

The Book of Job

Editor's Note (a.k.a. Message from Tom): This is an adaptation from the CRI/Voice, Institute, "The Book of Job Bible Study", <http://www.crivoice.org/biblestudy/bbjob.html>. Indented excerpts are from The OT Daily Bible Study Series "Job" by John C.L. Gibson unless otherwise noted (an Old Testament adjunct to the NT Barclay books).

The Book of Job is acclaimed as one of the great literary books of the Old Testament. One author says it is no less than eight types of literature rolled up in one book. One would then expect that there are many ways to look at and learn from Job. The CRI/Voice Bible Study focuses on what you personally might learn and apply in your life. However, the Book of Job is also called "the most theological book" of the entire Old Testament (Theology = study and commentary on the existence and attributes of a God.) The OT Daily Bible Study Series, "Job" looks at personal learning and the theology of late Old Testament Judaism. That book is, however, a horrible book to read. I was never able to read as many pages as I wanted in one sitting and Tim consistently fell asleep trying to read it. Understanding the theology and therefore the moral thinking and cultural mind set of late Old Testament Jews can add tremendous insight to your reading any of the New Testament Books, especially the Gospels. The indented excerpts will, it is hoped, allow us to discuss and learn about that theology without having to suffer through the dull scholarly book itself. You can find the entire text, if you have the fortitude, on our website:

<http://Gospel.ThruHere.net/BibleStudy/Downloads1/DailyBibleStudyJob.pdf>.

Forward: (Or perhaps this is an at least partially an afterward because I write this after I have completed half of the melding together of Roger Hahn's online *CRI/Voice Bible Study* and the excerpts from John C.L. Gibson's *Job*.) I have these thoughts to pass along:

- Some people, and I will admit I am one, find it difficult to read poetry. The majority of the Book of Job is poetry and to make matters worse it is poetry that has been translated from another language, Hebrew. If you find this scriptural poetry nearly impossible to read, try this. Set this 8½ x 11 side by side with your Bible. First read the explanation of a verse in this commentary and then read the corresponding verse so you are going back and forth between the two documents. It is sometimes easier to read poetry when you know what it is supposed to be saying.
- The story of Job is one of a pious man who falls on bad times and suffers. The cultural beliefs of the time said that everything was caused by something, if not caused by a fellow man then God was the cause, no in-between, no "stuff just happens." Therefore, affliction and suffering where the result of having offended God through sin, no in-between, no "stuff just happens." Job does not believe he has sinned and doesn't understand why he is suffering. Job and three of his friends debate the cause of Job's tremendous loss and illnesses. The debate is about God, his attributes and how he interacts with humankind. This is why the Book of Job is considered the most theological book of the Old Testament.
- We have heard (from our Barclay readings) that the belief that illness was cause by sin was so deep-seated that Jesus was compelled to tell some people that their sins were forgiven before he could cure them. We have heard that prosperity was believed to be a sign of God's favor, God's grace. We have heard that the thought that there might be a life hereafter was relatively new in Jesus' time and that the Sadducees totally rejected that thought. Yet we have not tried to understand how if we deeply held these beliefs it might affect us. We have not tried to see Jesus' and his disciples' teaching through the eyes of someone who had these deep cultural beliefs.

Reading the whole of Gibson's *Daily Bible Study, Job* gives the opportunity to see the New Testament through a set of glasses tinted by the above beliefs. I am concerned that excerpts I have added to Hahn's Bible Study may result in just "hearing" about these beliefs again and fail in the tinted glasses department. So I am asking that when the Study Questions ask you to consider how one of these beliefs might affect you that you give due time and effort to that thought process. The time spent will be well worth the effort.

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Lesson 1 Readings

No Bible Readings

Introduction to the Book of Job

Roger Hahn

This introduction is Lesson 1 in the [Voice Bible Studies on the Book of Job](#)

The book of Job is part of the Old Testament collection of Wisdom Literature, along with Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

The Book of Job belongs to what we call the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The *hakamim*, or “wise men”, were a class of philosophers or teachers who believed that by studying the world of nature and the workings of human society, a man could discern the inner harmony of the universe and tease out the principles of behavior which would bring him into contact with that harmony and ensure his happiness and success in life. Religion was important to them and, in a real sense, the basis of all their study: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” is how their enduring memorial, the Book of Proverbs, puts it

Like the other Wisdom books Job is primarily composed of poetry and Job 28 consists of a hymn to Wisdom. Yet Job stands in strong contrast to Proverbs. Many scholars believe that Job was written to correct a possible misunderstanding of the message of Proverbs.

Job is different from Proverbs in another important way. Most of Proverbs could be read in one or two verse segments and the full meaning would be clear. To understand the full impact of the book of Job the book must be read and understood as a whole. In fact, some scholars believe that Job requires an understanding of the book as a whole more than any other book of the Old Testament. Whole chapters of the book are devoted to speeches by Job's counselors. Then Job rejects their claims and advice. One can be left wondering what is safe to believe in any given chapter or verse of the book. Not all that Job's "friends" said was wrong, though some was. To understand the "message" of the book the whole book must be read and understood. Yet, each chapter and section contains important and true perspectives on life though they must be carefully evaluated. In that regard Job is quite representative of the Wisdom Literature.

In some ways Job can be an upsetting book. James 5:11 holds Job up as an example of patience. Yet as we read the book itself Job frequently seems impatient and even angry. Most Christians have considered claims of sinlessness as dangerous and even sinful! First John 1:8 and 10 provide all the Scriptural backing needed for a strong sense of sin in one's life. However, Job defends himself against those who suggest that it was his own sin that led to his troubles. In Job 7:20 he demands of God, "If I have sinned, what have I done to you?" Throughout the book Job demands to see God. He seems convinced that in a face-to-face confrontation with the Almighty he could win his case and be vindicated.

It is hard for the Christian reader of this book to cast his mind back to a time before the New Testament existed, and think themselves into an age when a man could be proud of his righteousness. But it is vital that we do so, otherwise Job's tragedy loses its cutting edge. Perhaps the best way for us to capture the atmosphere of Israel's Wisdom literature—in this regard at least—is to imagine the Pharisee in Our Lord's parable saying his—as far as we are concerned—dreadful words, "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men" (Luke 18:11), with utter honesty and without the slightest trace of hypocrisy. That is the kind of man Job was.

The climax of the book occurs when God does appear to Job and Job humbly acknowledges the divine sovereignty. Whatever else we might say about Job, it is not a typical book about being good. The questions it raises and the way in which differing opinions are presented can be confusing and even frightening. A reader of Job must "stay with it" throughout the whole book and then ponder what all the speeches and answers mean.

Such an effort is worthwhile. Throughout Jewish and Christian history Job has spoken powerful words of hope and comfort to people who have suffered or who have found faith difficult. For people who are not satisfied with simple answers Job rings a word of truth. One measure of the power of the book of Job has been its influence outside the spiritual communities of Christianity and Judaism. A recent work on Job describes it as "one of the classics of Western culture" with "manifold influence. . . on theology, philosophy, art, and literature" (Perdue and Gilpin, p. 11). Clines (pp. cviii-cxii) lists over four pages of works of literature, art, music, dance, and film inspired by the book of Job.

Historical Background of Job

It is not surprising that such a profound book might be difficult to understand. It is surprising that we know so little about the historical background of Job. There is no book of either Old or New Testament for which we have less idea about the author, the date, the place of writing, and even the context of writing.

The book of Job makes no mention of its author and gives no clue to his (or her) identity. The Jewish rabbis held to the tradition that Moses was the author of Job. The basis of their tradition is not clear. In some ways Job fits in the period of the patriarchs. Some traditions claim that Job married one of Abraham's daughters.

However, no historical figure we know from the Old Testament seems like a likely candidate to have written Job. We are left to describing what we can determine about the author on the basis of what we read in the book. The most basic statement that can be made is that the author was an Israelite, though even a few scholars suggest that he might have been an Edomite! Most believe he was part of the Wisdom tradition of Israel. He was competent with the literary techniques of Wisdom. Proverbs, rhetorical questions, riddles, and personification were techniques of writing that this author used easily. Hartley (p. 16) points out his extensive knowledge of plant and animal life. Five different Hebrew words for "lion" appear in Job 4:10-11. Chapters 38-39 reveal detailed knowledge of animals and their peculiar patterns of life. He must have been an "outdoors" man who hunted and trapped since he used six different words for traps in Job 18:8-10.

Thirteen different Hebrew words are used for precious gems and metals including five separate words for gold. Job 28:1-11 is the most detailed description of mining in all of ancient Hebrew literature. This author was aware of weather patterns and constellations. He was also knowledgeable about foreign cultures. Job 6:18-20 shows his awareness of the travel of caravans in the Arabian desert. Job 9:26 describes the speedy movement of the light skiffs made of papyrus that were used in Egypt in ancient times. His references to the hippopotamus and the crocodile probably also reflect travel in Egypt. Those animals were widely known in Egypt and we have no evidence of their existence in Palestine during the Biblical era.

There are many specific parallels between Job and the Ugaritic literature found in Syria that can only be explained by the author Job having read those works or having traveled in that part of the world. He was also very aware of the Canaanite myths that permeated Palestine during the Old Testament era. These characteristics all point to a highly educated and well-traveled person from the Wisdom tradition of the Old Testament.

The date of the book of Job is equally unknown. Some scholars believe the book comes from the patriarchal period (the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and thus they would date it to 1600 BC. The picture of life described in Job fits the patriarchal period better than it does any other period of the Old Testament. However, the assumption that the author was a part of the Wisdom tradition of Israel means that the book would not have been written before the time of Solomon.

The most common time frames suggested for the writing of Job are the time of Isaiah, about 700 BC, after the Fall of Jerusalem to Babylon around 550 BC, and in the post-exilic period, 300-400 BC. Partial arguments can be made successfully for each of these three time periods, but none can be conclusively ruled out by the historical methods and information available to us. The problem of suffering and wondering why would have been an especially important subject for Jews during the Babylonian Captivity (550 BC), but that does not constitute clear evidence Job was written then. Perhaps the best we can say is that it appears Job was written near the end of the Old Testament period, but we cannot be more precise than that.

The theology and religious ideas of the book of Job are those of a relatively late period, though not of quite the latest period represented in the OT. The book presupposes (a) a general agreement as to the religious value of the individual independently of the community, of personality: yet also (b) a practically unchallenged conviction that the real life or personality of the individual is terminated by death; (i) is the necessary condition of the entire discussion, and (ii) had there been a general belief in the survival after death of the personality with undiminished or enhanced relations with God, this would have

affected the discussion by Job and the friends of the sufferings of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked in this life.¹

The Book of Job does not contain any real belief in a meaningful life after death, despite the famous passage in Chapter 19, "I know that my Redeemer lives". Nor is there any notion that Job's sufferings have a positive function as a Christian's sufferings may in light of the Cross.

Our ignorance of the author and date of Job also means that we cannot know where the book was written. Job is described in the first verse as a man of Uz. The location of Uz is uncertain. Biblical evidences for it falls into two patterns. There are several evidences that Uz was in or near Edom, south and southeast of the Dead Sea. The Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek done around 250 B.C. believed Uz to be in Edom. Other lines of evidences point to Uz being located far north of Palestine near Haran, the home territory of Abraham and Laban. The location of Uz in the area of Edom is strengthened by the fact that Teman, the home of Eliphaz the Temanite mentioned in Job 4:1, was the main city and district of Edom. On the other hand, the home of Bildad the Shuhite who is mentioned in Job 8:1 is not known. Likewise, we do not know the location of the city or area that was home to Zophar the Naamathite who is mentioned in Job 20:1.

This background of Job does not play a major role in the book. The book can be divided into three main parts and the background only figures in the first and third parts. The first, Job 1-2, is called the prologue. It introduces Job and the "contest" that sets up the dialogues. The second main part - most of the book - consists of Job 3:1-42:6 and is composed of dialogues between Job, his various friends, and God. The final section, Job 42:7-17, is the epilogue which returns to the context of the prologue and describes the restoration of Job's family and possessions.

The question has been raised whether Job was a historical person and all that is described in this book really happened as described. Ezekiel 14:14 and 20 mention a man named Job along with Noah and either Daniel or Danel. Whether this reference to Job speaks of the same person found in the book of Job is not known. A few Bible scholars believe that character of Job of the Book of Job was an actual historical person described in the prologue and epilogue and who spoke all the words attributed to him in the dialogues. Some Bible scholars believe all the references to Job are literary or parabolic. That is, they believe the author of Job created a character to teach spiritual lessons as Jesus did in the parables.

The opening line of the account (Job 1:1) departs from the normal formula for introducing historical narrative. This construction, **there was a man** (lit., "a man there was") indicates the beginning of an independent tale like Nathan's parable (2 Sam 12:1) and the stories of Micah (Judg 17:1) and Mordecai (Esth 2:5)²

Most Bible scholars believe that there was a historical person named Job who is reflected in the prologue and perhaps epilogue. This man must have had some spiritual reputation for righteousness and perhaps patience as reflected in Ezekiel and James. However, most scholars believe that the author of Job composed the poetic dialogues to show the different theological positions used in Israel to explain suffering. The final dialogue between God and Job then reflects the way the author believes a personal encounter with God will move one past logical explanations of suffering.

The author takes as his starting-point an old folk story about a righteous patriarch called Job, who remained faithful under the severest trials which God could visit upon him, and

¹Driver, Samuel Rolles ; Gray, George Buchanan: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job. Edinburgh : T. & T. Clark, 1921, S. 1:i-iii

²Hooks, Stephen M.: Job. Joplin, Miss. : College Press Pub., 2006, S. 56

who received God's approval for his constancy. But this tale, with its rather simplistic moral, is very soon left behind. Into the middle of it, between the sending of the trials and the pronouncement of the favorable verdict, the author inserts a long series of confrontations between Job and his friends, and between Job and God, where the message is anything but uncomplicated.

In fact, the message of Job is not dependent on which position a person takes regarding whether Job was a historical person or not. The book is not about Job's history but about Job's life and the way we relate to God as a result.

The Structure and Flow of the Book

The book of Job opens portraying Job as a wealthy and righteous nobleman. He has a large family, many flocks of animals, many servants, a large home, perhaps an estate. His righteousness is carefully designed to protect his family. He even offers sacrifices for sin that might have been committed inadvertently during the feasts celebrated by his children.

Having introduced Job, the author shifts the scene to the court of heaven where Yahweh (the proper name of God in the Old Testament) praises Job for his righteous character. The heavenly adversary, Satan, replies that Job acts righteous, but accuses him of doing so simply in order to receive all God's blessings. Satan then challenges God to let him (Satan) afflict Job with the loss of all his material blessings to see whether or not Job's devotion to God is genuine or not.

Yahweh accepts the challenge with the only stipulation that Satan not harm Job physically. We then overhear a series of reports to Job describing the loss of his children and all his possessions to natural calamities and/or enemy tribes. Job begins to grieve but the text notes that he does not sin. Satan then acknowledges Job's faithfulness to Yahweh but claims that such faithfulness would crumble in the face of illness. Yahweh then gave Satan permission to afflict Job's body with the restriction that he not be killed. Satan then attacked Job with "loathsome sores" from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. Job's wife suggests that he curse God and die. Job refused and suffered in silence refusing to sin. The final scene of the prologue occurs when three friends of Job, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite got up to comfort him. However, they are so astonished by his losses and pain that they sit in silence for seven days.

The speeches begin in chapter 3. Job 3 consists of a lament or curse of the day of Job's birth. This is an introduction to the dialogues but it is addressed to God rather than to his friends. The main body of the dialogue section consists of Job 4-27. There are three cycles of speeches. In each cycle Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar speak in that order and Job answers each one of them. The first two cycles are complete with each consisting of six speeches. The third cycle was either never finished or parts of it were lost in the transcribing and copying processes. Zophar's speech is missing and Bildad's has been cut short. Much of the argument of the book of Job is carried forward by these three cycles of speeches.

Eliphaz speaks first in Job 4-5. He represents what theologians sometimes call the doctrine of retribution as it came to be derived from the wisdom writers. He is convinced that no one can be righteous before God and Job's calamities especially prove his guilt. Job responds to Eliphaz in chapter 6-7. He accuses his friends of not understanding his dilemma and of speaking theoretically rather than personally. He also complains to God again and asks for healing. Job 8 contains Bildad's first speech. He fears that Job is speaking to accusingly toward God and so he defends God's justice.

Job 9-10 consists of Job's response to Bildad, although he does not answer Bildad's comments. Rather, in these chapters Job argues for the right to argue with God about what is happening in his life. Such talk greatly disturbs Zophar and he replies in chapter 11 accusing Job of idle and foolish talk. Job's

final speech in the first cycle, chapters 12-14, defends him to his friends and appeals to God again for a fair hearing over this matter.

The second cycle of speeches begins in Job 15 with Eliphaz's second speech. Eliphaz is now more upset by Job's words and tries to persuade Job to repent by pointing to the doctrine of punishment. Job replies in chapter 16-17 that his friends are poor comforters and he again defends himself and his right to speak in the way he is speaking. Bildad responds in chapter 18 with an almost taunting description of the punishments the wicked must suffer. Without directly saying so he is warning Job that the same will befall him if he doesn't repent. Job responds in chapter 19 by accusing his friends of attacking God when they attack him, as he continues to defend his righteousness and affirms his confidence in God. Zophar's second speech appears in chapter 20. He also is appalled by Job's claims of innocence and he calls on his friend to repent lest he suffer an even worse fate. Job brings the second cycle of speeches to an end in chapter 21. He argues that, in fact, the wicked often flourish and that he has a right to his lament and confusion.

Eliphaz begins the third cycle in chapter 22. He has lost his patience with Job and angrily tells Job that his suffering is deserved. Still he calls for Job to repent. Job's response in chapter 23-24 ignores Eliphaz's words and bitterly laments his condition. He desperately wants a chance to defend himself to God. After words from Bildad, Job again maintains his innocence and the third cycle of speeches concludes with Job 27.

Job 28 is a hymn to Wisdom. The role it plays in the book is debated. Some see it as a part of Job's final speech. Others claim it is Zophar's speech in the third cycle, while others see it as an editorial comment by the author. It fits strangely enough in the flow of the book that some scholars have argued that it was a later addition to the book, though they fail to explain why such a chapter was inserted at this point.

The speeches resume in Job 29. Chapters 29-31 consist of Job's final defense. He argues his innocence and the correctness of his response throughout this trial. At this point Job's three friends give up. Their arguments have only made Job worse, but an observer, a younger man named Elihu, speaks up. In Job 32-37 he makes four speeches passionately attempting to defend God. He is sure God is trying to teach Job something if he would only stop defending himself long enough to learn. However, Job refuses to answer Elihu and so his speeches are presented in order and he leaves the stage.

The climax of the dialogue section comes in chapters 38-42 with the speeches of Yahweh himself. In chapters 38-39 he speaks to Job out of the whirlwind asking about Job's in creation and the course of nature. Now Yahweh demands that *Job* answer *him*. However, in Job 40:3-5 Job confesses that he cannot answer God. Yahweh then resumes his speech in the rest of chapter 40 and 41. He challenges Job's call to argue his (Job's) case before him. He challenges Job to move up to his (Yahweh's) level and make his claims. He then moves into a description of Behemoth and Leviathan and his creation of them. In this way Yahweh claims his power over all evil. He alone is supreme and God.

Job then responds in Job 42:1-6. He confesses his unworthiness, lack of understanding, and weakness. He also confesses full confidence and trust in God and affirms his faith in God. The issues of his suffering and sin melt away in the power of the simple presence of God.

The final eleven verses of Job 42 form the epilogue. Yahweh speaks first expressing his anger against Job's three friends for misrepresenting him. He demands that they bring a sacrifice for themselves and ask Job to pray for them. They obey and God accepts Job's prayer on their behalf. He then restores Job's fortunes by giving him twice the material possessions he had enjoyed before and new sons and daughters. After statements affirming Job's blessings the author describes his death in the final verse of the book.

The Message of Job

The book of Job is arguably the most theological book of the Old Testament. Whatever else it is about, it is about God. The book's portrait of God focuses on two different aspects of his nature. First and foremost, the God of Job is sovereign. He rules over the world he has made, and before him everyone and everything bows. In the prologue he is pictured as the king of a heavenly court to whom the "sons of God" (angels) report and give account (1:6; 2:1a). The "accuser," too, answers to God (2:1b) and can only do what God permits him to do (1:12b; 2:6b). Secondly, this God who sits enthroned above the heavens is also intimately involved in the lives of his creatures.³

Note: Some authors highlight how deeply ingrained this concept of an intimately involved God was in Jewish society by pointing out that their Hebrew language did not contain an impersonal verb. What's an impersonal verb? An Impersonal Verb ascribes an act to some unknown or unnamed agent. In English an impersonal verb is commonly used with the impersonal pronoun "it". Examples would be "it rains"; "it snows". So the Hebrew language did not even allow for an unknown cause. In their way of thinking everything had an agent of cause, human or Divine.

It should be clear that the book of Job is not a simple story with a simple moral teaching. Accusations fly back and forth between Job and his "friends" defending and accusing God at several levels. Thus it should not be surprising that the message of Job has been explained in more than one way. Some have seen Job as the Biblical answer to the problem of suffering, sometimes called theodicy. "Theodicy" comes from two Greek words referring to the righteousness of God. The problem of theodicy is simply the question of how a righteous God can allow innocent people to suffer. At one level Job addresses this question by the fact that he innocently suffers. However, the book of Job does not answer the "why?" of innocent suffering. It only affirms that when one really meets God such questions fade into the background.

