

## Introduction to Job

### **Setting & Date of the Book**

We don't know exactly when or where Job lived, but there are some clues. Job's wealth is measured in livestock and servants, sacrifices were made by the head of the family, and he lived for well over a century. These characteristics were typical of people around Abraham's time (c. 2000 BC). There's no mention of Israel, a priesthood, or Moses. Job lived in "the East" (1:3), which, from the Israelite perspective, included nations like Babylon, Assyria, Persia, Media, and Elam. Guesses and traditions about the authorship include Moses, Solomon, and Elihu, but we simply don't have enough information to know.

### **Theme**

Job initially remained faithful through incredible suffering. His friends believed that suffering must be a divine punishment, so they charged Job with sin and urged him to repent. Their uninspired "wisdom" was wrong. Job believed that God was unjust to let a righteous man suffer as he had. He even expressed his desire to meet God in a figurative courtroom to present his case.

A young man witnessing the debate justified God and reproved the four men. Finally, God corrected Job— not by explaining the reason for his suffering— but by challenging Job to explain the wonders and mysteries of creation. Job was humbled and comforted to learn that God knows what he's doing. Job's possessions were restored two-fold, and he lived a long life.

### Translation Difficulties on the Key Verse

Job 42:6 is, in my opinion, the most important verse of the book. It also contains some translation difficulties. The first line lacks the noun ("Therefore I despise."). Some translations add "myself" (ESV, NIV, NKJV) while others indicate Job's words (NASB; CSB). The two seem to be grammatically and contextually reasonable.

The second line is more controversial. Almost all English translations have the word "repent," but the Hebrew word standing behind this is *nacham*. This can mean regret or repentance, but its primary meaning is comfort. It's translated "comfort" in its six other occurrences in Job (2:11; 7:13; 16:2; 21:34; 29:25; 42:11).

Some assume that "dust and ashes" is associated with repentance, but that phrase is an expression of humility, not repentance, in the other two texts in which it occurs (Gen. 18:27; Job 30:19).

Job had suffered. First, the loss of family, possessions, and health. Then, the ignorant assumption that his losses were punishment for some terrible sin. But perhaps worst of all, he'd lost confidence in God's justice.

Job was penitent over his words, but he was also comforted to know for certain that God is just. When all the evidence is considered, "comfort" is the right word in Job 42:6.

Therefore, I relent and find comfort on dust and ashes. (CEB)

"therefore I despise myself, and repent in\* dust and ashes." (ESV, see footnote)

\*Or *and am comforted upon*