

JOB—AN ANGRY AND IMPATIENT OLD MAN

Old man Job has come off smelling a lot better than he deserves. His story is told in the Jewish scriptures, in the book called “Job” of course.

If you read around in it, you’ll soon find that Job was a cantankerous impatient old cuss. But somehow or other he has gone down in history as superbly righteous, and patient to a fault.

He’s only mentioned at two other places in the Bible, once in the Jewish scriptures and once in the Christian writings. In Ezekiel 14:14-20 he is coupled with Noah and Daniel. The three were considered examples of extraordinary righteousness. The kind of people who were so good they could have saved themselves.

In James 5:7-11 Job is mentioned with the ancient prophets as an example of patience. He is pictured as the kind of person who could stay steady in spite of excruciating suffering and who could wait patiently for the Lord’s mercy.

Where did they get that idea? Obviously from the book of Job. But not from the entire book of Job. Just from the first couple of chapters and from the concluding verses.

In those sections Job is almost too good to be true. According to chapter 1, the Lord lets Satan harass Job beyond human endurance. His flocks, his servant, and his ten children are all wiped out in the space of a single afternoon.

But Job refuses to complain. “The Lord gives and the Lord takes,” he muses. “Praise the Lord!”

Then in chapter 2 he comes down with a skin disease like you wouldn’t believe. He ends up at the town dump scratching his festering boils with broken jars.

His helpful wife suggests he curse God and end it all. When three friends show up to console him, they don’t even recognize him. But good old Job hangs in there without complaining.

In the end, at chapter 42, the Lord scolds he three friends and rewards Job. He ends up twice as rich as he had ever been, and he fathers ten more children. He lives unto a ripe old age, happily ever after.

So, according to the opening and closing chapters, Job is a saint. He never complains. He

suffers patiently. And the Lord rewards his efforts.

Now read the chapters in between. That’s a horse of a different color. There Job is anything but patient. He argues with his friends, and he argues with God. He is mad.

Here are a few samples: In chapter 3 Job complains about the fact that he has even been born. He suggests they curse his birthday. It would have been better if he had been aborted. That’s how miserable he feels.

When his friends suggest that he must have done *something* wrong or God wouldn’t let him suffer, Job laughs in their face. “That’s just the trouble,” he maintains “God isn’t fair.”

At one point, in chapter 9, he complains because there is no umpire who can referee his fight with God.

After pages and pages of arguing with his friends, Job is right back where he started. He shakes his fist in frustration at God. “You won’t even pay attention to me,” he grouches in chapter 30. “You are mean, cruel, and capricious.”

There follow more pages of pious blather, but nothing seems to convince Job. He remains angry and impatient with God.

So finally the Lord puts in an appearance in chapters 40-41. He simply overwhelms Job with his power and wisdom. And eventually Job capitulates.

He gives in. “I don’t know what I was saying,” is his lame excuse. “I’ll shut up.”

For ninety percent of the book Job is an angry, impatient old man. But the trouble is, too few folks read nothing but the beginning and ending chapters where he looks like a nice guy.

And that’s too bad. Because it’s the middle chapters which offer the more realistic picture of human existence. That’s where you can agonize over the gutsy issues of injustice in the world, and undeserved suffering, and the purpose of living.

So that makes it worth checking out, especially in the middle of winter. The tag end of January or maybe mid-February, when it’s cold and glunky and depressing outside, may be the perfect time for reading Job.

It helps to be able to identify with another grouchy old soul.