Some believe that the real message is not about suffering directly, but about why the righteous serve God. This was the question posed by Satan in the prologue. Is it possible for a righteous person to serve God only because of who and what God is rather than for the "rewards" the righteous derive from their righteousness? As Pope points out the values humans cherish - family, home, nation, wealth, and fame - all fade away (p. lxxxii). Only God abides forever, and God does not look as good in the face of tragedy as he does in the face of success. Is God himself, in all his holiness, all his terror, and all his grace, sufficient motivation to be righteous? Some believe the book of Job gives a resounding "Yes!" to that question.

Part of the greatness of the book of Job is its ability to raise several questions about life and relationship with God at the same time. Hartley identifies six themes that are part of the message of Job (pp. 47-50). One theme that is clear in Job is that righteous people can, do, and will suffer. Job's experience does contradict a form of the doctrine of retribution (sometimes derived from Proverbs, sometimes derived from Deuteronomy) that teaches that suffering is caused by personal sin. Hartley also points out that Job explores a wide range of the meanings of human suffering. The pain is not just loss of possessions or of health. Job also suffers alienation from his family and friends. The crowds mock him, he is terrified and dismayed by his circumstances, and Job demonstrates many of the

³Hooks, Stephen M.: Job. Joplin, Miss. : College Press Pub., 2006, S. 37

dimensions of suffering of which we are unaware until tragedy strikes us. Part of what we can learn from Job is what it means to suffer.

A special part of this suffering for a righteous person is the sense of abandonment by God. Job leads us through the range of feelings and thoughts that a righteous person experiences in the face of tragedy. Job maintains his own innocence throughout but in the presence of God he humbly confesses his trust. For a righteous person suffering will challenge that person's sense of relationship with God but it does not need to destroy that relationship. In fact, in the midst of suffering God *does* come to the righteous and affirms his presence and grace.

Part of the power of the book of Job is the fact that it realistically addresses these painful questions. In life, tragedy and suffering are never simple issues. Faith is rocked and one wonders which way to turn. Seldom is there a shortage of opinions from others trying to explain the pain they are not suffering. Characteristic of most false comforters is that they give simplistic answer to life's most painful questions. The strength of Job's book is that it allows all sides of the issue - the simple answers of the friends and the emotional turmoil of Job - to be heard and heard and heard. Some people become exasperated with the book of Job. It seems to go on and on and on repeating the same arguments over and over and then never coming to a definitive answer. In fact, that is exactly the way the problem of suffering is experienced.

At various times in Christian history the book of Job has been interpreted specifically in terms of Christ. In both prologue and epilogue Yahweh describes Job as "my servant." That fact, combined with the prominence of suffering in Job, has led many interpreters in Christian history to interpret Job in terms of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. The sufferings of Job were then seen as a pre-figurement or even a prediction of the sufferings of Christ. Others have interpreted Job as symbolizing the tribulations of the church at various periods of history.

However, there is nothing in the book of Job that legitimately can be seen as pointing directly to Christ. What is true is that Job authentically reflects the pain and problems of human suffering. Jesus also entered into the pain of human suffering as he came to identify completely with us (John 1:14). As a result of a genuine Incarnation Christ experienced the fullness of the power of our pain. We can identify with Job and we can identify with Jesus. Both help us understand our suffering and they help us turn to the Heavenly Father for strength and grace. However, Jesus provides more than Job because his suffering was redemptive. As a suffering servant his death has bought and brought us salvation. Jesus shows us that suffering can be more than a painful experience to be endured or a philosophical problem to be solved. Suffering can become redemptive.

Lesson 1 Study Questions

1. What is something about Job that you would like to learn during our study of this book?
2. What two ways are we going to try to look at and learn from The Book of Job?
3. What is Wisdom literature?
4. We have always heard that Job was a pious, good, patient man. Does it surprise you that the author of the OT Daily Bible Study Book (Gibson) says Job was just like the pompous Pharisee who prayed standing prominently in the temple while the tax collector prayed humbly at a distance (see parable Luke 18:9-14)?
5. Did you know that the Book of Job was considered perhaps the most theological book of the Old Testament?
6. Had it ever occurred to you that the Book of Job had had such a pervasive impact on our modern culture?
7. How would you behave differently if you and our modern culture had never had any belief in any life after death?

8. The Book of Job modifies the existing Wisdom teaching of its time by allowing the thought that a just person might indeed suffer even if they are in right relationship with God. The Book, however, never addresses the thought that a prosperous man might be evil. How would this influence late Old Testament Jewish culture and thinking?

Overview of the Book-Dennis Bratcher

I. A wisdom book (See [The Character of Wisdom](#))

- A. shares some characteristics with Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon
- B. highly poetic and metaphorical
- C. deals with mature reflection on issues of everyday living
- D. in contrast to Proverbs, but like Ecclesiastes, Job must be read in its entirety to understand its message; single verses often contradict the overall message of the book
- E. the theological stance of Job counterbalances, even challenges, some perspectives of Proverbs
- F. typical of wisdom thinking, Job views the world from the perspective of human need and concern rather than God's requirements

II. Historical Background

- A. author is unknown
- B. three theories about time of writing: 700 BC, 550 BC, and 400-300 BC
- C. place of writing is unknown
- D. three theories about Job:
 - 1) a historical figure who spoke all the words attributed to him;
 - 2) a literary creation by the author as a teaching parable;
 - 3) historical kernel adapted by the author to address certain issues. (see [Introduction to Job](#))
- E. none of these unknowns or theories play a major role in the book or effect its theological message

III. Structure and Features (see [Literary Structure of Job](#))

- A. two major parts: a narrative framework surrounding a series of dialogs
- B. the framework and the body are not directly related in details
- C. the satan only appears in the opening narrative
- D. heavily metaphorical, including mythical elements as symbols (Rahab, Yamm, Leviathan; see [Speaking the Language of Canaan](#), especially the section [The Ba'al Myth and the Physical World](#))
- E. the cycles of speeches are incomplete
- F. some chapters appear to have been added, such as the speech of Elihu and the poem about Wisdom (ch. 28)

IV. The Message of the Book

- A. righteous people suffer unjustly
- B. orthodox or traditional answers are not always true or appropriate
- C. God will tolerate honest questions (See [Commentary on Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4](#))
- D. sin is not always the cause of evil and suffering in the world (doctrine of retribution)
- E. God should be served simply because He is God
- F. God, and the world, cannot be put into easily definable categories

The Literary Structure

I. Prologue 1:1 - 2:10

- A. Setting the scene (1:1-5)
- B. The heavenly council (1:6-12)
- C. The satan's trial (1:13-21) [22 narrator]
- D. The stakes are raised (2:1-6)
- E. The satan's second trial (2:7-10b) [10c narrator]
- F. The three friends (transition to the dialogs; 2:11-13)

II. Dialogs with "friends" 3:1 - 42:6

- A. Job's opening soliloquy (3:1-26)
- B. Dialogs with "friends" (4:1-27:23)
 - 1. First cycle (4:1-14:22)
 - a. Eliphaz speaks (4:1-5:27), Job responds (6:1-7:21)
 - b. Bildad speaks (8:1-22), Job responds (9:1-10:22)
 - c. Zophor speaks (11:1-20), Job responds (12:1-14:22)
 - 2. Second cycle (15:1-21:34)
 - a. Eliphaz speaks (15:1-35), Job responds (16:1-17:16)
 - b. Bildad speaks (18:1-21), Job responds (19:1-29)
 - c. Zophor speaks (20:1-29), Job responds (21:1-34)
 - 3. Third cycle (22:1-27:23)
 - a. Eliphaz speaks (22:1-30), Job responds (23:1-24:25)
 - b. Bildad speaks (25:1-6), Job responds (26:1-27:23)

III. Monologues 28:1 - 37:24

- A. The inaccessibility of Wisdom (28:1-28)
- B. Job's concluding soliloquy (29:1-31:40)
- C. The speeches of Elihu (32:1-37:24)

IV. Dialog with God 38:1 - 42:6

- A. God speaks (38:1-40:2), Job responds (40:3-5)
- B. God speaks again (40:6-41:34), Job's second response (42:1-6)

V. Epilogue 42:7-17



Lesson 2 Readings

Read Job 1:1-3:26

Job 1:1-3:26

The prologue of Job consists of the first two chapters of the book written in narrative form. These chapters set the stage for the long dialogues or debates between Job and his so-called "friends" found in Job 3:1-42:6.

The Prologue of Job - Job 1:1-2:13

The prologue is composed of six scenes. The first scene, Job 1:1-5, introduces Job as a wealthy Middle East sheik who was very devoted to God. The next four scenes are composed of alternating descriptions of meetings of the heavenly council with God and Satan, the chief characters, and the events in Job's life that resulted from the decisions of the heavenly council. The final scene of the prologue introduces Job's friends.

The prologue is carefully composed. The descriptive parts of the narrative are brief and to the point. Most of the characterizations are accomplished by the speeches and by responses to the action. Usually there are only two characters per scene that keeps the story line simple and clearly defined for the reader. The style is concise and compact. It is an excellent example of Hebrew narrative in its characteristic style.

The opening scene unfolds Job's wealth and devotion. The story begins very simply by stating in verse 1, "**There was a man in the land of Uz named Job.**" This simple sentence identifies Job's name and his home. The meaning of the name Job in Hebrew has been debated. It is possible that Job's name originally derived from a verb meaning "to show hostility." If this were the correct etymology of the name it would be very ironic that the name Job would mean "enemy of God." Such an interpretation is not surprising when we consider the way Job often seemed to argue against God - at least against the interpretation of God held by his friends. Some scholars suggest a passive understanding rather than active, which would have the name Job meaning "alienated."

Another way the Hebrew root for Job's name can be understood is in connection with the Arabic root for "repent" or "return." This would also be ironic since Job spends most of the book insisting he does not need to repent. Then when God speaks to him he repents immediately without argument. It is possible that the author knew one or more of these meaning for the name Job and wrote this book with a bit of a grin that the hero's name would reflect so well on his actions.

However, the name Job or very similar Semitic words have been found in several archaeological finds from about 2000 BC. A number of well-to-do Canaanite men had the name Job in that period of history. Thus there is no reason to suppose that the author made up the name to fit the character. Hartley (pp. 66-67) points out that Biblical characters are usually introduced with a full genealogy. The fact that no genealogy is given, no mention is made of Job's tribe or clan, and there is no reference to the time in which Job lived is important. Silence in these three important ways of identifying a person has meant that Job is able to represent anyone from anytime.

The location of Uz is uncertain. Some scholars locate it in the area of Edom while others believe it was to be found north in the area of Haran. Verse 3 describes Job as a man of the East. In Palestine the term translated "east" here was a general expression for the area east of Palestine including Ammon, Moab, and Edom. In the final analysis we do not know exactly where Job lived and we do not need to know to understand the book.

The second sentence of verse 1 describes the spiritual characteristics of Job. Four words or phrases are used (see [Parallelism in Hebrew Writing - http://www.crivoice.org/parallel.html](http://www.crivoice.org/parallel.html)). The first word applied to Job is "**blameless**" which is a translation of the Hebrew word *tam*. This word was often used to describe sacrificial animals that were required to be without blemish or perfect. The King James Version frequently translates *tam* as perfect, which it does here. The word was often used of persons but it did not refer to sinless perfection. Rather, *tam* describes a person of integrity who is all that they are expected to be as a human being in relationship with God (see [The English Term "perfect"](#)).

The second word describing Job was "**upright**." This word meant that Job faithfully obeyed God's laws. This included justice and mercy in the treatment of other people. The third description of Job is a brief

phrase, "**he feared God.**" The fear of God is the highest expression in the Wisdom literature to describe wisdom. The fourth description is the phrase, "**he turned away from evil.**" It is clear from Proverbs that avoiding evil is the practical expression of wisdom in the moral realm. Though we learn hardly any details of Job's historical context in the opening verse we are told a great deal about him spiritually. It would have been hard to have compressed any higher compliments of Job's integrity, wisdom, and righteousness than those contained in the second part of Job 1:1.

It would, however, be quite misleading to pretend that these introductory verses are describing Job's integrity *rather* than his good works, or that later, when disaster strikes him, he takes his stand on that integrity *rather* than on his behavior. Taking the book as a whole, Job does not often confess his faults and when he says he is blameless, he means—whatever else he means—that his conduct has been such that he deserves his riches and large family and good health. We are, in the Book of Job, light years away from a Pauline suspicion of good works, and in touch with a culture where, for a good man to claim to be good, was not deprecated but expected. It was indeed that claim which, as much as anything else, constituted Job's integrity.

Verses 2 & 3 turn to a description of Job's wealth. The numbers **three** and **seven** appear twice and **five** plus **five** or ten is mentioned once. The numbers three, seven, and ten were frequently used in the Bible to symbolize completeness. There was nothing that Job lacked materially in the culture in which he lived. The full measure of God's blessing can be seen in verse 2 where the text states that Job had **seven sons and three daughters**. Both Ruth 4:15 and I Samuel 2:5 describe seven children as the ideal number. Job is further blessed in that he has seven sons, which were more favored than daughters, plus three daughters.

In Verse 2 the Hebrew delicately suggests (*waw* consecutive tense) Job's character was the precondition of his wealth in heirs and possessions.⁴

Verse 3 states that he had **seven thousand sheep**. The Hebrew word translated **sheep** means both sheep and goats that were normally pastured together. **Three thousand camels** represent the number of camels attributed to the wealthiest nomadic Bedouins of ancient times. The large number of **donkeys** and **oxen** also communicates immense wealth. In fact, just to feed and care for such a large number of animals would require **very many servants**, as the author notes. The conclusion of this listing of Job's assets notes that he was "**the greatest of all the people of the east.**" The exact meaning of the term "great" depended on the context in which it was used. Here it seems clear that the author intended us to understand that Job was the wealthiest person east of Palestine.

Verses 4 and 5 return to the theme of Job's piety. Apparently Job's sons were grown and lived in their own homes, probably with responsibility for some part of Job's large estate. The text does not intend to describe Job's sons as "party animals." Rather they would get together on festive occasions. Some commentators think that birthdays would have been such occasions while other scholars believe sheep shearing and other agricultural duties provided the occasion for the festivals. Job's family was close knit and very wealthy. After each festival Job would offer atoning sacrifices for his children. In the Old Testament the burnt offering that the text mentions was designed to atone for sin in general rather than for specific transgressions. Job was concerned that one of his children might have **cursed God in their hearts**. Job was the priest for his family and verse 5 shows that he took this responsibility very seriously. It is significant that the sin Job feared for his children - cursing God - was the sin that Satan is sure Job will commit if he were to lose everything.

⁴Clines, David J. A.: Word Biblical Commentary : Job 1-20. Dallas : Word, Incorporated, 2002 (Word Biblical Commentary 17), S. 13

The second scene describes a meeting in the presence of God. It is difficult to describe the participants in that meeting. The King James Version and the New American Standard Bible call the participants "the sons of God." The New International Version calls them "the angels" while the New Revised Standard Version uses the expression, "the heavenly beings." The Hebrew text literally refers to "sons of God" or "sons of gods" (the same Hebrew word is translated "gods" or "God"). This exact expression occurs twice in Genesis 6, (verses 2 and 4; see [Sons of God and Giants](#)) and three times in Job.

Most scholars believe that the expression refers to a heavenly council of spiritual beings. The NIV and NRSV translations reflect that understanding. The Revised English Version describes these beings as "the members of the court of heaven." There is not sufficient information in Job (or the rest of the Old Testament) to be able to describe these beings with confidence. The implication of Job is that these heavenly beings met with God on a regular basis. It is interesting that the author of Job shifts from the generic term for deity (God) to the Israelite covenant name (Yahweh) to describe the host of this meeting.

Editor's (Tom) Note: If you accept the proposal that "The author takes as his starting-point an old folk story" then this might give a glimpse into ancient thinking. Don't get distracted by this but here is something to think about if you like:

The sons of the gods "the sons of God" is grammatically an legitimate rendering, and might be compared with "sons of the Most High" (בני עליון, Ps. 82:6), but whether interpreted as offspring of the one true God, or beings dependent on, but sharing the spiritual nature of the one true God, this rendering fails to reproduce the Hebrew conception "The sons of the gods" (בני האלהים) are individuals of the class god, as "the sons of man" (בני האדם, 1 S. 26:19) are individuals of the class man; also "the sons of the prophets," means members of a prophetic guild. Consequently the same class of beings who are called "the sons of the gods" (בני (ה)אלהים, 2:1, 38:7, Gn. 6:2; בני אלים, Ps. 29:1, 89:7; cp. בר אלהין, Dn. 3:25) can also be called simply "gods" (אלהים, Ps. 82:1, 6; cp. אֱלֹהִים (point אֱלֹהִים) in Ps. 58:2). The phrase is traceable to a stage of thought in which *elohim* was not supreme or *sui generis*. The class of gods like that of men was numerous, though members ("sons") of the two classes were sharply distinguished in appearance (Dn. 3:25) and manner of life (Ps. 82:6f.). However, Yahweh, to this writer, is absolutely supreme; Yahweh is not a man, but one of the *elohim*; and yet not merely any one of the *elohim*, but that one who is in absolute control of all other *elohim*, as also of all men and of the affairs of the whole world.¹

¹Driver, Samuel Rolles ; Gray, George Buchanan: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job. Edinburgh : T. & T. Clark, 1921, S. 1:9-10

However, the author of Job is not really interested in communicating to us about the heavenly council or angels. Only one member of the heavenly court is of interest in this scene, that being the **Satan**. To capitalize Satan is a step of interpretation already. The Hebrew word *satan* literally means adversary or accuser. The article (the) appears here in Job indicating that the term is not a personal name, i.e. Satan, but a title, the Accuser or the Adversary. The Accuser appears with the heavenly court. Some scholars believe that this Accuser had the responsibility of prosecuting attorney for the heavenly council. It was his job to seek out human sin and to bring charges to the heavenly court against sinners. Such a view is consistent with the statement that he was going back and forth over the earth - presumably to find sinners. Whether the prosecuting attorney image is correct or not one thing is clear. The picture of the *satan* here in Job is not the same as the picture of Satan as the rulers of demons and evil that is found in the New Testament. One may debate whether the *satan* of Job is an early step in the development of the doctrine of Satan that would emerge between the testaments or simply a literary figure opposing Job. In either case the *satan*, the Accuser appears only in Job 1-2 as the test of Job is being set up.

Yahweh initiates the conversation in verse 7 asking the Accuser where he has been. The *satan* responds that he has been roaming over the earth. The word "roaming" (NRSV: "going to and fro") suggests a spy randomly seeking subjects disloyal to the king. Yahweh's response sets up the rest of the book of Job. He asks if the Accuser has noticed Job. The Hebrew word usually translated "considered" literally means to "set your mind on." Yahweh seems ready to provoke the Accuser almost taunting him. He is confident that the *satan* has not discovered any evil in Job. In fact, Yahweh is confident that there is no one like Job. He then repeats the four characteristics attributed to Job in verse 2, thus verifying that high evaluation of Job. He also described Job as "my servant" which is the highest compliment the Old Testament ever pays to human beings. The concept of *servant* combined overtones of obedience, worship, and faithfulness.

There are many historical and theological questions that arise from the interaction of Yahweh, the *satan*, and Job.

What are we to make of this sinister and busy figure? The Satan is a nasty piece of work, brazen and impertinent towards God, and cynical and sneering about men. These are traits he carries with him into his subsequent career as God's enemy or opposite when as Satan, rather than *the Satan*, he will have his own "kingdom" as opposed to God's, and his own army of lesser devils to carry out his commands. But here, he is patently not yet God's enemy in that full sense, but still very much his subordinate, although a rather difficult one to keep in check. Nor is he yet the tempter *par excellence* whispering things in men's ears; a role that he may have taken over from the serpent in the Garden of Eden story. All through the book, Job knows nothing about him and is completely unaware of the Satan's involvement in his fate. So there is only one possible conclusion: the Satan is, in this story, just like the other "sons of God", *still* an extension of God. He represents an aspect of God's providence: that side of him which, for whatever reason, visits suffering upon human beings; that side of him which is responsible for the evil and tragedy which afflict the lives of men.

Or rather, the pictures we are given in the story of *both* God *and* the Satan represent together that darker side of the divine providence as it operates on human lives; For God hardly emerges from it all any better than the Satan. He rises to his challenge like a fish to the bait and almost lays a bet on Job's virtue. But much worse, he stands aside while his minion destroys not only Job's cattle and sheep, but his servants and finally his sons and daughters—all fair game, it seems, as long as he can win his wager.

However, we would do well to ponder what it would take to become the kind of person in whom God could have such confidence. Perhaps such people are as rare today as they were in the time of Job. In the light of Christ we need to ask why people of such integrity and uprightness are so rare.

The Accuser is not so impressed with Job. He has seen enough human beings to suspect that Job has a weakness. He accuses Yahweh of putting a fence around Job to protect him and his wealth from any harm. The *satan* is confident that Job serves the LORD because of all his material blessings. The Accuser accepts the popular theology of late Old Testament Judaism that blessing is a sign of favor with God. He is so confident that he demands Yahweh to put Job to the test by stripping him of those material blessings. It is fascinating that Job feared one of his children might have cursed God in their heart. The *satan* is confident that financial loss will cause Job to curse God to his face. Job worried over secret sins; the Accuser boldly predicted defiant rejection of God.

But Yahweh was not impressed by the *satan's* claims. Accepting the challenge, he gave the Accuser access to destroy any of Job's possessions as long as he did not attack Job personally (physically). This permission sets the stage for the third scene.

