *theodicy* — a vindication of God's justice.

A theodicy addresses . . .

- Why does evil exist in God's creation?
- Why do bad things happen to good people?
- What are the purposes of misery and suffering?
- Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?

Other isolated passages glance at these issues (Psa. 37; 73; Eccl. 8:11-14; Jer. 12:1ff; Mal. 3:13-15; Rom. 9—11), but Job is entirely devoted to them.

Job is also unique by its silence about Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, the prophets, and Israelite religion. Job knows the God of creation and redemption but does not mention other familiar Bible stories.

Who? Where? When? Little is known about the man Job or who wrote the book by his name. He seems to have been a public official (a king? — ch. 29), perhaps in northern Arabia. If, as some think, Job lived at the time of the Hebrew patriarchs, his story is one of the Bible's oldest.

Structure

- Prologue (chs. 1, 2): Job's testing by Satan brings the loss of his children, possessions, and health.
- Dialogue (chs. 3—41): Job and his friends exchange ideas in ancient poetic form. Job's nine speeches cover 20 chapters (3, 6—7, 9—10, 12—14, 16—17, 19, 21, 23—24, 26—31); Eliphaz gives three speeches (4, 5, 15, 22); Bildad, three (8, 18, 25); Zophar, two (11, 20); and Elihu, one long speech (32—37). Speaking from a whirlwind, the Lord gives a climactic response (38—41).
- Epilogue (ch. 42): Job repents, and God restores his health and prosperity.

Essence of speeches

Job wonders why a good God permits such catastrophe and wishes for a referee to negotiate justice between himself and God. Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu say that, since suffering results from sin, Job needs to repent and find God. God's position is that Job did not make the universe or its marvels.

Classic texts

"The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (2:21).

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him" (13:15).

"Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. . . . If a man dies, shall he live again? You shall call, and I will answer You" (14:1, 14, 15).

"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (19:25, 26).

Elsewhere in the Bible, Job . . .

- ranks alongside Noah and Daniel as holy men (Ezek. 14:14, 20).
- illustrates human patience and God's goodness: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11, KJV).

Job and Jesus: When a notably righteous man suffers extreme calamity, faith in a good God, an omnipotent God, is sorely tested. If God is loving enough to care for people and powerful enough to control circumstances, why should Job suffer? When the perspectives of Job's friends fail to assuage his grief, God's spoken word turns the tide. Millennia later, the Father's living Word, though sinless, would take all the world's misery upon Himself at the cross. In Christ we learn that undeserved suffering can be vicarious, can work for good, and can open the gates to glory. Often our misery is deserved. When it is not and we take it patiently for His sake, then we are companions of Christ and shall reign with Him!

Job in a sentence: After losing every earthly thing by various tragedies, Job debates the "why" with his friends, hears God's voice, humbles himself, and finds it all restored again.