The third scene, Job 1:13-22, returns to earth. Job and his family are unaware of the agreement between God and the Accuser and no mention of that agreement is made in scene three. Life was going on normally when tragedy struck. A series of four messengers come running to Job with a succession of bad news. It is interesting that the order in which Job's losses are reported is opposite the order in which his blessings were enumerated. The result is that the climax of tragedy is the death of Job's children. The blessings of children, flocks and camels, and herds and donkeys proceeded from the most important to the least. By beginning with the loss of the herds and donkeys and moving to flocks and camels, the author builds up the tense expectation of the worst possible news regarding Job's children.

The four tragedies communicated an all out attack on Job. The forces of destruction alternate between earthly and heavenly (**Sabeans, fire of God** or lightning, **Chaldeans, great wind**). Each attack comes from a different point of the compass. The Sabeans were from the south, the lightning from the west, the Chaldeans from the north, and the desert sirocco wind blew in from the east.

Though Job's losses were devastating they are not the goal of the third scene. Job's response is the climax of the scene. Though Job did not know of the challenge between Yahweh and the Accuser, we the readers know and Job's response is astounding. His devotion to God stands steadfast and firm. He was devastated by the losses - any person would be - and he followed the customary rituals of grief by tearing his robe and shaving his head.

Note that in making his statement, Job uses the name *Yahweh* or "the Lord". The story-teller may have momentarily forgotten that Job was not an Israelite, but it is more likely that he is quoting and that the verse was already so well-known that he felt he could not change it. Did he get it from a Hebrew burial service? We cannot say, but so poignant and cruelly evocative are the words, that they are often used at Christian funerals, especially in circumstances of great distress. Or should I say that, in sturdier times, they *were* thus used? This remark is prompted by the fact that the words appear in a burial prayer in the 1940 *Book of Common Order* of the Church of Scotland, but are not to be found in its successor of 1979. They are, it seems, too strong meat for the modern Scottish faithful.

The next verb is the surprise to us, Job **worshipped**. As part of his worship he pronounces the insights of verse 21. Three times in this verse Job speaks the name of Yahweh. This is a powerful testimony to the strong sense of personal, covenantal relationship that Job had with the LORD. He acknowledged that he had entered life with nothing and that he would take nothing with him. He affirmed that the God who had given him all these blessings had the right to withdraw them at any time. As Hartley (p. 78) notes of Job, "In sorrow as well as in blessing he praised God's name." The author then makes an editorial comment in summary. **In all this tragedy Job did not sin or accuse God of wrongdoing.** Job's piety had stood the test.

Job 2:1-6 returns to the presence of Yahweh for the fourth scene of the prologue. The language of verses 1, 2, and most of 3 are almost identical to the language of the second scene in Job 1:6-8. Yahweh again affirms Job as "**my servant, blameless, upright**, fearing God, and shunning evil. The final line of verse 3 is important. Yahweh not only brags on Job's integrity, he also accuses the *satan* of "inciting" him against Job. The Hebrew word translated "inciting" means to allure or stir someone to a course of action that person would not normally take. This is important as Hartley (p. 80) states:

"Yahweh accepted full responsibility for Job's plight. He would not concede any of his authority to the Satan...in the dialogue Job will seek deliverance from Yahweh alone and rightly so, for he has no battle with the Satan. This statement also explains why the Satan does not reappear in the epilogue. Yahweh himself feels obliged to resolve the conflict for Job."

The *satan* is unshaken in his confidence that Job's faithfulness is given only to Yahweh for what he (Job) can get out of it. Since Job's health was preserved he has not really been tested. Had God allowed a true test of Job that would include his physical well-being (**skin, flesh, and bone**) Job would surely curse God to his face. The Accuser challenges God to threaten Job's life. God then grants the *satan* the right to attack Job's health in any way as long as he was not killed. It is possible to see the prohibition against Job's death as Yahweh still maintaining a fence of protection around Job. However, should the Accuser kill Job the question of Job's faithfulness could not have been answered. Yahweh was not protecting Job by not allowing him to be killed. He was, in fact, making Job's test all the more excruciating since the Accuser could prolong any threat of death against Job as long as he (the *satan*) wished, gradually and continually increasing the pressure and torment.

The fifth scene, Job 2:7-10, returns to earth and to Job. While the third scene had prolonged the story of Job's losses by means of the four messengers, the author gets straight to the point in verse 7. The Accuser afflicted Job with a terrible illness. Some of the symptoms mentioned throughout the book include boils, disfiguration, oozing-scabbing-cracking sores, sores infected with worms, shriveling of the skin, diarrhea, sleeplessness, choking, bad breath, and excruciating pain throughout his body. All attempts to achieve a modern medical diagnosis of Job's illness are fruitless. The ancient world did not distinguish between terminal illnesses and those that could be cured. People often died of what we would call a minor infection while others would survive a dreaded disease. Thus from his cultural perspective Job was facing death.

Job's wife enters the scene for the first time in verse 9. Within the drama she functions to emphasize Job's attitude of acceptance. She speaks more like we would expect Job to have spoken. She asks why he persists in his integrity. These are the same words Yahweh had used in verse 3 to compliment Job to the Accuser. Job's wife, however, saw persisting in integrity as dangerous fanaticism rather than Job's strongest point. She demands that Job **curse God and die**.

We are shortly going to leave the simplistic folk tale of the patient Job behind and find ourselves encountering a loudly complaining Job who will seem to us to have followed his wife's advice only too well.

Through history Christian interpreters have been very critical of Job's wife. Some of the great commentators of Christian history have called her "Satan's ally" or "the Devil's best scourge." But we need not accuse her. She personifies the position that there is no hope for Job. He has suffered irreparable damage. He will never again enjoy health, wealth, and the obvious signs of God's blessing. Job's friends will take another position. They will argue that is he would just repent his fortunes could be reversed. Job, however, affirms his trust in Yahweh. One must accept the bad that Yahweh brings in life as well as the good. The author then comments again that Job did not sin with his lips.

The final scene of the prologue comes in Job 2:11-13 with the introduction of Job's friends. **Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar** heard of Job's terrible losses and agreed to go to Job and **comfort him**. Several things are accomplished by this scene. First, the friends confirm the severity of Job's disease. **They did not recognize him** so disfiguring with his illness. Second, they join Job in grief. They throw dust, tear their robes, and weep to show their identification with Job. That they would sit in silence for **seven days** also signifies how deeply they share Job's sorrow. Finally, the arrival of the friends sets the stage for the dialogues that will compose the majority of the book.

In contrast to Job's wife the story-teller lingers upon the discomfiture of Job's friends, all eastern patriarchs like himself. Great play is made of their sympathy for him as, risking contagion and even public censure; they made a concerted decision to visit one who had so obviously become an offence to society. It is a touching picture, but it does not necessarily mean that the folk tale was more favorably disposed towards them than it was towards Job's wife. The traditional story breaks off at this point and does not resume until

the last chapter. It seems that the part of the prose story dealing, presumably quite crisply, with the confrontation between Job and his friends, has been omitted and in its place the author of the book has inserted the long and sophisticated dialogue or debate. There is support for this reconstruction of the missing part of the folk tale in a much later apocryphal work called the *Testament of Job*; the Hebrew original of this has perished, but it survives in a Greek translation discovered only a century ago.

Job's Lament - Job 3:1-26

Chapter 3 has been outlined in several different ways. The most common way is to see three parts: Job's curse of the day of his birth in verses 1-10, his personal lament in verses 11-19, and his complaint in verses 20-26. Van Selms (p. 29) organizes these three parts with these phrases: verses 1-10 - "if only I had never been born," verses 11-19 - "if only I had died at birth," and verses 20-26 - "What meaning does an existence like mine have?"

Chapter 3 begins with Job's curse of the day of his birth. The word "**cursed**" weighs heavily on Christian ears. However, this chapter is not about Job "cussing." He does not speak either profanities or obscenities. The "test" of the *satan* was whether or not Job would curse God. He does not. These words are not addressed to God. They are the agonizing words of a man whose life has been devastated. What Job does is to speak negatively about his birth. He declared that he wished that he had never been born. Such negative talk is often described as "cursing" in the Hebrew Bible. After sitting and suffering in silence with his friends for seven days Job burst forth with this expression of his pain. Verse 4 exclaims of the day of his birth, "**That day - let it be darkness.**" These words speak directly opposite the first words of God in creation in Genesis 1:3, "Let there be light." Part of the theme of Job's lament is that of anti-Creation. God began with light and ended resting. Job begins by calling for darkness and ends in verse 26 by having **no rest**. Not only does he curse the day of his birth, he bitterly regrets the day of his conception as well.

In verses 11-19 Job asks why he did not die at birth. The reference to **knees** has been interpreted in several ways. Comparison with Genesis 50:23 suggests that it was the father's knees that welcomed a child at birth. Isaiah 66:12 speaks of the mother's knees as the place of affectionately playing with the newborn child. Job's question is not really a philosophical question. The question, "**Why did I not die at birth?**" is the way of wishing for something different than the pain he was enduring. Had he only died at birth he **would be at rest** and in the company of **kings, princes**, and other leaders who had gone on before. He notes in verse 17 that in death **the wicked** no longer trouble a person and there is eternal rest. Without directly mentioning the word Job speaks of Sheol, the place of the dead in Old Testament thought. There he would be at ease again instead of in the torment of tragedy and disease.

Job wishes that he had been still-born and carried straight to *Sheol*. This is the name given in the Old Testament to the underworld abode where it was believed that the souls of the dead had a temporary wraith-like existence as they waited for their bodies to decompose.

Verses 20-26 continue the questions, "**Why is light given to one. . . who longs for death. . .?**" By means of this question Job protests the seeming injustice of life being given to those who don't want it and taken from those who do. Verses 20 and 23 use the word "**light**" instead of life. Very literally light contrasts with the darkness of the grave. However, here it continues the contrast with creation light. The darkness that Job longed for was invaded by God's creative light.

These are the harshest words Job will utter in the entire book that bears his name. For many it is shocking to find such words in Scripture. That the Bible would preserve them may be surprising to some, but it is not surprising that Job would utter such words. People who have suffered profoundly

have had such thoughts pass through their minds, though few are so eloquent as Job in expressing such anguish.

Now is not the time to condemn Job for his depression. These are not Job's final words nor were they his first words. He has already affirmed his confidence and trust in God in chapter 2. He will again affirm his faith. There are the words of pain that gush forth unbidden when the hurt is too great to bear (see [Lament Psalms](#)). As too often happens today, Job's angry honesty shocked his friends. In the literary structure of the book this speech rouses the comforters from their silence. Job's fanaticism that worried his wife has given way to near blasphemy. His friends will bandage his wounds with their formulas for faith.

Lesson 2 Study Questions

1. Gibson (OT Daily Bible Study) differentiates between integrity and behavior. What do you suppose he means?
2. Were the sacrifices that Job offered on behalf of his children worship and love like our Eucharistic sacrifice (honorific) or were they intended as the payment of a possible debt (appeasement)?
3. The Satan argued that Job only served God for what he could get out of it. Do you think that was true of Job? Is it true of anyone you have known?
4. What, if anything, did you get out of the "*sons of the gods*" excerpt from *Drivers* book?
5. Gibson says the Old Testament conversations between the Satan and God in Job don't paint a pretty picture of the Satan nor God. Question; are our current beliefs about the relationship between the Devil and God really all that different - God allows the Satan to exist and go about his mischief after consultation versus God allowing the Devil to exist and go about his mischief unconsulted?
6. Do you feel Job's response to all his losses in verses 20-22 is realistic or not?
7. What new argument does Satan introduce in chapter 2 to explain Job's righteousness? Do you think physical suffering is more difficult to suffer than the loss of material blessings?
8. Describe the response of Job's wife. How important is one's spouse in responding to tragedy in life? How would you describe Job's friends? How important are friends in responding to tragedy?
9. Was Job wrong in cursing the day of his birth? Why or why not?



Lesson 3 Readings

Read Job 4:1-8:22

Job 4:1-8:22

Job's speech in Chapter 3 is composed in poetry. It is usually considered a part of the poetic dialogues that compose almost the entire book of Job. Some scholars, however, consider Job's speech in Chapter 3 as simply an introductory comment with the dialogues proper beginning with Job 4. In either case as we enter chapter 4 we enter a significant part of the structural design of the book. Job 4-7 consists of three cycles of speeches in which Job's friends speak and he responds.

The First Cycles of Speeches - Job 4:1-14:22

As is true in each cycle Job's friend Eliphaz speaks first. Job 4-5 contains his opening speech. In chapters 6-7 Job responds and Bildad addresses him in Job 8. Job's response to Bildad appears in Job 9-10. The final speech by a friend in the first cycle is that of Zophar who speaks in chapter 11. Job's closing response in the first cycle appears in chapters 12-14.

Eliphaz's First Speech – Job 4:1-5:27

Eliphaz is the most prominent of Job's comforters. This can be seen by the fact his speech comes first in all three cycles, the fact that his speeches are all longer than those of his co-comforters, and the fact that he is best speech maker of the friends. There is more evidence of rhetorical skill in the speeches of Eliphaz than in those of any other speaker in Job except God and Job.

We know nothing historical about Eliphaz. We can deduce from his speeches that he was kind and wise, but his purpose in the book of Job is to present the ideas of his speeches for our consideration. Eliphaz argues for the position that suffering is God's punishment for sin. His basic presupposition is that everyone is guilty of error. He boldly states that the righteous prosper and hardship befalls the wicked. He also praises God for his gracious blessings on those who are righteous.

Eliphaz begins his speech with an attempt to "connect" to Job in verses 1-6 of chapter 4. Verse 2 shows the dilemma in which Eliphaz finds himself. He knows if he speaks Job may be irritated or offended (NIV has **impatient** and the KJV has **grieved**). The Hebrew expression suggests that Job may be weary with the subject of his suffering already and "fed up with" having to deal with it. Whatever Eliphaz may say could make Job angry simply because Job will not want to be reminded of his pain. However, as the second line of verse 2 notes, Eliphaz must speak. Job's bitter words in chapter 3 offended Eliphaz's sense of the rightness and so he feels compelled to correct his friend.

Eliphaz begins the painful correction with compliments. He notes in verses 3-4 that Job has been a fine example of Old Testament spiritual leadership. He (Job) has **instructed many**. The Hebrew verb "**instructed**" implies moral and religious teaching. Isaiah 35:3-4 uses almost identical language to describe those in need of help. Job has helped others in affliction and enabled them to move on even when life had tripped them up.

However, in verse 5 Eliphaz points out that though Job had previously instructed others about how to overcome suffering, he himself is now the one who is suffering. The criticism of Eliphaz is that Job responds with impatience and dismay to the same suffering he had told others to endure. In fact, the Hebrew word in verse 5 translated "troubled" in the KJV, "discouraged" in the NIV, and "**impatient**" in the NRSV is the same word used back in verse 2 meaning wearied or fed up with. Thus verse 5 charges Job with failing to live up to his own teaching.

Many of us have discovered that our own advice is hard to follow when we are the ones standing in need of it. Good advice always seems more appropriate for someone else. Eliphaz accuses Job of failing to recognize this basic human inconsistency in his own life. He questions the reality of Job's faith in verse 6. Job's **fear of God** (the beginning of wisdom) should be a source of **confidence** and strength for him - it should not motivate him to curse the day of his birth. His uprightness (or **integrity** - the Hebrew literally has "perfection") should be the basis of hope. Eliphaz did not like Job speaking so bitterly as he had done in chapter 3. He feared that such bitterness either was the result of a loss of faith or would lead to the destruction of Job's righteousness.

Job 4:7-11 expresses the popular opinion among many people in Old Testament times that suffering was the result of sin. This is often called the doctrine of retribution. It arose from the teachings of Deuteronomy and Proverbs that God blesses obedience and punishes disobedience. Proverbs and Deuteronomy did not go on to say that all suffering is punishment for disobedience, but the doctrine of retribution made that claim. In verse 7 Eliphaz calls on Job to **think**. The Hebrew is literally a command to remember. He asks Job to come up with an example of anybody righteous who has suffered God's punishment. Verse 8 states the doctrine of retribution with the illustration of farming. Those who **plow sin** and **sow trouble** reap a harvest of suffering. This figure of speech is important for it shows that Eliphaz is thinking of a life that is intentionally sinful. To plow and to plant implies a purposeful choice of life's direction.

In verse 9 Eliphaz claims that the losses suffered by the wicked are the results of God's punishing work. He speaks of **the breath of God** and **the blast of his anger**. Though he does not directly claim that God

sent the wind that destroyed the house in which Job's children were feasting (Job 1:9) it is clear that Eliphaz believed that to have been true.

Verses 10-11 seem to be designed to highlight the argument. Even ferocious lions cannot withstand the power of God's judgment. Perhaps Eliphaz intended to compare Job's outburst of anger against God in chapter 3 with the roaring of the lion in verse 10. Unfortunately, however, Job's complaint in chapter 3 and Job's case do not fit into the picture being painted by Eliphaz. Job has not plowed and planted intentional sin and there is no evidence that his losses were some form of punishment from God.

Eliphaz had appealed to his (and Job's) experience in verses 7-11. In Job 4:12-21 he appeals to another authority - that of a vision. Verses 12-16 are devoted to explaining the way (s) in which Eliphaz received the revelation he claimed from God. Anderson (p. 113) wisely describes this section as "evocative rather than photographic." There is always a mysterious element to direct contact with God and that mystery cannot be described with the same objectivity and precision we use for daily events.

The actual content of what God showed Eliphaz appears in verse 17. It is not clear whether the revelation is only verse 17 and verses 18-21 are Eliphaz's explanatory remarks or the revelation is all of verses 17-21. Verse 17 is expressed in the form of two rhetorical questions - both expecting "no" for an answer. The first question asks whether **human beings can be righteous [or pure] before their Maker**. The very construction of the sentence shows Eliphaz's assumptions. Since one's "**Maker**" is superior to the creature, there is no way the creature can stand against that Maker arguing for his or her own rightness and God's wrong-ness. Eliphaz is convinced that every human being - no matter how thoroughly faithful they may be to God - cannot claim the right to question God.

Verses 18-21 enforce the argument by a technique the rabbis would later call from greater to lesser. Eliphaz points out that God does not fully **trust** even his heavenly servants and angels. If God treats heavenly beings as his inferiors **how much more** will he consider earthly beings inferior to himself. The evidence Eliphaz sees of this is the way human life is so easily disrupted and destroyed.

On the face of it, the two positions Eliphaz espouses in chapter 4 are contradictory. It is not consistent to be stressing, as the chapter opens, that a man like Job is a good man who deserves to be restored; and to be denying, as it ends, that any man can be justified in God's sight. Christian readers of the Book of Job must, however, be very careful not to read too much into Eliphaz's shift of stance. We may be glad to see it, but we are not entitled to take Eliphaz's vision as indicative of a change of life which is anything like as fundamental as that experienced by St Paul when he surrendered a total reliance on the Jewish law for an equally total reliance on faith in Christ. That would be to transport him from the world of Old Testament Wisdom into the world of the Epistle to the Romans. Certainly he has taken a few steps along that road, but he is far from formulating a hard doctrine of original or universal sin that would cut out any reliance on good works.

Not until his third speech (see 9:2) will Job grapple with Eliphaz's central theological assertion (4:17): that no man can be justified in God's eyes

Eliphaz moves his argument to the next stage in Job 5:1-7. He asks where Job might turn to gain a hearing with God. In verse 1 he asks if any of **the holy ones** will be available to help Job? Here the question of a spiritual mediator who could get God's attention for a human being is raised. Eliphaz asks the question rhetorically and assumes that none of **the holy ones** would help Job. From our later, Christian viewpoint we know of the one mediator who is able to bridge the gulf beyond God and ourselves, Jesus Christ. However, that kind of mediator was not available to Job and Eliphaz urges him to be careful not to ask for more than he can have.

Verse 2 is formulated like a proverb - it is a general observation about life. It warns against impatience and envy, though a variety of English words are used to translate the Hebrew, **vexation**, resentment, passion, and **jealousy**. Hartley (p. 117) points out that both words describe "burning, angry emotions" that lead to "erratic behavior and the desire for revenge." Such uncontrolled emotion **kills the fool** and **slays the simpleton**. While it is true in a figurative sense (as the proverb intends) modern society has illustrated that such out-of-control emotions are also literally fatal. Eliphaz's point is that Job must get his emotions under control and stop ranting against God. Verses 3-5 describe the consequences suffered by fools who do not control their emotions. Their **children** are in danger, **they are crushed**, they lose their **harvest** and their **wealth**. These are obviously aimed at Job and the losses he has suffered. Eliphaz points out that Job's losses are consistent with the losses of those who foolishly lash out against God.

Verses 6-7 come back to Eliphaz's basic assumptions. Misery and trouble do not grow on trees - they are the product of human behavior according to verse 6. Verse 7 then affirms that such human behavior is intrinsically wicked. Human beings are destined for **trouble** because of their sinful nature and complaining against God about trouble is foolishness according to Eliphaz. From this perspective Job should silently accept the suffering of his life as just punishment for his sins whether he was aware of sinning or not. As chapter 6 will show, Job does not agree.

Eliphaz moves to advice in Job 5:8-16. If he were in Job's shoes he **would seek God** and **commit his cause** to the Lord. The opening word of verse 8 in the Hebrew text is a strong adversative showing the great contrast between what Eliphaz thinks he would do and what he believes Job was doing. Obviously Eliphaz does not believe Job has been seeking God or submitting his cause to God. Van Selms (p. 35) paraphrases Eliphaz in this way, "If I were in your shoes, I would not go to God with a complaint, which always implies some kind of accusation, but I would go to him with a request for advice and lay my cause before him: so do not indict him but await his...decision. You can trust God not only to give a verdict but also to put it into effect."

Verses 9-16 then tell why a person can trust God with the verdict. Anderson (p. 120) describes these verses as one of the most beautiful creedal hymns on the Bible. Verse 9 affirms God's marvelous ways in creation. Romans 11:33 reflects the same understanding. Verse 10 affirms God's goodness in supplying **rain** and **water**. Jesus seems to draw on this verse in Matthew 5:45. Verse 11 declares God's concern for the poor in spirit. Verses 12-13 describe the way God overcomes those who are wise in their own understanding. Paul draws from these verses in 1 Corinthians 1-3 and verse 13 is quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:19. This hymn of praise to God comes to its climax in verses 15-16 where God's salvation of the **needy** and **hope** for the **poor** overcome the devastation of **injustice**.

The final section of Eliphaz's first speech is found in Job 5:17-27. Here he continues his advice for Job. He begins with a beatitude. **Blessed is the man whom God reproves**. Eliphaz appeals to the fatherhood of God. As father God disciplines and corrects those who stand in need of such correction. The appropriate (and blessed) response is to accept such discipline rather than rejecting it. In this Eliphaz echoes Proverbs 3:10-12 and Hebrews 12:5-11.

Verses 18-26 then list a series of blessings that one can count on from the hand of God. Verse 18 points out that while God disciplines he also brings healing. This verse echoes Deuteronomy 32:39 where God declares, "See now that I, even I, am he; there is not god beside me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand." Verse 19 uses the numerical patterns of some proverbs by speaking of **six troubles** and **seven**. Then a series of troubles are listed: **famine**, **war**, **scourge of the tongue**, and **destruction**. Eliphaz is confident that God graciously provides a way of escape and success.

Verses 24-26 then contain a series of promises available to the person who accepts God's discipline. Security, plenty of children and grand children, and successful **old age** await Job if he will stop complaining and start accepting God's punishment.

Eliphaz's advice would be quite correct if his original assumption was true - that God was punishing Job for his sins. But the author has already told us repeatedly that Job has not sinned. What can we make of Eliphaz's advice then? Perhaps it was inadvertent since Eliphaz was not present when the *satan* challenged Yahweh. But Eliphaz is suggesting to Job that God should be served for the blessings that he offers the righteous.

Note on (the Christian Concept of) Suffering As Divine Discipline

We have in our study so far come across several ideas and emphases which are alien to Christian sentiment or which have been superseded in the centuries between the Old Testament and the New. It may be helpful to remind ourselves of the three most important of these at this stage:

- (a) a man in Old Testament times who sincerely tried to live a good life was not ashamed to say so or to look to God to bless and reward him;
- (b) such a man had to experience the blessing due to him in this life, for there was in Old Testament times no expectation of a meaningful existence after death to which his reward could be postponed; and
- (c) if such a man encountered mishap or tragedy in his life he knew it could only come from God, for there was in Old Testament times no belief in a power independent of God (such as the Devil, or Satan, in the New Testament period) who could be blamed for it.

Job's First Response to Eliphaz – Job 6-7

Job does not back down in the face of Eliphaz's advice. He affirms that his complaint against God does not undermine his righteousness. He charges his friend with insensitivity and lack of insight. Since he is still keenly aware that he has not sinned none of Eliphaz's remarks apply to him. As a result he continues his complaint against God.

Job begins his response by declaring the painful reality of his suffering in Job 6:1-7. He wishes for a huge scale or balance upon which he could place his pain so his friends could see how heavy the burden of his suffering was. He uses the same word, "**vexation**," that Eliphaz had used in Job 5:2. If such a scale were available his friends would understand his rash sounding words. Verse 3 allows Job to admit that his words were **rash** but the suffering he was enduring made them justifiable. Eliphaz had declared that vexation would kill a fool. Job responds that he is indeed vexed, but it is no fool.

Verse 4 repeats the complaint that God has turned against him. Poisonous arrows from God are sapping his spirit; **the terrors of God** are terrifying him. In such circumstances should his friends expect him meekly to accept God's torment silently? In verse 5 Job appeals to nature. The **ox** and **ass** do not bellow when they have food. Their noise is a complaint when they have nothing to eat. The losses of his life have ruined Job's appetite for life. Therefore his complaint is to be expected not criticized.

Job returns to the complaints of chapter 3 in Job 6:8-13. Though he will not curse God and die, he asks God to curse him so he could die. If God would only strike him dead Job knows that he could die in the confidence that he had not sinned.

Verse 10 is a powerful testimony to Job's confidence that he has not fallen short of God's expectations for him. He specifically declares that he has **not denied** God's words. The KJV most literally translates the Hebrew word as "concealed" but the modern versions correctly interpret Job's meaning with the word "denied." He meant that he had not hidden God's words by making them a private matter of relationship between himself and God. Rather Job had lived out the instructions and word of God publicly in his life. Put another way, Job was affirming that his life had not contradicted God's words, but had exemplified them.

This is a moving and important testimony for several reasons. First, it is spiritually uplifting to see a person whose life embodies the will of God. All of us need to see human beings living out the will of God so that his will is not abstract theory but realistic and understandable life. Job's testimony calls us to a life of integrity in which we can be an example of the way God intends life to be lived. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for us, Job shows us here that right relationship with God cannot be kept in the private dimensions of our lives. There is such an over emphasis on personal and individual relationship with God that faith is made a private matter. While it is personal, faith is not private if it is biblical faith. Biblical faith is persistently public. What one believes privately is of no interest to Biblical people unless it is demonstrated by the way one lives publicly.

In verses 11-13 Job again attempts to justify his complaint against God. He knows that he is not strong enough to bear such pain forever. There is nothing to be gained by suffering in silence from Job's perspective. The end of his life is near; he must cry out to God.

The remainder of chapter 6, verses 14-30, contain Job's accusation against his friends. The tone of these verses is less violently emotional and more reasoned. Job acknowledges that these are his friends and brothers. He begins by accusing them of failing to keep their obligations of friendship to him. But he concludes the section by inviting them to try again to instruct him.

Verse 14 begins the section with a powerful criticism. Job speaks of **those who withhold kindness** as the NRSV translates it. The word "**kindness**" ("pity" in the KJV and "devotion" in the NIV) translates the Hebrew word *hesed*. This word speaks of covenant loyalty and faithfulness. Job believes that friendship involves an actual covenant of mutual commitment and support. Failure to live up to that covenant of friendship is to abandon "the fear of the Almighty."

This expression is important for two reasons. First, it is another way of referring to the fear of the Lord, which the wisdom tradition defines as the source of wisdom. Thus failure to observe the covenant of friendship is to reject the wisdom taught in Proverbs. Second, Job specifically calls God **the Almighty** in this verse. Eliphaz had used the same name for God in Job 5:17. Job's response to Eliphaz is that **the fear of the Almighty** is more important than the discipline of the Almighty.

In verses 15-17 accuse the friends of being unreliable. They are like run-off water in the desert. They wanted to be close friends when Job had plenty, but when life turned dry for him, they had nothing (no water) to offer. Using the water in the desert imagery Job continues in verses 18-20. Ancient **caravans** depended on certain oases or water holes, but when they arrive at a water hole and it is dry they panic as they look frantically for another.

Verse 21 makes the application. Job's friends had all the answers they and he needed when life was going well for him. Their theology was adequate as long as the water held out. But when they came to him and found him so devastated their familiar answers went dry. Their words of comfort were no more to Job than the panicked repeating of old water hole formulas. Forcefully Job has declared that his friends do not understand his pain and they do not know what they are talking about.

But in Job 6:24-30 he opens the door for them to try again. Job invites his friends to **teach** him and promises that he will **be silent** long enough to listen. Verse 25 declares that **honest words** are powerful. This is an important truth. The Hebrew literally speaks of "straight" words. Words of integrity will be effective. Job was willing to submit his life and his words to examination in the confidence that straight talk will lead to the truth. In verse 28 he appeals to his friends to look him in the eye and he promises an honest response to them.

Chapter 7 changes directions. Job is no longer responding to Eliphaz and his friends. Rather, he renews his complaint against God. All 21 verses are part of the lament form (see [Patterns for Life: Lament](#)). Hartley (p. 142) comments that the fact that Job begins to speak realistically of his pain in this chapter instead of simply cursing the day of his birth as he did in chapter 3 shows that he is beginning to cope

with the reality of his pain. This is the first step toward making peace with God over the losses he has sustained.

The first six verses describe the great pain of Job. He laments the hard life that all human beings suffer and then graphically describes the worms, scabs, crusts, and oozing that accompanied the disease afflicting his body. In verses 7-10 Job asks God to **remember** his frail condition. He is convinced he is about to die - to descend to **Sheol** as verse 9 puts it. Job was sure that God did not realize how far gone he was. He is also sure that if God would only understand how precarious his condition was that he (God) would respond in compassion. These verses reveal Job's continuing confidence in God's goodness.

Verses 11-16 return to the lament. Since God has treated him so badly Job must respond forcefully. He will not keep silent nor restrain himself from words others might consider disrespectful. They are not the ones suffering. Finally, Job concludes his speech in verses 17-21 with a plea for God to come to his rescue before it is too late.

First Job asks (vv. 12–16) whether he is a threat to God. Does he endanger the order and stability of the universe like the great deep of chaos which (according to [Gen. 1:2, 6–10](#)) God had to bring under control at creation (see also [Ps. 104:6–9](#)), or like the monster Leviathan of Hebrew folk lore who is a personification of the deep and whom (according to [Psalm 74:14](#)) God had to engage in battle and defeat? Another Hebrew name for this monster is *Rahab* whom (in [Psalm 89:10](#)) God had to crush, and whom, in a later allusion by Job ([26:12](#)) he had to smite (see also [Job 9:13](#)). The same monster is called *Prince Sea* in the Canaanite myths from Ras Shamra (Ugarit), and we should probably therefore translate “Am I Sea or Dragon?” with capitals.

Second Job asks (vv. 17–19) whether puny man could be such a slight threat to God that he should need to bother with him at all. It is almost the opposite question, but since the answer this time is in the affirmative—yes, he is as puny as that—the condemnation of God is essentially the same.

Thirdly (vv. 20–21) Job asks a question that I am sure even he would rather not have asked when irony is in the air; but he is driven to it by the perverse thrust of his satire. Suppose he has sinned—and it is a supposition—how does that harm God?

Bildad's First Speech – Job 8:1-22

Job 7 echoed many of the themes of Job 3 and so a friend speaks to correct Job's foolish words. As was true of Eliphaz, we know nothing historically about Bildad. He is simply the second speaker in each of the cycles. This implies that he had lower status than Eliphaz and the author of Job presents him as less eloquent also. Bildad, however, is more direct. He plainly compares Job's words to “wind” in Job 8:2. Verses 4-7 bluntly speak of Job's **children** and Job himself. Bildad does not speak in generalities. If Job's **children sinned**, that sin was fatal to them. If Job were **pure** then God would **restore** him. Bildad is sure that God is just and that the universe runs like clock-work in the carrying out of God's justice.

Job 8:8-19 provide Bildad's evidence for God's justice. Verses 8-10 appeal to tradition and experience. Everyone who has ever dealt with God experienced his justice. The fathers of the faith can teach us that. Verses 11-19 provide a series of illustrations from nature that argue the justice of God. **Papyrus**, **reeds**, spider webs, root systems, and **rocks** provide Bildad with examples of his basic premise. Those who sin will be punished severely.

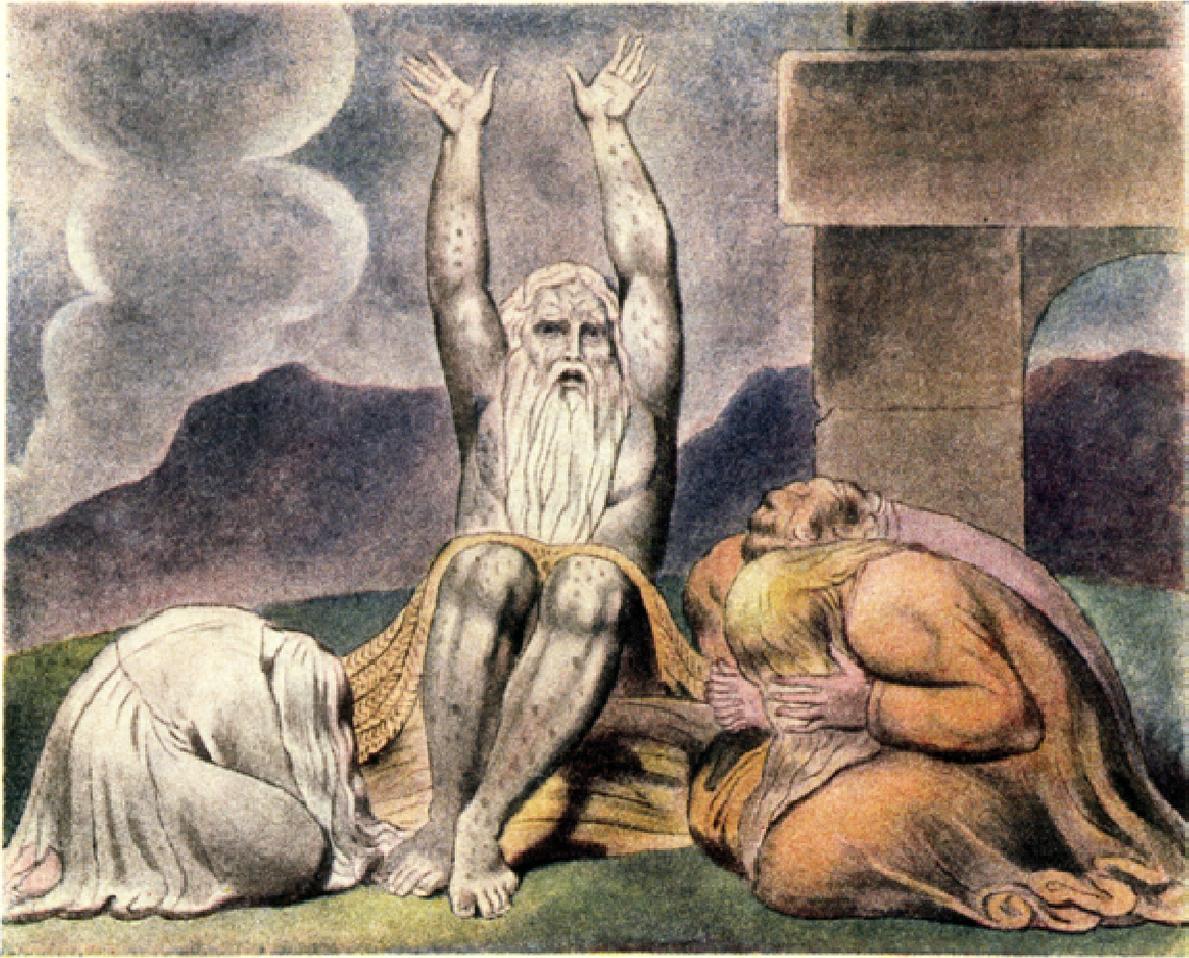
Verses 20-22 state the other side of the coin in Bildad's mind. If those who sin are punished, then God will not punish a person of integrity or a **blameless person**. If Job is as innocent as he claims God will soon restore to him **joy and laughter**. Wickedness will be shamed and righteousness will be vindicated.

Bildad's *first* tune is the simple one that, by definition, God can do no wrong. And his *second* one is equally simple: God rewards the good and punishes the bad. But there is no tune in his repertoire for the problem of unmerited suffering. It just does not exist for him, nor does the larger problem of evil and tragedy in God's world. The catastrophes that so perplex and sadden people of feeling in every generation.

Bildad is painful reminder of a certain kind of religious person. Hartley (p. 164) describes him as "a prisoner of tradition." His theology is set; he knows all the answers. Job's experience must be forced into Bildad's theology. There is no room to learn from Job's experience. The only thing Bildad does not know is whether Job is guilty or not. So he must wait and see. The tragedy is that his concern is Job's guilt, not Job's pain. He is more concerned to be proved right than to really bring comfort.

Lesson 3 Study Questions

1. Eliphaz points out to Job in 4:3-5 that he has been able to instruct others but cannot apply that teaching to himself. Has this ever happened to you?
2. Job 4:7-11 is a reminder to Job that illness is caused by sin. Try to put yourself, your own perception of reality, back into the late OT period. Can you imagine what it would be like if you, your whole family and everyone you are acquainted knew with absolute certainty that the cause of your common cold was your sinful behavior? How would that make you feel if you caught a cold (or other illness)?
3. (Question for those who have studied Barclay's commentary concerning The Gospel of Matthew's Beatitudes during one of the past several summers): Job 5:17 begins with the Hebrew interjection *'eshet* (אֵשֶׁת) which Barclay says is translated from Matthew into the Greek *makarios* (μακάριος) and older English term blessed ('ble-səd). Does this example of actual use in Old Testament Hebrew help your understanding of the Beatitudes?
4. The excerpt from Gibson's book at the top of page 22 summarizes the three principal late OT theology learnings we hope to take away from our study of Job. Try to spend a little time imagining how your personal behavior and life would be different if this were our current cultural heritage. Now reflect on some Gospel stories such as the Pharisee and tax collector praying in the Temple, the pious man who walked away from Jesus when he was told to give everything away and then follow Jesus, Jesus regularly forgiving sins first and then curing, etc. How much does trying to understand these three late OT pervasive beliefs help you understand some of the Gospel stories that heretofore were difficult to understand?
5. What statements of Job in verses 7:1-10 have you observed to be true by your experiences in life? Do any of his statements seem too pessimistic?
6. What accusations does Job make against his friends in verses 6:14-23? Is he correct? What insight can you draw from these verses about how to best comfort those who suffer?
7. In verse 7:11 Job declares that he will no longer remain silent. What are the advantages of speaking the anguish of one's spirit? What are the disadvantages?
8. Summarize Bildad's appeal to Job in verses 8:1-7. How would it make you feel if you were Job? Is Bildad right?



Lesson 4 Readings

Read Job 9:1-13:28

Job 9:1-13:28

The First Cycles of Speeches - Job 4:1-14:22 (cont.)

Job 4:1-14:22 contains the first cycle of speech in which Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar each speak and Job responds to each one of them. In Job 8 Bildad made his first speech. He was convinced that God punishes evil. As a result Job's suffering must be the result of sin. Chapter 9 begins Job's response.

Job's First Response to Bildad – Job 9-10

Job's reply to Bildad is not easy to understand. He appears to start a train of thought and then switches tracks to another train of thought when the concepts get too heavy. He frequently uses rare words for the Hebrew Bible, but does not provide enough context for us to be sure of the meaning of those words. One of the results of this has been many changes in the copying process of the book of Job. Scholars who try to determine the exact words of the original text have great difficulties in Job 9. What is clear is that Job was in search of a deeper understanding of God than that with which he had

been raised- a deeper understanding than that of his friends. Andersen (pp. 143-144) notes that there is a basic agreement between Job and his friends about the character of God. The issue at stake concerns the "whys and wherefores of God's dealings with Job." Andersen continues,

Job's faith is stronger than theirs, more imaginative and adventurous, and, in consequence, more exacting and painful. Job will explore his way into God while the rest merely watch and talk. Job accepts what they have said and then goes far beyond it. He replies to Bildad's speech with a tribute to the magnificence of God that makes Bildad's easy-to-talk-about deity seem puny and trivial. His agreement with Bildad (9:2a) is genuine; his question (9:2b) is not derisive, but the starting-point of a most urgent quest.

The pain of his life had caused Job to desire deeply a sense of vindication from God. He wanted God to confirm his (Job's) integrity, that these tragedies were not punishment for some unknown sin. This quest for vindication causes Job to take the language of Bildad and Eliphaz and turn it in a new direction, a direction that does not prove profitable for Job.

In the opening line of his response Job agrees with Bildad, "I know that this is so." His agreement is with Bildad's affirmation from Job 8:3 that God does not pervert justice. Eliphaz had raised the question of how a person could be just before God in Job 4:17. The language of justice suggested the courtroom to Job and his thoughts turned in that direction. The rhetorical question in verse 2b, "**How can a man be declared innocent [or just or righteous] before God?**" implies that Job did not think a person could be acquitted if God was the accuser. Yet his own conscience knew no sin and so his confidence that God would not pervert justice led him "to contemplate the impossible...pursuing litigation against God" (Hartley, p. 166).

Yet this train of thought is not the solution to Job's problem. He immediately realizes that no human being could be successful in a law-suit against God. In the cross examination the human could not even answer **once in a thousand** questions God might put to him or her. (It is also possible to understand the one out of a thousand with God as subject. To use our expression, God would not answer one out of a thousand subpoenas with which a human might serve him.)

Bildad and Eliphaz have been spouting *general* truths which, by their very nature, can only apply to most people most of the time. Come hell or high water, he must know the answer; not the answer that would account for this or that man's good or ill fortune, but the answer that would account, at one and the same time, for his own personal previous good fortune and his own personal present ill fortune. He wishes that he could. So he asks, "How can a man get God to acknowledge his innocence?" But even as he asks this question, he is overwhelmed by a sense of his own hubris, and of the terrifying might and incomparable power of the one he is questioning. According to the RSV, verses 2-3 show "a man" wishing to argue his case with God, but quite incapable of answering any of the thousand questions which God would put to him.

As Job notes in verse 4, God is **wise in heart** [or thought] and **mighty in strength**. No one can resist him with success. The Hebrew text of verse 4 yields several interesting insights. The first phrase literally describes God as **wise in heart**. It is not God's superior intellectual firepower that interests Job; it is God's wisdom in relationships. In Hebrew thought the **heart** was the seat of the will and thus of commitments. One of the unfortunate results of the Enlightenment and the Age of Science on all of us is that we tend to think of God's wisdom in terms of facts, propositions that can be argued, and impenetrable logic. The Bible sees God's wisdom operating in commitments and relationships, which should be instructive for us.

A second facet of understanding that arises from the Hebrew text is in the final line of verse 4 that asks about the possibility of resisting God. The KJV correctly translates the Hebrew verb as "harden"

([He is] wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened [himself] against him, and hath prospered?). The question is, who can harden himself against God? This is an abbreviated way of saying, who can harden his heart against God, or who can stiffen his neck against God? Job recognizes that the very act of pursuing a law-suit against God reflects a sinful attitude on the part of a human being. He knows he can not take such against God, but his pain has made that idea attractive to him.

Verses 5-13 continue to reflect on God's greatness that would make litigation against him folly. Andersen (p. 145) compares verses 5-10 with the great hymns of the Psalms, Amos 4:13, Isaiah 40:21-31, and Genesis 1. These verses declare God's power over nature in typical Old Testament ways. The Canaanites considered Ba'al to be lord of the mountains, sky, and weather. The Egyptians considered Ra, the sun, to be the supreme God. And the Old Testament never tires of describing Yahweh as the God who moves mountains, commands the sun, and controls the weather. It was their way of affirming God's power over all rival deities. It was also a way of placing trust in God in the face of the fearful, the unknown, and the mysterious.

But despite God's great power verses 11-12 point out that God has cloaked himself with mystery. Human eyes cannot **see him**. Human sense cannot **perceive him**. Human power can not resist him. When God unleashes his anger no power can resist him. In verse 13 Job speaks of **the helpers of Rahab** bowing before God's anger. This word **Rahab** does not refer to the prostitute of Jericho. This word **Rahab** describes one of the sea monsters - Leviathan and Tannin being the other major ones. The nations around Israel saw in these sea monsters the chaos of the world without God's restraining order (see [Ba'al Worship in the Old Testament](#) and links there). God's work of creating and sustaining the universe was the work of defeating the forces of chaos to impose and maintain the order of the universe. God has defeated the very powers of chaos. How could Job or any other human hope to successfully defeat him in a court battle?

Though verses 5-13 have made the hopelessness of the lawsuit against God clear, Job pursues the idea in verses 14-24. He knows that even though he knows that he is in the right, he also knows that he cannot win a case against God. In God's presence his words of defense would be turned into an **appeal for mercy** - hardly a way to win the case. Here Job anticipates the climax of the book in which God finally appears and speaks and Job can do nothing but worship. Already the readers are being prepared for one of the main points of the book - that there is no satisfactory philosophical explanation for why a righteous God allows good people to suffer. There is no explanation but the presence of God in the face of suffering, which is finally all that righteous people need.

All of a sudden we are back in the rhetoric of the courtroom, and with Job's burning certainty of his own innocence. A lyrical poem about God's mysterious dealings in the world of nature and the world of men, which in another context would have moved us to wonder and to a proper sense of our own helplessness before so great a Being, is made to serve as a backcloth to a portrait of pernicious and inconsistent divine dealing which, for gross irreverence, is unparalleled in the annals of literature. The fiercest atheist cannot hold a candle to this distraught believer when he gets going.

He imagines himself challenging this mighty God in court. But immediately he is lost for words, quite incapable of forming a reasoned case. The fact that he is innocent makes no difference. Job finds himself having to beg for mercy from the one who is wronging him. If God attends at all to his summons, he will not even listen to him. For God is the same enemy who has already crushed Job for a trifle (we should read this in v. 17, literally a "hair"; the word for "tempest", which the RSV prefers, has the same consonants, but different vowels)

Verse 17 shows the skillful use of words by the author. Job complains that God has multiplied his wounds "**without cause.**" This is the same Hebrew word used by the *satan* in Job 1:9 when he asked if Job served Yahweh "without reason." Then in Job 2:3 Yahweh describes the *satan's* actions against Job

as being his (Yahweh's) action against Job for no reason - again the same Hebrew word (see Lesson 2). The book of Job began with the *satan* questioning Job's motives in being righteous. Now Job questions the justice of a God who permits him to suffer as he suffers.

We should read this in v. 17, literally a "hair"; the word for "tempest", which the RSV prefers, has the same consonants, but different vowels.

The heart of Job's problem appears in verses 20-22. He knows that he is right (or **innocent**; the Hebrew word is *sadaq*) and he cries out that he is **blameless** (the Hebrew is *tam* - the word for integrity). Yet there is no way within the theology of retribution to account for his sufferings. Beyond the theology of retribution Job is aware of the fact that the very act of trying to defend himself against God treads the edge of sin.

Verses 22-24 raise the question another way. **The blameless (*tam*) and the wicked** are both destroyed. Disaster **mocks the innocent** as well as punishing the guilty. The powers of wickedness overrun the earth. Those are the circumstances Job observes and they are unjust circumstances. Israel's monotheism demanded that there be only one God capable of controlling human history and natural events. Job's logic is pushing him toward the conclusion that God is the cause of these injustices. And so he asks the poignant question in verse 24, "if it is not he (God), who then is it?"

Verses 25-26 present four quick metaphors for the shortness of life. Like a swift runner, like a fleeing robber, like a fast light boat, like an eagle life passes quickly away. Then after lamenting how fast life goes by Job then complains in verses 27-28 that life is dangerously too long. He is afraid to try to put "a stiff upper lip;" he is afraid to "gut it out." Verse 28 is especially powerful. Job admits that his suffering has brought terror into his life. If he has suffered so much while blameless just think what could happen to him should he sin? It is easy for us to claim that Job is inconsistent in these verses. However, logical consistency is not Job's purpose. His emotions are ragged and he is lashing out against the pain of his life and he is lashing out at God because the rules of life (retribution) are not working.

Verses 28-31 are addressed toward God. In verse 32 Job begins to talk about God rather than to him. Verses 32-35 then return to the theme of verses 14-21. Verse 33 is interesting in that Job laments the fact that there is no "umpire" between him and God. This is another example of his feelings that he is suffering injustice. The final line of verse 35 is unclear. Perhaps Job is confessing that for all his brave talk about wanting to take God to court, he really does not have the heart for such a confrontation with the Lord.

Can we go further and see in these closing verses of chapter 9, if not a prophecy, at least a distant intimation of the Incarnation? As long as we are careful how we phrase it, and do not put into Job's mouth anything that would be meaningless to him or to those listening to his story, I am sure we can. There is probably, beneath the surface of Job's despairing wish for an arbiter or umpire, an intense longing that the Lord of hosts, whom the Old Testament knew all about, should be kind—and kind not only in the sense that an Oriental potentate could be kind, dispensing occasional beneficence from his high throne, but humane in the true meaning of that word, accessible to his creatures as a human father is to his children (the great New Testament name of God—Father—is remarkably rare in the Old Testament). In short Job wished that God could be a real Immanuel, "God with us". It is a longing which the writers of the Old Testament, never guilty of bringing Creator and creature too near to each other, do not often allow to come to expression.

Job 9 contains Job's bold quest for understanding the "whys and wherefores" of God's treatment of him. Chapter 10 can be described as another lament. Verses 1-7 begin the lament with a complaint against God. He openly declares that he is giving vent to the bitterness of his life. In verse 2 Job demands that God declare him "not guilty." The second line of the verse demands that God give a

reason for what is happening to him. Job continues the language of the courtroom but now pictures God as the one who initiated the lawsuit. God must declare the charges against Job.

Hartley (p. 183) wisely points out that had Job known of the "contest" between God and the *satan* described in chapters 1 and 2 all his suffering would have been easier to bear. But for the "test" to be a genuine test Job cannot know. Thus Job must be left in the dark. God cannot answer his pleas. He must feel abandoned by God for God to discover whether Job really trusts him. This paragraph is full of irony. In verse 3 Job asks if it seems **good** to God to **despise the work of your hands**. This seems to be a deliberate twist on Genesis 1 where after each day of creation God declared the work of his hands "good." In verse 6 Job asks if God is using all this suffering as a way to find out if Job has sinned. The language is ironic because Job asks if God is seeking out his iniquity and searching for his sin. If it were true God would be doing the work of the *satan* as described in chapters 1 and 2. But in verse 7 Job repeats his confident assertion that God really knows his innocence.

Verses 8-12 reflect on God as Job's creator. Verses 8-9 are built on the metaphor of human beings as clay. In a world in which pottery was the standard cookware and dinnerware the description of humans as clay speaks of their fragile and weak nature. But despite human weakness God has granted the dignity and power of relationships as verse 12 shows. The most powerful relationship is relationship with God. God has granted life and "**steadfast love**." The word for "**steadfast love**" is *hesed* - the covenant love that God shows to his people. Verses 13-17 describe God's vigilant watch against Job. Job's lament is that God is constantly on his case watching to see if he will fall.

Verses 18-22 bring Job's reply to Bildad to a close. Andersen (p. 155) summarizes the matter well:

Job has now stated the issues more incisively than his detached comforters. The two great things he knows about God intersect and clash. God is powerful; God is good. In creation first, and now in Job's recent disasters, the might of God is seen. That God Himself did it all is indisputable. Job does not question God's right to do it. But God's reasons for His actions Job cannot detect. Why should He create only to destroy? His superb craftsmanship in a man's body is a supreme token of His commitment to life. But for Job it has become a burden and a horror.

The baffled sufferer retires to his first position, the lament of chapter 3, which is resumed in the closing lines of this speech.

Zophar's First Speech – Job 11

Zophar is the third friend to respond to Job. As in the case of Eliphaz and Bildad we have no historical information about Zophar. There is little evidence that he is the youngest of Job's comforters but he does have the least status in that he only makes two short speeches. He is the least attractive of the friends. He does not appeal to a revelation from God like Eliphaz did nor to the traditions of the fathers like Bildad. Rather, he offers only the cold logic of his theology. In his opinion people are "either contrite worshipers of God or arrogant sinners" (Hartley, p. 193). Thus he has no delusions that Job might be right. His goal is to convince Job to stop his foolish protestations of innocence. His speech is built in three sections, an accusation against Job in verses 1-4, a section on God's wisdom in verses 5-12, and an appeal to Job to repent in verses 13-20. The accusing nature of his speech can be seen from the fact that he accuses Job of talking too much in verses 2-3, of being self-righteous in verses 4-6, of being opinionated in verses 7-12, and of being stubborn in verses 13-20.

Zophar begins by accusing Job of talking too much. He is afraid that some will be persuaded by the avalanche of Job's words and rhetoric. He tries to deflate Job's responses by scornfully calling them a "multitude of words" in verse 2 and "**babble**" in verse 3. He questions whether anyone who talks as much as Job did can possibly be justified. Zophar seems completely untouched by Job's pain and he caricatures Job's words. In verse 4 he accuses Job of claiming that his "doctrine" (as the KJV translates

the word) is pure. The NIV gives a more powerful paraphrase of Zophar's summary of Job's response when it translates, "You say to God, 'My beliefs are flawless'."

In fact Job had made no such claim. His speech in chapters 9-10 show that his thoughts about God are in turmoil and confusion. Zophar also states that Job claimed to be **pure** in the sight of God. Zophar's word for "**pure**" speaks of spotless moral purity. In fact Job had claimed to be blameless (*tam*) - a person of integrity, not a person with no flaws. The weakness of Zophar's speech is already clear. He has no sympathy for Job and he has not listened well enough to summarize accurately Job's own statements. Neither Zophar nor anyone else should expect to be heard with respect when he shows such rude disregard for the other person's position.

Job had wished that God would speak to him. Zophar also wants God to speak, but he has no interest in having God argue Job's case. Rather he simply wants God to set Job straight. Verse 6 declares the content of what Zophar wants God to tell Job. The hidden **secrets of wisdom** and the full scope of sound wisdom would surely convince Job that he had sinned and that his sufferings were punishment for those sins. Zophar would also like God to tell Job that he is only being punished for part of his sins. Job may think that his suffering is terrible, but Zophar is convinced that God has moderated what Job deserved by a great deal.

In verses 7-11 Zophar points out that God is beyond human understanding. The obvious conclusion is that Job is wrong and arrogant to claim that God has mistreated him. Since the ways of God are past finding out, Job has no business complaining according to Zophar. He (Job) should be praising God rather than complaining. These verses are almost hymnic in their exalted description of God's surpassing wisdom. But Zophar's praises to God ring hollow because of their superficiality. Worship arises from a person's experiences with God. Zophar's experience of God has not taken him into the deep waters being experienced by Job. Zophar was quick with the simplistic answer, but it was not an answer tried and tested by the real experience of a person God described as perfect (*tam*).

Zophar's conclusion is to call Job to repentance in verses 13-20. The invitation to repent is built around two conditional sentences. The first, proposing a positive condition appears in verse 13, "**If you direct your heart rightly.**" This means to make his heart firm or steadfast for believing. The Biblical writers strike an interesting balance between calling for a firm heart and rejecting a hard heart. We might say that too "soft" a heart would be vacillating and wishy-washy. One's heart - the seat of commitment and decision making - must be resolute enough to maintain one's commitments. The second part of verse 13 calls on Job **to stretch out your hands** in supplication to God.

The negative condition is stated in verse 14. Should Job stretch out his hands to God those hands would be subject to the search light of God's scrutiny. Should Job discover wrong he must remove it. The word that Zophar uses for "wrong" (or **iniquity**) was used for a variety of sins, but it especially referred to hidden acts of extortion and oppression. It is possible that Zophar suspects Job of gaining wealth through extortion of the poor. This would fit with the second line of verse 14 with its exhortation to not let injustice " **dwell in your tents.**" This expression reflects the ancient Bedouin culture in which the tribal head or father was responsible for the behavior of all members of the family and all servants (all the people in his tents). This is a call to investigate and remedy any injustice that might have been committed by a family member or servant. This is a reminder that we always have both personal and social responsibilities for sin.

If Job will remove evil from his life Zophar lays out the benefits in verses 15-19. God will **lift up** Job's **face**, Job **will be secure**, he will be free from **fear**, and he will **forget** his troubles. These reassuring promises, however, depend on Job's confession of and repentance from sin. That Job would not be conscious of sin is incredible to Zophar. Thus verse 20 describes the doom coming to the unrepentant wicked. Their **eyes will fail**, their hope will turn to despair, and there will be no hiding place for them.

Zophar is every whit as orthodox as Bildad and no more inclined than he to regard Job's sufferings as exceptional. Indeed, on the basis of that orthodoxy, he goes further than Bildad dared to, and quite unambiguously lets Job know that he considers him to be a wicked man paying for his wickedness.

Job's First Response to Zophar – Job 12-14

All three of Job's friends have now spoken. Job's response to Zophar is his final speech in the first cycle of speeches and it functions as the transition between the first cycle and second cycle of the friends' speeches. Andersen (p. 159) notes a change in Job's mood at this point. Job's emotions have fluctuated wildly and his words have bordered on outrageous. This speech reflects a greater sense of self-control and a calmer tone. The three chapters reflect the three main divisions of the speech. Chapters 12 and 13 each form a complaint that Job registers against his friends.

Chapter 12 begins in verse 2 with sarcasm on Job's part. "I suppose you are the only people with understanding. Wisdom will perish from the earth when you are gone!" But verse 3 shows that Job does not at all believe his biting comment of verse 2. He is convinced that he knows as much as they do. In fact, anybody could make the observations they have made. Part of Job's complaint is that his friends have done nothing but parrot back the standard clichés of the Biblical culture about sin and punishment to him. What he needed and what many hurting people today need, is someone to think past the superficial answers to find the depths of God that will match the depths of human pain.

While Job had defended himself in verse 3 he still feels deeply disgraced and describes that feeling in verses 4-6. The key word of this paragraph is **laughingstock**. While no one likes to be made fun of, the ancient (and modern) Near East was a culture especially built on status and respect. Loss of face was a devastating loss and Job is not only being mocked by those who had hated him before for his great wealth, he is now also being ridiculed by his **friends**. Job describes himself in verse 4 as one who continually **called upon God**, a person who was righteous (or **just**) and **blameless**. Something terrible has gone wrong when such a person has become a **laughingstock**.

In verses 7-11 Job turns to traditional Wisdom patterns of thought. He appeals to the example of the **animals**, the **birds**, the **fish**, and the **plants**. The point is not made until verse 11. All nature tests food with taste to determine whether it is good or bad. Likewise **the ear** is created to **test words** whether they are correct or not. Thus Job is not only justified in his questioning of God, God's own creation demands it.

Verses 12-25 form an interlude in Job's complaint, turning to praise for God's sovereign rule over the world. These verses proclaim God as the source of all things. He is superior in wisdom to any rival. All earthly rulers, no matter how powerful, are subject to him. Their power depends on his favor. "Nothing lies outside his power or beyond his wisdom" (Hartley, p. 212). The implication of this emphasis on God's power over creation and earthly rulers is that God is also in control of Job's circumstances. Zophar had implied that anyone suffering God's judgment is stupid or worthless. Job's description of God's establishing and destroying of earthly leaders makes it clear that not everyone who experiences God's destructive power is stupid or worthless. Devastation falls on people regardless of their social status or spiritual standing. These verses paint a picture of God more awesome, more mysterious than the God of Job's comforters.

Job 13 returns to Job's complaint. In verses 1-12 he charges them with not listening to his words and with defending God falsely. Verse 4 described his friends as whitewashers of lies and verse 5 declares that the wisest thing they could do is to be quiet. Verse 7 criticizes the comforters for defending God with perversity. Their answers are as worthless as **ashes** and their defense of God as reliable as pottery according to verse 12. Verses 13-17 call on his friends to be silent while Job argues his case with God personally.

Having given his own analysis of the “facts of the case”, Job repeats in 13:1–2 his claims to know as much about God’s attributes as the friends. He needed no lessons from them in this regard. But of course his real desire was not to argue *about* God, but to get through to him and argue *with* him. In that quest, which, even as they spoke their platitudes, was eating his heart away, they were no help to him at all.

Verses 18-22 describe Job’s readiness to place his case before God. He requests two considerations in the process. He asks that God “**withdraw your hand far from me**” in verse 21. This is a plea for God to stop the physical suffering Job is enduring so he will have the strength to present his case. The second line of verse 21 asks the terror of God’s presence not overwhelm him. Atkinson (p. 85) notes, “Job is concerned not to find himself driven from a place of trust in God to a place of terror before God. What troubles him most is that God will turn out to be a monster, and his faith will have been misplaced.” This fear is one of the deepest difficulties a person of faith faces in the midst of overwhelming trouble.

Lesson 4 Study Questions

1. What points does Job make about God in verses 9:13-24 that seem important to you? Why are those points so important for a right understanding of God?
2. The NAB translates verse 9:33, “Would that there were an arbiter between us.” One of the primary messages in Paul’s letters is that one is saved through Jesus; that Jesus acts as a go-between between us and The Father. Had Job lived after the coming of Christ, how do you think the peace of Christ might have helped him face the sufferings of his life?
3. In verses 10:1-10 Job cries out that God is trying to destroy him. Have you ever felt that God had turned away from you?
4. Verse 10:12 affirms God’s gift of life and loyalty for which we all should be thankful. (What the NAB translates as “grace” most others translate as “life.” Douay-Rheims, from the Vulgate, has it as “life.” The Hebrew word describes living or alive as in new greenery or flowing, fresh water.) How does thanksgiving affect your sense of hope?
5. Compare Zophar’s comments in verses 11:7-12 with I Corinthians 2:6-13. How does one discover the deep things of God? Do you want to know those deep things of God? Why or why not?
6. Why do you think Job described himself as a laughingstock to his friends in 12:4? Was he correct or was he overreacting?
7. What is Job’s point about God in verses 12:14-16? How could you re-state his point in your own words? Does this view of God make you comfortable or uncomfortable? Why?
8. Why does Job want to speak directly to God instead of with his friends in the latter part of Chapter 13? What are the reasons that would cause you to want to speak with God more than with your friends? What conclusions about your prayer life can you draw from your answer above?



Lesson 5 Readings

Read Job 14:1-18:21

Job 14:1-18:21

The first cycle of speeches in which Job responds to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar in order is found in Job 4:1-14:22. In this first cycle Job's friends have tried to teach him God's ways and they have urged him to turn to God. However, Job is not convinced that his friends have correctly understood God and his ways. He is sure that they have not understood him (Job), his suffering, or his righteousness. Job accuses them of giving easy answers to hard questions. He is so convinced that his friends are wrong that he warns them that God will expose their falsehood and they will not be able to stand before God.

Job also concludes that his friends will provide no help. As a result he decides that he must pursue his case before God. Yet the pain of his suffering is so great that Job vacillates between confidence that he will be proven innocent before God and depression that he cannot survive the rigors of such a trial. Yet he perseveres.

The Second Cycle of Speeches: Job 15:1-21:34

The second cycle of speeches contains a full round of speeches by each friend and a response by Job. Each speech of the second cycle is shorter than the corresponding speech in the first cycle except for that of Zophar. As was true of the first cycle, Eliphaz has a significantly longer than the speeches of the other friends. Also similar to the first cycle, Job's speeches are longer than those of the friends in the second cycle. If one compares each friend's second speech with that friend's first speech it is clear that they are becoming increasingly impatient with Job. They are more suspicious that his affliction is the result of some serious sin on his part. Job continues to resist their claims and holds to his innocence. However, their increasing pressure calls forth significant expressions of faith from Job.

Eliphaz' Second Speech – Job 15:1-35

Of the three friends Eliphaz is the most entitled to feel aggrieved at Job. In his first speech, in chapters 4 and 5, he had honestly tried to sympathize with Job, and had encouraged him to look for an explanation of his suffering not directly in his own wrongdoing, but in the common imperfection of a human race which had to live with trouble as its birthright. He had received a dusty and ungracious response. Instead of taking the well trodden route of turning humbly to God in prayer, Job had insisted on blaming God—and blaming him vehemently—for what was happening to him, and had gone on at unseemly length about his own innocence. The man whom he had once been pleased to count as his colleague, and who did seem to him to be getting more than his fair share of mankind's misery had, to his chagrin, turned out to be a rebel at heart. Indeed, it was now clear to him that if ever there was a case to which the traditional doctrine of retribution applied, it was Job's. So in his second speech, we find the old philosopher, who had at first been brave enough to express his disquiet at the rigidity of orthodox Wisdom, espousing it as enthusiastically as Bildad and Zophar, and joining them in blanket condemnation of Job.

Eliphaz had begun his first speech in Job 4:2 with a question expecting a negative answer. He does the same in this second cycle in Job 15:2-3. However, the change in the question reveals the change in mood. In the first speech Eliphaz had politely asked if Job would listen; this speech begins with questions about the difference between a genuinely wise person and one who throws words around. The questions are pointedly designed to imply that Job had spoken empty words. The Hebrew text in verse 2 is especially pointed. Job is accused of having filled his belly with **the east wind**. The east wind refers to the dreaded days when the wind blows off the dry desert to the east day after day. People become irritable and listless. Eliphaz was rebuking Job sounding like the angry, uptight people made snappy by the desert wind. But not had only the wind made Job angry, it filled his belly. In Hebrew thought the heart was the seat of reason, decision, and will. The belly was the seat of feeling. Eliphaz was accusing Job of being full of the hot air of emotion rather than the wisdom of the heart.

With verse 4 Eliphaz turns from pointed questions to direct accusation. Job has broken faith with God by destroying **the fear of God** in his own life (NAB translates *yir'ah* - fear (of God), respect, reverence, piety - as "piety.") He accuses Job of intentionally abandoning that source of wisdom that would enable him (Job) to cope with life successfully. Job's angry attitude was hindering prayerful meditation in the presence of God.

Verse 5 accuses Job of trying to cover up his sin by **crafty** words designed to throw his friends off the track of their duty. Eliphaz correctly understands the close relationship between a person's heart and their mouth, which Jesus would later express in Matthew 12:34. The wicked person chooses to express their sin by the things they say. The Bible often urges us to guard our lips because it knows that the mouth reveals the heart. We may not like it and modern culture may deny it, but a person is still condemned by the things they say. Eliphaz had that much right. Where he went wrong was in his initial assumption that Job must have sinned to have suffered so much. He blamed Job's bitter words on that sin rather than on the depth of his pain.

Verses 7-8 turn to sarcasm. Was Job the first man born? Did he come into being before the eternal hills? Had Job sat in on **the council of God**? Where does Job get off thinking he is so wise? The questions of verse 7 are built on the cultural assumption of the ancient Near East that older is superior to younger and newer. This is the opposite of modern Western society that worships youth and newness. Were Job as "old as the hills" that would not be an insult as in our world, but a compliment. The same thinking explains verse 10. Eliphaz claims the wisdom of the ages to be on his side and Job has rejected it.

Verse 11 criticizes Job for rejecting God's comfort, although the parallelism of the verse shows that Eliphaz understands that comfort as the words of him and his friends. Though Eliphaz is correct in assuming that long tradition agreed with him, that is not the same as assuming that his words are God's words. Some of the most helpful instruction in spiritual direction and pastoral care that I received at seminary were the words of Dr. Hamilton when he said, "Just because you have told someone something does not mean they have light on it." True wisdom is humble enough to let God speak for himself instead of demanding that our words be accepted by someone as the very words of God.

The double question of verse 12, "**Why have you let your heart carry you away? And why do your eyes flash?**" is instructive. In Semitic thought the heart was the center of the will and one's reason. But the eyes were closely connected to the heart since they were the gate of information to bring input to the heart and the eyes were the mirror of the heart revealing its state even before the mouth spoke. Eliphaz is sure that Job's flashing eyes reveal anger against God.

Verses 14-16 replay the message Eliphaz was said to have received in a vision in Job 4:12-19. Verse 14 asks the rhetorical question whether human beings can be righteous and pure from sin. Eliphaz implies that the answer is "no". Verse 15 repeats the affirmation of Job 4:18 that God does not even trust the heavenly beings who surround him in heaven. These two verses enable Eliphaz to draw his conclusion in verse 16 that it is impossible for a human being to be pure or considered righteous in the sight of God. The language of verse 16 is particularly strong. Humankind is described as "vile and corrupt" (NIV) or "**abominable and corrupt**" (NRSV). The first word in Hebrew means "something that is disgusting and repulsive" (Hartley, p.248). The second word means "filthy" and the corresponding Arabic word is used for sour milk. Eliphaz is convinced that human beings are thoroughly depraved; there is nothing good in a human being. Thus it is not surprising that he would find Job's claim to innocence to be shocking and even sinful in itself.

Eliphaz's view of human sinfulness is not completely shocking. It says no more than much of traditional Protestant understanding of the total depravity of human kind. Some of the confession sections of the traditional liturgies of strongly Calvinistic churches contain even stronger language. From a Wesleyan perspective what is missing in Eliphaz's analysis is any word of grace. While a human being left totally to himself or herself in a sinful world usually ends up as Eliphaz has described, God is always at work bringing some influence and potential for good into a person's life. What Eliphaz fails to acknowledge is that Job has responded appropriately to the grace of God revealed to him. There is no more evidence of sin in Job's life than in Eliphaz' except the tragedies Job has suffered. But the whole point of the debate is whether those tragedies are evidences of punishment for sin or not.

The rest of chapter 15, verses 17-35, form a single unit. These verses describe the fate of the wicked. Hartley (p. 248) calls it an "instruction about the woes of the wicked." Verses 17-19 form the

introduction with Eliphaz promising to deliver the wisdom of the fathers. Verses 20-24 describe some of the terrible consequences of wickedness. The wicked are tormented with pain. They live in perpetual fear - hearing terrifying sounds, and experiencing destruction in the midst of prosperity. The wicked have no confidence that their lives will ever turn from darkness to the light.

The Hebrew word *aman* (he believes) is the first verb of verse 22 which suggests that the wicked have no sense of security that life will ever turn out right for them. This leads to a paranoid sense of being destined to a terrible and violent end. This anxiety means they can not settle down and be a part of a community. Rather, the wicked must wander in perpetual insecurity.

The reasons for such a terrible life begin to unfold in verse 25. The Hebrew text speaks of a person who has **stretched out their hands against God**. The NIV catches the sense when it paraphrases, "he shakes his fist at God." Though we rarely like to admit it, such defiance of God reveals a deep sense that we can somehow overpower or outsmart God. Though our theology teaches us quite differently, rebellion against God knows no logic. The Hebrew expression of "stretching out one's hand against" was used for fighting and warfare.

Verse 26 continues the fighting figure of speech. The woes of the wicked are suffered because the sinner "defiantly" charges "against" God "**with a thick, strong shield**" (NIV). While such language seems a bit exaggerated for most of us, it is an amazingly accurate description of Job's angry desire to file a law-suit against God. Sin is both the product of and the producer of an attitude of arrogance toward God.

Verse 27 expands that thought. The wicked suffer great loss because they have become spiritually **fat**. While fatness is not a positive thing in our society it was regarded very highly in the ancient world. Only the extremely wealthy had enough food and enough leisure to be fat. Thus it is possible that verse 27 attributes the problems of the wicked to their materialistic greed to acquire more and more. However, most interpreters see Eliphaz claiming that the habit of self-indulgence and the acquiring of more and more "things" will cause a person to become spiritually "out of shape" and "unfit."

Verses 28-35 then return to the consequences of wickedness. Verse 28 mentions the loss of one's home. Recent years have seen this painful toll paid as the result of several kinds of disobedience against God. Verse 29 speaks of financial reverse. Andersen (p. 179) notes the irony that Eliphaz began his speech by accusing Job of being a "wind-bag," but he ends his speech by being one himself. Andersen calls verses 31-35 "a pile of verbiage." In a variety of ways Eliphaz proclaims, "you reap what you sow."

Eliphaz offers Job no encouragement in this speech. He argues that Job must accept the traditional teachings of the wise and acknowledge that his pain is the result of his sin. Eliphaz is willing to accept the view that Job's blessings were accidents of history and due to raw luck rather than being the reward for Job's goodness. However, he cannot accept the idea that Job's sufferings could also be accidents of history. They must be the punishment for Job's sin. The only amazing thing for Eliphaz is how long it took for God to discover Job's real nature.

Should we agree with Eliphaz we are left with a powerfully depressing view of the human race: totally wicked and without the grace of God to lift us beyond the punishment we so much deserve. The pessimism of Eliphaz is as deep as that of Paul in Romans 7:14-25. What we miss and what Job lacks is the outburst of worship in Romans 7:25-8:1, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord....There is now, therefore, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

Job's Second Response to Eliphaz – Job 16-17

Few of Job's responses to his "friends" directly answer the charges they make against him. This second response to Eliphaz comes as close as any speech of Job in responding to the friend's accusations. Most

of his speeches have begun with a response to the friends and then shifted to God as the audience. While Job briefly addresses God in this response (Job 17:3-4) most of his words are directly to Eliphaz and his friends. The response begins with an attack on his comforters in Job 16:21-6. This is followed by a personal complaint against God in Job 16:7-17. Verses 18-22 deal with heavenly witnesses and Job 17:1-16 returns to the form of a personal lament.

It is easy - perhaps too easy - to smile at the opening words of Job's response to Eliphaz in Job 16:2-6. Job admits that he would be saying the same things his friends are saying if their positions were reversed. In fact, like his friends he begins by accusing them of being wind-bags. That accusation seems to be a part of everybody's speech in response to everybody else. But Job has heard everything they are saying before - it was simply the Wisdom theology of Israel. What Job was discovering is that that conventional theology did not match his own experience.

Verse 6 most concisely states his problem. If he talks it does no good; if he is silent it does no good. Whether Job gives into his friends' viewpoint or throws away the restraints against giving vent to his own feelings, the end result is the same; his suffering goes on. He finds it hard not to be bitter that his friends have turned out to be enemies by tormenting him with prosperity theology in the adversity of his life.

However, the hostility of his friends is a small matter compared to the sense of hostility Job feels from God. Verses 7-17 are devoted to a painfully personal lament in which Job complains that God has become an enemy. Eliphaz had claimed that Job was attacking God but Job responds that it is God who was attacking him. Though verses 7-8 fluctuate between third person talk about God and second person address to God, Job is telling his friends what God has done to him. God wearied him, God has devastated his family, God has "shriveled" him up (v. 8, NRSV - no mention of "shriveled" nor "wrinkled" in NAB), God has turned him over to the vicious (verse 11), God has crushed and shattered him (verse 12), God's arrows have pierced him (verse 13), and God charges him like a warrior (verse 14).

This is the language of ancient (and modern) warfare. Job complains that God has viciously attacked him. While words like this sound strangely violent to us, they are not that different than what God admits to doing in his conversation with the *satan* in Job 2:3. There Yahweh accuses the *satan* of inciting him to destroy Job. Job has done no more than provide a detailed description of what God admits to doing to Job.

Verses 15-17 describe the effect of God's attack on Job. He has sewn **sackcloth** to cover his scabs, he has buried his face in sorrow and pain, his face is inflamed with tears, and dark shadows encircle his eyes. All these terrible consequences have come upon him even though his prayer is pure and there is no violence on his hands. Verse 17 still proclaims Job's innocence. Psalm 17:1 suggests that God was more likely to answer a prayer that arose from pure motives. Job's claim to integrity is an appeal to God to respond to him.

Job 16:18-22 represents a new level for Job. He calls on the earth, "**O earth, do not cover my blood.**" The language here echoes Genesis 4:8-15 where the blood of Abel cried out from the ground against Cain. Here, Job calls on the earth to allow the voice of his affliction to speak out. If the ground would cry out surely God would avenge Job for his suffering. But thus far the ground has not taken the witness stand on Job's behalf. Therefore, he turns in verse 19 to appeal to his **witness [who] is in heaven**. Janzen's words (p. 125) nicely sum up the question of who this heavenly witness is,

"Who, then is the heavenly witness to which Job appeals in verse 19? Such a question is misguided, and specific answers blunt the significance of Job's affirmation. The point is precisely that, in the face of a universe whose earthly and heavenly figures - friends and God - are all against him, Job imaginatively reached out into the dark and desperately affirms the reality of a witness whose identity is completely unknown to him."

Janzen's point is well taken. To ask if this heavenly witness is God or Christ or the Holy Spirit or some special angel misses the point. Rather, Job is so sure that he is right that he cannot imagine that the truth will not someday be vindicated. Of course it is God who will vindicate the truth and be that witness, but it is not the God that Job has experienced - yet. Job's experience of God has been an experience of being attacked. This heavenly witness is God to be sure, but it is God as Job believes he must be rather than God as Job has known yet in his life.

Job is not so optimistic as to demand instant vindication. Only when he is dead—and at God's bloodthirsty hands!—will the strange figure (whom he called in 9:33 an “umpire” and will in 19:25 call his “redeemer”, but to whom here he gives the name of his “witness”) arrive on the scene to plead his case for him.

In Hebrew legal procedure there is neither a prosecutor nor a defending counsel in our sense of these terms. An offended party did his own prosecuting and the accused defended his own case, each calling witnesses as required. And the witnesses on both sides did more than give evidence under oath. They took an active part in condemning or exonerating.

Yet in his mind's eye, he also sees a future assize in heaven at which he himself will not—alas!—be present. But as God sits on the bench, another God will be there to speak for him and to say better than Job ever could, the things that had to be said. To that God he now pours forth his anxious and tearful prayer that he will win for him, from the other God, the verdict that is his due. The second part of 16:21 should be more precisely translated “as a man will plead for his fellows” (Jerusalem Bible, NIV). Job's point is that if a mere human can get justice for his friend in an earthly court, how can God do less for him in his own heavenly court?

The paradox of Old Testament theology could not be more starkly set forth than in that verse which has just been mentioned and which I will render as following:

...that he [God] might advocate for a man with God,
as a man advocates for his friend.

Add, at the end of the second line, “with whoever has wronged him” and the meaning becomes crystal clear. God has wronged Job, and only God can right the wrong. Job therefore has to appeal to God against God in a way that makes us feel distinctly uncomfortable. But we have encountered before the contradiction within the Godhead that arises from a view of reality that is not afraid to place both good and evil under the direct will of God.

In some ways this is a turning point for Job - and for us. The book of Job has been “stuck” on the question of righteousness or justice. Is God treating Job justly? Are Job's sufferings the expression of God's righteous judgment against Job's secret sins? Here Job appeals to God's love and faithfulness rather than to justice. In fact, many commentators point out that Job is calling on God to testify against himself. Though that is incredible from a legal standpoint it is the heart of Biblical faith. The whole plan of salvation arises from the conflict between God's love and God's justice. Hartley astutely concludes:

Here Job appeals to God's holy integrity in stating his earnest hope that God will testify to the truth of his claim of innocence, even though such testimony will seem to contradict God's own actions. Such risking is the essence of faith. For a moment Job sees God as his steadfast supporter. In this plea he is expressing the trust God had expressed in him in the prologue because he is pushing through the screen of his troubles to the real God. He is not essentially pitting God against God; rather he is affirming genuine confidence in God regardless of the way it appears that God is treating

him. Since Job, in contrast to his friends, will not concede that truth is identical with appearances, he presses on for a true resolution to his complaint from God himself.

Genuine faith may (it frequently does) struggle with doubt and dismay. But genuine faith cannot get away from the confidence that God will eventually vindicate truth and justice. Verse 22 returns to the theme of Job's death but with a difference. Job had previously warned that he would die because he could not stand much more pain. He here foresees several years and his expectation is that God will come through for him before the time of his death.

Job 17:1-16 return to the form of a personal lament. Perhaps it is best to understand Job 17:1 as a continuation of the thought of 16:22, describing Job's death. Verse 2 comments that before he dies he is surrounded by mocking friends. Verses 3-4 contain the only words directly speaking to God in this speech of Job responding to Eliphaz. Job uses two unusual words in verse 3, "**pledge**" and "**give surety**." Job suspects his friends of not being willing to support him in his argument with God for fear that God will turn against them. So Job appeals to God to speak on his behalf and to not let his friends' fearfulness triumph.

Job returns to his own condition in verses 6-16. Though his life's energy is waning and his body is wasting away he challenges his friends with renewed vigor. This new strength does not arise from his past - for Job's past was full of brokenness. Rather, the renewed faith that appeared in Job 16:19 now sustains Job. There is a fascinating tension between faith and exhaustion. Exhaustion can undermine faith, but faith can also overpower exhaustion. A believer cannot ignore exhaustion or count on faith always to banish exhaustion and its effects. However, frequently God graciously energizes us in the midst of exhaustion when we reach out in trust to him.

Bildad's Second Speech – Job 18

Bildad's second speech is constructed with two major sections. The first, found in Job 18:2-4, complains against Job. The second, found in verses 5-21, explains the terrible fate that awaits the wicked. In his first speech (Job 8), Bildad had considered the possibility that Job might be innocent and that God would shortly restore him to favor. However, this second speech is totally devoid of hope. Bildad is intent on convincing Job that questioning God is wrong and will lead to disastrous results. Thus he hammers away at the horrors that the wicked inherit.

The complaint against Job found in verses 2-4 contains the now familiar accusation of vain speaking and of under-rating the listeners. The new step of Bildad's complaint against Job comes in verse 4 with a sarcastic question. Bildad describes Job as one who tears himself in anger. He believes that much of Job's struggle is actually a sign of a guilty conscience. Bildad accuses Job of resisting God's discipline. He then asks if Job expects God to cause devastation on earth because of him. If the earth is forsaken it is a sign of devastating judgment. That rocks would be moved from their place implies an earthquake. Does Job expect an earthquake to shake the earth should he not get his own way? This is cutting sarcasm.

With verse 5 Bildad leaves his attack on Job and begins his instruction to the consequences of wickedness. Verses 5-6 compare life to a light. The statement that **the light of the wicked is extinguished** means simply that they die. However, in a time before electricity and matches, extinguishing the final light brought deep and terrifying darkness for which there was no relief until sunrise.

Verses 7-10 speak of the various ways in which wickedness ensnares a person and trips them up. Six different Hebrew words are used for various kinds of trapping devices. Hartley (p. 276) points out that the proud sinner may confidently move along with head held high. Though he may successfully avoid one or two or even three traps, he can not escape forever. In this observation Bildad is quite correct.

The question is whether Job is guilty of sin and has fallen into a trap as Bildad believes or is innocent and maintains his integrity as Job himself claims.

Verses 11-21 describe a fate worse than death in the minds of ancient near easterners. Verses 11-16 describe the suffering of Job as the kind of punishments given to sinners. Frightening **terrors**, depleted strength, skin eaten by disease, torn from his secure tent, and nothing dwelling in his tent are all pointed descriptions of Job's condition.

But verses 17 and 19 speak an even worse consequence for the wicked. For one's **memory** to disappear **from the earth** because one has **no name** to pass on via children was the worst thing that could happen to an ancient Hebrew. To have no children who would carry on the family tradition, the family name, and the family heritage was to be cut off from the flow of God's dealing in history with his people. Bildad turns the knife in Job by pointing out that all his children are gone and that the name of Job will disappear from history and memory. Job knows that full well and it is part of the bitterness of his suffering. But for Bildad to describe that as the result of sin is the bitterest blow of all. Even if God should vindicate Job somehow it would be of only short-lived benefit. Without children to whom his integrity can be passed Job's righteousness was only a temporary matter.

Though our culture does not view children as positively as did Job's we should consider the profound importance of building integrity and righteousness into the next generation. Our personal salvation is not enhanced if we fail to transmit faithfulness to our children.

Lesson 5 Study Questions

1. As we begin the second round of speeches, Job's friends are taken back that he would dare seek to speak to God directly. What do you think of Job's proposed approach? Now take a look at Romans 9:20. Do you still feel the same way about Job's proposed approach?
2. What is Job's point in verses 14:7-14? Do you find it depressing that we are mortal and will someday die? Does Job have any hope for life hereafter? Is "depressing" the right word to describe Job's feelings?
3. Gibson says in the excerpt concerning Job 15 that Eliphaz now considers Job a rebel. What exactly does Eliphaz see Job rebelling against?
4. In verse 15:4 Eliphaz accuses Job of "doing away with the fear of God", "doing away with piety." Do you think Eliphaz's accusation is correct? Why or why not? What do Job's words mean is he is not "doing away with piety", "with the fear of God?"
5. Eliphaz, in both his first speech (Chapter 4) and his second speech (Chapter 15), addresses man's sinfulness. In verse 15:16 he calls Humankind "abominable" and "corrupt." Is this exclusively an Old Testament view of the human race or would the New Testament agree? (Hint: See Romans Chapter 3)
6. Verse 15:31 powerfully describes emptiness as the reward for those who trust in emptiness. From you own life, or from our society describe some of the emptiness that comes from trusting in emptiness.
7. Gibson identifies verse 16:21 as "The paradox of Old Testament theology ... ". Put that paradox in your own words.
8. Summarize Bildad's whole argument in one sentence. Do you agree with him or not? Why or why not?



Lesson 6 Readings

Read Job 19:1-22:30

Job 19:1-22:30

The Second Cycle of Speeches: Job 15:1-21:34 (cont.)

The second cycle of speeches in which Job responds to his comforters, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, is found in Job 15:1-21:34. The speeches of Eliphaz and Bildad are shorter than the speeches they made in the first cycle but Zophar's is slightly longer. Job's responses are also somewhat shorter. Bildad's second speech is in Job 18. Job's response will appear in chapter 19 with Zophar's second speech following in chapter 20 and Job's response in chapter 21.

Job's Second Response to Bildad – Job 19

Job's speech begins with a complaint against his friends in Job 19:1-6. Though English versions do not show it, Job uses the plural form for "you" in these verses. This shows that Job was addressing all three of his friends. However, the opening words of his speech, "How long..." are identical to the opening words of Bildad's speech in Job 18:2. This suggests that Bildad's words are in mind even though Job speaks to all three friends.

Job uses strong words in verse 2 to describe the painful comfort being given by his friends. The first word is often translated "torment" or "grieve" and it describes personal sorrow. The second word can be translated "break," "crush" or even "pulverize" and it was often used to describe military action against one's enemies. It was not often used with psychological or emotional overtones. Thus Job's point is probably not that he "feels" crushed, but that his friends are treating him like an enemy they are bound to destroy.

It is not just the friend's "words" that are hurting Job as many English versions imply. Rather, the Hebrew word means "arguments." It is the fact that his friends are arguing the case against him that is so destructive to Job's sense of well-being. The reference to **ten times** in verse 3 is not a literal counting of the speeches made so far or of the total number that will be made by Job's friends. Rather **ten** is a number expressing completeness (from the total number of fingers perhaps). His friends have completely reproached him. The Hebrew word suggests humiliation and public dishonor. Job turns a traditional Hebrew expression on its head in verse 3. The verbs "humiliate" and "shame" were frequently used in parallel constructions. His comforters have humiliated and shamed him. The second line of verse 3 suggests that the comforters should have been ashamed of such treatment of a friend. Unfortunately they were not.

The meaning of verse 4 is built around an important distinction in the Hebrew words for sin. Hebrew has a particular noun and verb for unintentional errors or inadvertent mistakes. Though these mistakes needed atonement in the sacrificial system to enable fellowship with a holy God (Lev 4), they did not break relationship with God as did intentional sins or sins with a high hand (clenched fist). It is the word for unintentional or inadvertent **error** that appears in verse 4. Job concedes that he must bear the consequences of any unintentional mistakes but he is sure that he has not sinned in any such way as to deserve the misfortune that has come his way. In fact, verse 5 points out that his friends have "exalted" themselves at his expense. He uses the language of psalms to describe the arrogance of his comforters. He doesn't quite say so, but he implies that by their self-exaltation they are the ones who are closer to intentional sin than he is.

However, Job's real complaint is against God and verse 6 brings that back into focus. Bildad had stated back in Job 8:3 that God does not "pervert" justice. The Hebrew word translated "pervert" there means to twist, bend, or make crooked. Job uses the same word in verse 6 and affirms that God is mistreating him. Habel (p. 289) attempts to bring out the play on words by translating God "has subverted me." The second line of verse 6 uses the language of trapping or of laying siege to describe God's action against Job. This suggests that God has hemmed Job in on all sides with no way of escape.

All of Job's theology (and that of his friends) is in conflict with his experience and he can find no way out of the deadlock. Job's accusation in 19:7 that "God has wronged me" (NIV) sounds too strong to most christian ears ("Injustice!" NAB). However, the Old Testament and Job in particular are not afraid to speak of their experience of God in ways that violate traditional theological teaching.

There is a fine line to be drawn here. Our experience of God must always be held in accountability to a community of faith and what we know of God from past revelation. In that sense we are subject to theology. However, theology that reduces God to logical conclusions and categories is not true to Scripture. Though the same in essential character yesterday, today, and forever, the God revealed in Scripture is a bit unpredictable. And it seems that God will often crash through our theological categories and boxes when we are too comfortable thinking we know everything there is to know and explain about him.

Verses 7-12 then develop Job's complaint about God's mistreatment that is so painful to him. He feels that God is treating him like an enemy. He cries for help but there is **no justice**. Not even God has responded to his desperate cries for help. God seems to be building walls across the path Job is walking or turning the light to darkness. Job had trusted God and had lived in close fellowship with him. He had had a sense of God's presence and blessing. Suddenly when these tragedies of life have overtaken him

God has withdrawn. Not only are the blessings gone, there is no answer when Job appeals to God for an explanation.

First (vv. 8–10), God had deprived Job of hope. He had hemmed him in.

Second (vv. 11–12), God had openly and visibly assailed him as though he were his enemy. He had assembled his troops to lay siege.

In fact, it seems to Job that God is not only silent, he has taken the offensive in destroying Job. Verse 12 brings this present complaint to its climax with a powerful mixing of metaphors. Job accuses God of laying siege against his tent. By referring to himself as a tent Job emphasizes his frailty. But siege works are the military action taken against a walled city. God is attacking Job as if he were as strong as a walled city when in fact he is only a flimsy tent. Hartley (p. 286) remarks, "With this hyperbole Job expresses his utter astonishment at God's treating him so roughly."

Alienation from God is bad enough but Job is also alienated from the natural human supports that should have come his way, as verses 13-20 point out. **Family**, friends, **acquaintances**, guests, servants, and his **wife** are all alienated from him. In Biblical culture a person's sense of identity and worth was connected very closely to the social network of family and neighborhood friends. Job's point is not just that he is no longer popular but that all the support structures that give meaning to life are no longer working for him.

Third (vv. 13ff.), God had isolated Job from all human contact and affection.

Job is not thinking here so much of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, as of his immediate family and neighbors

Verse 18 expresses the matter poignantly. Even **young children**, normally the most trusting, affectionate, and accepting people around, make fun of Job and will have nothing to do with him. If you've got a face that makes babies cry you are in trouble - the very trouble that Job was experiencing. He brings this section to a climax in verse 20 by expressing amazement that he has even survived. The expression "**escaped by the skin of my teeth**" appears in verse 20. Perhaps Job was the first to use the expression that has become a part of our language.

Verses 21-27 contain a plea for help that turns to a statement of assurance. Job begs his friends to be merciful to him. The sense of being cut off from his supporting community is so devastating that he must have someone who will take his side and see things his way. Job desperately needed the friendship of his comforters at the very time they were most concerned with threatening him for his "bad" theology. Job has little reason to believe that his friends will come through and so verse 22 sarcastically accuses them of joining God in hunting him down to devour him.

Fearful that his friends will fail him Job searches for some way to make his case. Verses 23-24 latch onto the idea of engraving his story on a stone monument for all to see and read. If he dies without someone to speak for him all future memories of Job would simply be misrepresented by his three comforters. Job longs to vindicate himself for history by inscribing his story on the monument.

Verses 23-24 have been wishful thinking, but verse 25 turns to a deep and profound affirmation of faith. Instead of wishing for a monument Job affirms in verse 25 "**I know**." The Hebrew word does not refer so much to theoretical knowledge as to personal acquaintance. Job is not speaking theologically about God's existence. He is affirming his personal relationship with a God who is a "**redeemer**."

The word Job chooses, here (RSV) translated "**redeemer**" (NAB translates "**Vindicator**,") is the Hebrew word *go'el*. It was used of the nearest relative who if a person had to sell themselves into slavery to pay debts would assume responsibility for the person's debts and redeem them by buying them back out of slavery. The book of Ruth is built around her discovery of Boaz as the *go'el* for her family and her attempts to convince him to fulfill his redemptive obligations. As the Old Testament writers reflected on Yahweh's deliverance of Israel out of slavery in Egypt it is not surprising that they frequently used the word *go'el* to describe God. It is significant that this is the title Job chooses to

refer to God in this passage. The *go'el* was a rescuer, one who delivered out of the direst of circumstances. At this low point in his life Job expressed his faith in God by appealing to God as the one who rescues and delivers those who have no hope of being able to save themselves.

All the first line of verse 25 says is that Job knows that his redeemer is alive. Job may die. His friends may spread wildly false stories about him. The monument was a bad idea, but God is alive and God will not let Job's suffering go unexplained forever. God will eventually vindicate Job. Someday the missing piece or pieces of the puzzle of Job's theology and his experience will appear and the picture will make sense. Finally, the second line of verse 25 affirms God will take the witness stand and speak in Job's behalf.

The Hebrew text of verses 26-27 is quite obscure and this had led to a great variety of translations and interpretations. The traditional interpretation is that Job is describing his hope of resurrection when he will see God personally and be vindicated. Almost all modern scholars now believe this traditional view to be a case of reading New Testament faith back into Old Testament people's lives. Throughout the book of Job death is portrayed as the end. There is no return from death and there is no existence in some disembodied form after death. The rest of the Old Testament shares this perspective. In fact, it is not until almost New Testament times that language clearly speaking of resurrection appears in the writings of the Jewish people. Even the conservative Wesleyan scholar, John Hartley, acknowledges that Job would not be thinking in terms of resurrection here. Job's hope is that God will not stay hidden from him but that before he dies he will have a chance to see God again and to make his case before him. Hartley (p. 297) provides a very helpful conclusion to this section.

“Although Job's confession as interpreted does not explicitly support the doctrine of resurrection, it is built on the same logic that will lead to that doctrine becoming the cornerstone of NT faith. Job is working with the same logic of redemption that stands as the premise of the NT doctrine of resurrection. Both hold to the dogma that God is just even though he permits unrequited injustices and the suffering of the innocent. God, himself, identified with Job's sufferings in the sufferings of his Son, Jesus Christ, who suffered unto death even though he was innocent. Jesus overcame his ignominious death by rising from the grave. In his victory he, as God's Son and mankind's kinsman-redeemer, secured redemption for all who believe on him. While his followers may suffer in this life, he is their Redeemer, their Advocate before the Father. In this way Job's confidence in God as his Redeemer amidst excruciating suffering stands as a model for all Christians.”

Job's great expression of faith seems to have exhausted him and his speech comes to a close.

Zophar's Second Speech – Job 20

Zophar, like Eliphaz and Bildad before him, is oblivious to Job's anguished cries for human understanding and sympathy. Job had put himself beyond the pale by his continuous whining at God and his refusal to listen to the warnings his two colleagues had given about the fate of the wicked. And now he was making mad claims that the God whom he had vilified was about to come to his aid and tell the world how innocent he was! This was insufferable. There was no way this man could be saved from the retribution he was bringing on himself; but perhaps he could yet be made to recognize his arrant folly in challenging the constitution of the universe. As his variation on the only tune the friends have played throughout the second cycle, Zophar draws the picture of an arrogant and greedy man hurtling in the midst of well-being to a well merited doom. It is a quite appalling diatribe, replete with the most nauseating metaphors.

Zophar is not happy that Job has accused the friends of increasing his torment but neither does he know how to actually comfort Job. As a result he delivers a one dimensional speech on the fate of evildoers. In this he seems to reject Job's faith affirmation and to continue the painful assault that has

characterized the "comfort" of Job's friends. To the modern Western mind Zophar's speech seems to be rambling, but, in fact, it reflects a traditional way of arguing in wisdom literature. The structure of Zophar's speech is quite simple. Job 20:2-3 contains the typical response of hurt feelings at the previous speech. Then verses 4-29 all deal with the doom of the wicked (Clines, p. 480).

Zophar's first point, argued in verses 5-11 is that the joy of the godless is temporary. He begins with a question though it is not clear whether the question was, "Do you know that...?" or "**Do you not know that...?**" The fact that the original wording is not clear does not change the basic thrust of Zophar's question. The point is that Job ought to know that the mirth of the wicked is brief and the joy of the godless is hollow and temporary.

There is an implied rebuke in Zophar's words. Job had testified in 19:25 to knowing that his redeemer was alive. Zophar suggests that what he ought to know is that **the joy of the godless** is short-lived. It is easy to see that Job has chosen the better position - personal knowledge of God rather than theoretical knowledge of theology. However, Zophar's real purpose in bringing up the issue is in his conviction that Job is guilty of some terrible sin and thus the end of Job's happiness must be the clear signal that Job had grievously sinned. Verses 6-9 suggest that the higher a person rises in this world the more quickly they will disappear when their wickedness is discovered and punished.

Job would not disagree with Zophar's basic premise that the joy of the wicked is momentary. Job is already convinced that all human life is temporary. The difference between the two is that Zophar assumes that Job has sinned and is suffering the consequences of that sin which Job is maintaining his innocence. Andersen (pp. 195-196) points out that Zophar is actually assuming with Job that human experience at any given point is not the final answer. The difference between the two is that Zophar assumes that suffering is the result of God's punishment of sin which Job believes that suffering may happen regardless of one's sin and punishment may be delayed even until after one's death.

Verses 12-18 make an important point. Often the punishment for sin is a slow process because God permits the consequences of sin to work themselves out in a person's life. Sometimes that takes many years before it is even clear that sins from long ago are bearing fruit. Paul expresses this idea in Romans 1:18-32. There sad refrain of those Pauline words is, "God gave them up to..." as he describes the various sins and evil as the outworking of wicked choices. One of the very unfortunate examples of this truth occurs regularly in troubled marriages. Often one partner establishes a pattern of neglect, abuse, or insults. Years later when that person has matured and is ready to establish a genuine relationship with the marriage partner the partner refuses and leaves the marriage because of the damage done early in the marriage. Zophar's words can be paraphrased, "You can choose to sin but you cannot choose the consequences of sin and you cannot choose the timing of those consequences.

Zophar's speech is narrowly focused on the terrible consequences of sin. While what he says is true, what he leaves unsaid is very dangerous. His speech gives no hint of the possibility of repentance or mercy. There is no evidence of compassion. Andersen (p. 197) points out that Zophar is just as materialistic as the wicked people he condemns. For him the most horrible thing that can happen is God's judgment carrying away one's possessions (verse 28). Job is tormented with the loss of fellowship and communication with God. Zophar seems too shallow to care about that. He is a good example of the fact that a person can have lots of correct theology yet be far from reflecting the heart of God. Zophar's life and viewpoint is far simpler than Job's, but it is so shallow that it is not worth keeping.

Job's Second Response to Zophar – Job 21

It is in his final speech in each of the first two cycles that Job chooses to meet head on the arguments of his three friends. Throughout the first cycle the friends had defended the consistency of the divine providence and Job had attacked it; but it was only in chapters

12–14 that he felt able to marshal his theological forces, as it were, and drive the friends in disarray from the field. In the process some of his own wilder ideas of God's nature and purposes were abandoned; but it was his sober and somber analysis of the divine power holding sway over a world whose human inhabitants could see no hope or meaning in their lives, that won the first battle in their war of words. In the second cycle the friends do not again dare to take up the weapons of debate on behalf of their doctrine of God. Instead, fastening onto Job's brief reference to the "tents of robbers" being at peace and those who provoke God being secure (12:6), they attempt in their second speeches to prove to Job that the opposite is the case. Why they should shift to ground where their fighting position is to our eyes patently weaker than it was in the first cycle, is not easy to say. But we should remember that the friends are representatives of a supremely confident ethic, that of the Book of Proverbs, whose writers had few qualms about dividing mankind into two, the wise or good and the foolish or bad, or about predicting the rewards and punishments which each group would inevitably earn for itself in life. The friends do not think that they are on weaker ground, but they are about to find out, as Job, compelled by Zophar's pitiless tirade to abandon briefly his turbulent search for an absent God, decides to be quit of them once and for all.

This speech of Job will bring to a close the second cycle of speeches. There are several features of this speech that differ from Job's previous ones. First, this is the first speech which is directed completely to his friends without shifting to God as an audience. Second, Job specifically responds to several accusations of his friends in these verses. Thus there are more direct connections to the previous speeches than has been customary. Part of what this means is that Job is now actually entering into dialogue and argument with his comforters. As a result there is less bitterness and not so much the sense of emotional outbursts. Job is more rational and more in control as he addresses the issues that interest the author of the book. The structure of this speech is also more narrowly focused. After appealing for a sympathetic hearing in verses 1-6 Job speaks in the form of a wisdom disputation raising questions about the traditional view of rapid retribution in verses 7-33. Verse 34 presents a final complaint against his comforters.

Verse 2 appeals for Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (and us as readers) to give close attention to Job's words. That very courtesy of listening would be more comfort and encouragement than they have provided so far. Job reminds us here of the importance of listening. We are too prone to want the power of being able to give "good advice." When we do not have advice that seems adequate we often refuse the gift of just listening because that seems too little and too weak.

Job then unleashes an attack on the argument of his friends that suffering is the necessary and immediate result of sin. To the contrary, Job argues, the wicked actually prosper. He points to the blessings enjoyed by wicked people in verses 7-16, to how rare it is that the wicked are punished in verses 17-21, to the failure of the doctrine of retribution in verses 22-26, and to weaknesses in his friends' arguments in verses 27-33.

Job's comforters had argued that sin causes suffering and that suffering is evidence of sin. Job denies both claims. In fact, Job paints a picture of the blessings enjoyed by the wicked that very much resembles the picture of the good man Eliphaz had described in Job 5:17-27. Zophar claimed in Job 20:11 that the wicked die young. Job claims the opposite in verse 7. Bildad had declared in Job 18:13 that the wicked would die childless. Job points out that the wicked often have large and happy families. Eliphaz had asserted in Job 5:24 that by being righteous Job's home would be secure. Job declares in verse 9 that it is the wicked whose homes are secure. According to Job's observation in these verses, all the blessings that Israel claimed for the righteous are also enjoyed by the wicked. Verses 14-15 describe the irreverent attitude of the wicked who assume that God has nothing to offer them and that devotion to the Lord is a waste of time.

These are very interesting remarks from Job. His own background has taught him to think just as his friends think (Job 16:4) but his personal experience is not fitting in with what he has been taught. Thus before the tragedies described in chapter 2 befell him he would have also argued that suffering is punishment against the wicked. But his experience of suffering without having sinned has also opened his eyes to other exceptions to the doctrine of retribution. Now he can remember wicked people who have enjoyed all the blessings Israel traditionally assigned to the righteous only.

However, his training is too strong to completely throw off. In verse 16 he rejects the idea that the wicked ultimately prosper. In the final analysis he agrees with his friends that sometime the wicked will suffer the consequences of their sin. He will not align himself with the wicked. Job accomplishes two purposes in this paragraph. Since there are wicked people who prosper Job's suffering does not automatically categorize him as a sinner. Second, since Job will have nothing to do with the viewpoint of the wicked his friends are wrong in claiming that he is wicked.

In verses 17-21 Job challenges the view that Eliphaz (5:4) and Zophar (20:10) that God stores up punishment deserved by the wicked to give out that punishment to their children. Job essentially points out the inconsistency of his friends. They have claimed that God is just and as a result he punishes the wicked with suffering. However, they accept the idea that punishment might be delayed a generation. Job will have none of that idea. That is not justice. In verse 20 he demands that the wicked see their own ruin and drink the cup of their own judgment.

Verses 22-26 point out that the doctrine of retribution just does not always explain life or death. In these verses Job sounds much like Ecclesiastes in denying that there is any predictable pattern that always works to explain the connection between sin and suffering. He concludes by rebutting arguments that he expects to come from his friends.

The Third Cycle of Speeches - Job 22:1-26:14

The dialogue between Job and his friends has moved along irregularly. Some positions stated in the first cycle are not answered until the second. These speeches have reflected the painful reality of grief up against pat answers. However, as a general rule in the first cycle Job's friends spoke in generalities without applying them directly to Job. In the second cycle the friends openly accuse Job of sin and explain his suffering as God's punishment for that sin. Job vehemently denies that he is guilty of sin and the dialogue seems to reach an impasse. This impasse quickly becomes symbolically clear in the third cycle of speeches. The breakdown of communication is symbolized by the breakdown of structure. Only Eliphaz's third speech is constructed appropriately. There are problems and contradictions in each of the following speeches and there is no evidence that Zophar speaks again. The dialogue comes to a halt.

Eliphaz begins shamelessly by pronouncing the sentence which he feels he and his two fellow judges have been guided by an even higher Judge to pronounce.

And there is worse to come as Eliphaz takes it upon himself to specify the crimes of which Job must have been guilty to merit so black a sentence. The kindest thing one can say is that the old scholar has simply consulted his textbooks again and devised a short catalogue of the most heinous sins to which a man of Job's former rank and wealth might be tempted.

verse 6, exploitation of the destitute; compare 31:19–20 and Deuteronomy 24:12–13

verse 7, inhumanity towards the needy; compare 31:16–17 and Isaiah 58:7

verse 8, misappropriation of another's land; compare 31:38–40 and 1 Kings 21

verse 9, disregard of the defenceless; compare 31:16–17, 21 and Deuteronomy 14:29.

But, however conventional his words were for his time, we must surely also register horror at the lengths to which this once gentle soul is willing to go to maintain the orthodoxy to which he is now a hooked and landed victim.

The real nastiness of his speech is reserved for verse 18 and verses 19–20. In verse 18 the wicked are said to show no gratitude to God for the blessings they receive from him—and, we are meant to conclude, Job had been ungrateful when he was prosperous. And in verses 19–20 the righteous are said to be glad when they see the wicked bite the dust. Eliphaz is able here to use the language of the Psalms and could almost be quoting from Pss. 52:6 or 107:42.

Then after all that, Eliphaz reverts to the traditional appeal, an appeal none of the friends has been fit to employ since the first cycle. If Job, even at this eleventh hour, is willing to change his ways, to receive instruction from God rather than give it to him, then the God, who abases the proud and lifts up the truly innocent, will yet deliver him.

In his third speech Eliphaz sharply contradicts Job. He accuses Job of "great" wickedness in Job 22:5. In verses 12-24 he then rejects Job's claim that the wicked sometimes prosper. Eliphaz then concludes his speech in verses 25-30 with a stirring call to Job to repent of his sin. Eliphaz felt the need to defend God's honor but he chose to attack Job. Hartley (p. 335) wisely remarks, "But a genuine defense of God must not downgrade another human being. Eliphaz fails to realize that in condemning Job he is also casting reproach on God, Job's creator." This is an important warning for us. Our defense of God must always respect the people God has created or our defense turns into an attack on God.

Lesson 6 Study Questions

1. Does claiming that "God has wronged me" or calling out "Injustice!" sound too strong to your Christian ears? If yes, why? If no, why not?
2. Hahn says in his commentary concerning Chapter 19 that "Though the same in essential character yesterday, today, and forever, the God revealed in Scripture is a bit unpredictable." Do you agree or disagree?
3. The text says "The sense of being cut off from his (Job's) supporting community is so devastating that he must have someone who will take his side and see things his way. Job desperately needed the friendship of his comforters." Has there ever been a time you felt this way? Have you ever failed to simply listen and comfort a friend who had experienced great loss, maybe because you were too busy or thought you didn't know what to say or the loss was so great that you were uncomfortable approaching the individual?
4. In the response of faith found in verses 19:21-29 Job describes God as his "Redeemer" or "Vindicator." What did that mean to Job? What does it mean to you? What is your favorite title for God? Why?
5. Is there any positive note in Zophar's speech? Should there be? Why do you think Zophar honed in on the negative consequences of sin so strongly? What was he trying to accomplish? Are there circumstances in which you would speak as negatively as Zophar does about the consequences of sin? What kind of circumstances?
6. While discussing Chapter 21 Hahn says, "Job reminds us here of the importance of listening. We are too prone to want the power of being able to give "good advice." What do you think of this statement? Have you ever had this problem?
7. Verse 21:15 appears on the lips of wicked scoffers. However, it raises an important question. Why should a person serve God? What is your answer and why do you give that answer? Have you or someone you know asked that or a similar question after a great loss or some other despair?
8. What wickedness does Eliphaz accuse Job of? What is the basis for these accusations? How do you feel about Eliphaz's accusations? Why?



Lesson 7 Readings

Job 23:1-28:28

Job 23:1-28:28

The Third Cycle of Speeches - Job 22:1-26:14 (cont.)

The third cycle of speeches has several indications of a broken structure. Job 22 contains a full speech by Eliphaz and a full response is given by Job in chapters 23-24. However, the final verses of chapter 24, verses 18-25, are very obscure. Some scholars believe that they were originally a part of a speech by either Bildad or Zophar and were miscopied into this location. Others scholars believe that these verses belong in Job's third response to Eliphaz.

Bildad's third speech begins in Job 25, but that chapter contains only six verses, which is too short considering the pattern that has been established in the first part of the book of Job. Job's response to Bildad consists of chapters 26-28 which is proportionally too long.

Furthermore there is material in Job 26-28 that is very different from anything that Job has said in any of his other speeches. Some of the material seems to fit better as part of a speech by Bildad or Zophar.

There is no indication of a speech by Zophar in this third cycle. As a result there are a variety of ideas by scholars about what had happened in the third cycle of speeches. Some scholars assign part of chapter 27 to Bildad, some to Zophar, and some end the cycle of speeches at the end of chapter 26 and make chapter 27 a concluding speech to the three cycles. Almost all scholars of Job agree that chapter 28 is a hymn to wisdom that was not part of the cycle of speeches.

Eliphaz's third speech appears in Job 22. He begins with a series of accusations against Job. We can see a major reversal from Eliphaz's first speech. There in Job 4:3-4 Eliphaz had praised Job for his righteousness and devotion. Now he is convinced that Job is the worst of sinners. The accusations of verses 6-9 are an attempt to discredit Job's behavior toward his fellowman. Verses 12-20 begin by affirming the greatness of God, but Eliphaz quickly twists Job's words. Verses 13-14 accuse Job of questioning whether God knew anything of human affairs and saying that God does not see through the thick clouds surrounding him. In fact, Job had complained that he could not see God but he had not claimed that God could not see him. Verse 15 accuses Job of following the age old pattern of the wicked. Eliphaz concludes his speech with an appeal to Job to repent and be forgiven in verses 21-28. These verses reflect the best instincts of a "soul winner." The problem, as Andersen (p. 205) points out, is that this appeal is "completely irrelevant to Job's case."

Job's Third Response to Eliphaz – Job 23-24

The view taken in this commentary is that chapter 23 gives us more or less the whole of Job's next speech and chapter 24 does not belong with it. That chapters 24–27 consist of a number of fragments of speeches which the author preserved along with the main body of his work because he thought they might be useful, either as additions or as alternatives to existing passages, in a future revision. These were then subsequently gathered together and inserted in their present position by a disciple or scribe who was not quite sure what else to do with them.

Though the pattern of speeches suggests that Job replies to Eliphaz in chapters 23-24 careful analysis shows that God is Job's intended audience. It appears that he ignores his friends and Eliphaz's accusations against him but the matter is not quite that simple. Eliphaz has summed up the position of the three "comforters." In their view Job is suffering because he has sinned and the only way out for him is to confess that sin and hope that God will withdraw the punishment. However, Job cannot compromise his integrity by repenting of some contrived sin he has not committed. Nevertheless he shares with his friends the conclusion that only God can help him now.

As a result Job is ready to appeal to God. But part of his frustration has been the feeling that God is not listening. So Job does not address his friends directly, nor God directly. Rather he delivers a soliloquy about his desire to find God and to see him. Though the friends listen they are never addressed. Though chapter 23 speaks only of God in the third person Job is really crying out to the Lord.

After setting forth succinctly in verse 2 the gravamen of his complaint (namely that, in spite of his groaning and lamenting and protesting and appealing, God's hand still lies heavy upon him), Job gives vent to his feelings in three crisp but forlorn paragraphs. In verses 3–7 Job expresses his earnest desire that he might come to God's tribunal and that God might not only listen to him but answer him. Then, in verses 8–12 Job, as so often before, awakens to the realization of what he is asking or, rather, of whom he is asking it. How can he pin God down? In verses 13–17, therefore, instead of further light, Job only sees more darkness ahead.

The first seven verses of chapter 23 state Job's desire to present his case before God. Even though Job describes his complaint as "bitter" and full of "groaning" these verses actually speak great confidence. In verse 3 Job expresses his longing to appear before God's judgment throne. If only he knew where to find God he would relish the opportunity to present his case. He would make his appeal and give his arguments.

Verse 5 reflects a confidence that Job would be able to accept God's judgment with the assurance that justice had been done. This represents a major advance over Job's earlier speeches. In those speeches Job had demanded an audience with God, but his attitude was one of fear rather than confidence. Job 9:34 and 12:31 reveal the terror of actually standing at the witness stand as he had brashly demanded. Verse 6 allows the possibility that God might unleash the awesomeness of divine power against him but Job still concludes that God would listen to him. In verse 7 he declares his confidence that God would acquit him. He is confident that an "upright person" can argue a case with God and win. This word "upright" is the same Hebrew word used to describe Job in Job 1:1. It is also ironic that Job's growing confidence in God is beginning to give the first-time reader confidence that God will win his argument against the *satan*.

The confidence that Job shows in this paragraph is important when compared to his earlier fear. Something has happened in Job to bring about this change. First John 4:18 notes that there is no fear in love because perfect love casts out fear. A turning point comes with the crisis of Job 19 in which Job seems to reach the bottom of the pit of despair and then rebounds with his affirmation of faith. Within that experience Job experienced a deepening of faith that totally changed his perception of God. Part of maturing faith is the confidence that God will do right and that he can be trusted.

Verses 8-12 continue to develop the theme of God's hiddenness and of Job's confidence in God. It is common in times of affliction to feel that all access to God has been cut off (see [Lament Psalms in Patterns for Life: Structure and Theology in Psalms - http://www.crivoice.org/psalmgenre.html](http://www.crivoice.org/psalmgenre.html)). People sometimes speak of their "prayers bouncing off the ceiling." They are describing that sense that Job was feeling of not being able to connect with God. Some of the great saints of the Christian tradition have spoken of this as "the dark night of the soul." Hartley (p. 340) makes the very important point that this sense of hiddenness of God shows God's confidence in Job. This too is part of the test. Psalm 139:7-10 makes the point that no one can escape from God. When one wants to get away from the influence of God, the Holy Spirit reminds that person of the Lord in a multitude of ways. God could have chosen to reveal himself to Job but his confidence in Job was great enough that he did not.

Job 23:10 shows that God's confidence was not misplaced. Though he does not know where God is Job is sure that God knows all his thoughts and deeds. And he is confident that when God has finished testing him he will have passed that test, "**when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold.**" Scripture often speaks of God's testing as a refining process in which the dross of one's life is burned away by the testing. Hartley (p. 340) also points out that this phrase shows that Job is more interested in "the restoration of his own honor" than "the restoration of his wealth." Eliphaz had challenged Job to disregard material gold and to make God his gold in Job 22:24-25. Job shows no interest in regaining a pile of gold, but he earnestly desires a "golden character."

The mood shifts in verses 13-17. From a skeptical perspective one could say that Job loses his nerve and returns to the groveling fear that had characterized him earlier. However, the difference between these verses that speak of Job's fear and the preceding verses speaking of his confidence is more than a difference in Job's feeling. In the preceding verses Job was contemplating God's justice. In view of God's justice he was confident that God would confirm his integrity. This allowed him a sense of boldness as he confidently predicted God's affirmation of him.

However, when he thought of God's sovereign freedom and majestic holiness Job's confidence melted away. This is not fickleness on Job's part; it is simply the recognition that there is more than one way to think about who God is and the nature of our relationship with him. It is easy to testify that I have

met the requirements for salvation and thus "I know beyond a shadow of a doubt" that I am saved. A sense of God's integrity and consistency allows such confidence. On the other hand, it is not so easy to explain why God should choose to save me in the first place or to claim that I have perfectly understood the will of God for my life and salvation. The awesome holiness of God is so different from anything I understand from a human perspective that awe and a certain uneasiness are the natural (and appropriate) responses. That is why Job can confess in verse 17 that he would feel far more comfortable if he didn't have to stand before God.

The ancient copies of Job present a series of difficult problems for figuring out chapter 24. There have been a variety of responses to these difficulties. The Jerusalem Bible has rearranged the order of some verses to achieve what seems to those translators to be better sense. The New American Bible translators inserted a footnote for verses 18-24 indicating total uncertainty and they then omitted several verses in their version. Others see parts of chapter 24 as being dislocated verses from a speech of Bildad or Zophar.

However, the first 17 verses are fairly clear. As he thinks about the sovereign freedom of God Job's mind is drawn to the broad extent of suffering in the whole world. It is not just Job who suffers and as he contemplates the holiness of God he feels a sense of kinship with all those who suffer and who wonder why. Job 24:1 begins with the question "why?" Why do those who know God not always experience him in their times of question and affliction? That is Job's question in the midst of his suffering. But the other side of the matter is why does wickedness go unpunished? That is the question occupying most of the following verses. The various subjects that he addresses can be summarized as abusive injustice against the weak in verses 2-4, 9, terrible conditions for life and work verses 5-8, 10-12, and various criminals acts are never punished in verses 13-17.

It is important to note that such conditions contradict the theology of Job's friends. Their theology of retribution requires them to declare that all these injustices are in fact punishments from God for the sins of the weak and afflicted members of society such as orphans and widows. Job's point is that anybody with half an eye to see can tell that the rich and powerful as well as many criminal elements in society daily live in violation of the theology of retribution. In his case his suffering was undeserved and he did not know why it was happening. However, he knew many folk whose suffering was equally undeserved and the reason why was obvious. His cry for justice from God could not remain self-centered.

Justice for Job would also demand justice for those who were wickedly oppressed by human sin. Though verses 18-24 are far from clear, verse 18 does describe the evil-doers as **cursed**. Job is puzzled about why God would allow such injustice and wickedness to continue. However, his faith in God is so strong that he can not imagine the problem being solved apart from God.

Job 24 is a rebuke against the self-centeredness of much of our spirituality. We often act as if God only exists to deal with what concerns us. Even in the midst of great personal loss and suffering Job's heart turned to others who also suffered. We will never be biblical Christians until we share that concern for others that penetrates and revamps our concern for ourselves. The key to becoming a person after God's own heart is not just personal holiness but a heart that hurts for others in every kind of need.

Bildad's Third Speech – Job 25

Bildad's final speech lacks the introductory reproaching of Job and a conclusion. Because Job 25 devotes only 5 verses to it, many scholars have concluded that originally the speech was longer. Some suggest that various verses in chapters 24-28 originally belonged to Bildad's speech but were dislocated in the copying process. Others simply suppose that part of Bildad's speech was lost in the copying process. While either (or both) of these suggestions might have been true historically, the fact remains that we have only 5 verses in Job 25 to interpret with certainty as coming from Bildad. Andersen (p.

214) believes that the brevity of this speech and no speech from Zophar in the third cycle are purposeful designs of the author to show that the arguments of Job's friends "have run out of fuel."

There is one thought in Job 25. Bildad returns to the concept of God's holiness and human worthlessness. Verse 4 is the focal point of Bildad's speech, both structurally and conceptually. He is convinced that no human being can stand before God as **righteous** or **pure**. These words echo the pessimism of Eliphaz stated in Job 4:17-18 and Job 15:14-15. If righteousness and purity is impossible before God as Eliphaz and Bildad assume then Job is deluded in claiming his own integrity.

Once again Job's friends take the side of the *satan* and reject God's own evaluation of Job. Bildad concludes his extolling of God's greatness by appealing to worm theology. Verse 6 is one of the sources of the Christian tradition of referring to human beings as worms and maggots. While the decay of Job's body makes these words almost literally true of his physical condition they have also been used as a Biblical support for a low view of human beings.

This is the only passage in Scripture using maggots as a metaphor for human worth. This passage; Psalm 22:6; and Isaiah 41:14 are the only passages comparing people to worms. The Isaiah passage reads, "Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you insect Israel! I will help you, says the Lord." The words "worm" and "insect" describe the way Israel felt about herself compared to the power of Babylon. They are not prescribing the correct way to think about Israel. In fact God is promising to intervene to save them. The Psalm 22:6 reference is part of a lament psalm in which the psalmist is describing the depths of his personal despair (see [Lament Psalms](#)).

This passage in Job is on the lips of Bildad who has misunderstood the truth in both of his previous speeches. The biblical basis for regarding human beings as worthless as worms because of our sinfulness does not rest on a firm foundation. The defining description of human worth is given in Genesis 1:27 where we are said to be created in the image of God. Sin has marred that image but not erased it. However imperfectly we reflect the image of God (see 2 Corinthians 3:18) human worth is still defined by the value of being in the image of God and of being persons for whom Christ died. Our modern world that has made individual desires the measure of all reality needs a healthy dose of the biblical realism of sin. However, Christians must never devalue themselves or others like Bildad and Eliphaz have done.

Job's Third Response to Bildad – Job 26-27

Job's final speech in response to his friends appears in chapters 26-27. Because of the very difficult Hebrew text and even uncertainty about what the original reading was there are a variety of theories about the composition of these chapters. Chapter 26 is usually considered part of Job's response, but chapter 27 is analyzed in various ways. Some scholars see it as a conclusion to the dialogue with the friends similar to the way chapter 3 introduced the dialogues without being a response. Others see part of chapter 27 as belonging with chapter 26 and part of chapter 27 belonging with Bildad's speech. Others see part of chapter 27 belonging to a third speech by Zophar.

Job 26 consists of two major sections. Verses 2-4 specifically reply to Bildad. These verses follow the pattern of rejecting, even mocking, the opponent's previous speech. In these verses the Hebrew text shows that the forms of "you" are second person masculine *singular*. In other responses to the speeches of his friends Job has used second person masculine plural. This change suggests that Job is specifically targeting Bildad with his sarcastic questions.

Verse 2 asks what kind of help Bildad has provided. Condemnation harms rather than helps the powerless. Verse 3 asks how Bildad had managed to come up with such **good advice**. Were Job written today we might expect a "Not!" to appear at the end of verse 3. Verse 4 asks the source of Bildad's **words** and **spirit**. The word translated "**spirit**" literally means "breath." It is the same word that is used

in Genesis 2:7 to describe God breathing the *breath* of life into the human. Job's biting question does raise an important question. We would do well to examine whether the "breath" that blows the words we speak out of our mouths comes from God or from ourselves. Even right theology is undermined by a selfish spirit.

The second section of chapter 26 consists of a hymn of praise of God's majestic power in verses 5-14. Job begins by acclaiming God's power over death in verses 5-6. **The shades, the waters, Sheol, and Abaddon** are all Hebrew expressions referring to the dead or the place of the dead (see "[He Descended into Hell](http://www.crivoice.org/dead.html)" - Sheol, Hell, and the Dead - <http://www.crivoice.org/dead.html>). Sheol, the place of the dead somewhere in the heart of the earth, was hidden from human eyes. But Sheol is naked before God. There is no hiding from God even in the depths of the earth.

Verse 7 portrays God creating the world as a wealthy sheik pitching his tent over the watery chaos. The Hebrew word "void", translated "empty space" in NAB (*tohu*) is the same word used in Genesis 1:2 for the formless void. In ancient near eastern thought that void was not simply nothing but had the characteristics of a monster that must be tamed. Thus creation over the chaos was not simply making the world but also involved defeating the powers of nothingness and anti-order (see [Genesis Bible Study 2: The Cultural Context of Israel](http://www.crivoice.org/biblestudy/bbgen2.html) - <http://www.crivoice.org/biblestudy/bbgen2.html>). Subsequent verses describe God's power over the earth, the clouds, the moon, the waters, and the boundary of light and darkness.

Verse 12 declares God's victory over the sea and over Rahab. The sea had always been a fearful place in Israelite thought. Rahab was another name for the ferocious monster of the sea, the dragon of chaos who went by various names in other cultures. Rahab or Tiamt was the personification of chaos, disorder, and the destructive forces in the world (see [Speaking the Language of Canaan](http://www.crivoice.org/langcaan.html) - <http://www.crivoice.org/langcaan.html> , especially the section [Mythical Images in Scripture](http://www.crivoice.org/langcaan.html#images) - <http://www.crivoice.org/langcaan.html#images>). This victory of God demonstrates supremacy over evil and anything that threatened to overcome human existence.

It is important that verse 12 attributes this victory both to God's **power** and to his insight or **understanding**. In the mythologies of the ancient near east the gods of wisdom were never the same as the gods of power. Part of the uniqueness of the God of Scripture is the fact that wisdom and power are combined in him.

Verse 14 brings this hymn of praise to its conclusion. All these mighty deeds of God are only the "**outskirts of his ways.**" We hear only a whisper of all that God really is. Just imagine, Job concludes, what it would be to hear the full reality of God thundering forth!

Job 27 begins with an affirmation of Job's innocence and his commitment to righteousness in verses 1-6. This section begins with the words, "**As God lives,**" which is an oath formula. He calls on the living God to testify to the truthfulness of his words.

Verse 4 contains the heart of the oath. Job swears that he **will not speak falsehood or deceit**. This is a significant commitment for us to contemplate in our world. So much of the communications of modern society are based on strategic lying. Becoming people of the truth is an increasing challenge in a society of the lie. An important part of the integrity and uprightness that have been attributed to Job since the opening verse of this book is this commitment to the truth. After all the tragedies that have struck him and after all the irrelevant comments of his three friends Job's commitment to God is still sufficient to call forth such a commitment to the truth. In verses 5-6 he affirms his intention of clinging to his **integrity** and **righteousness** forever.

Verses 7-10 are a prayer for the destruction of Job's **enemy**. This is a difficult concept for the Christian mind but Old Testament psalms of lament often contained such thoughts (see [Lament Psalms](#)). In Job's

case the only way that he can be completely vindicated is for those who opposed and condemned him to be removed.

Verses 11-12 speak of Job's intention to **teach** his friends the truth about God. Verses 13-23 proclaim certain punishment for the **wicked**. Some scholars believe these verses belong with Bildad's final speech. Since they echo thought of Zophar found in Job 20 other scholars believe these verses are Zophar's final speech. Others believe they represent the conclusion of Job's response to Bildad. Regardless of the speaker these verses warn of the danger of sin. No matter how well things may go for awhile, the wicked finally suffer punishment appropriate to their sin. Regardless of one's righteousness such punishment is not a happy thought.

A Hymn to Wisdom – Job 28:1-28

(note: NAB reorders verses in Chaps 28 -42 because the translation method used included an analysis of strophic patterns)

Job 28 consists of a beautiful hymn in praise of wisdom. This hymn comes at the end of the three cycles of speech that form the dialogue of Job. However, the tone, language, and style of this chapter is so different from what has gone before that most scholars believe that the author of the book has inserted this hymn as an interlude between the dialogues and monologues that will follow. Andersen (p. 224) remarks that this is an interlude told by the story teller (narrator) summing up the conclusions of the story so far. Chapter 28 "emphasizes the failure of the human mind to arrive at the hidden wisdom" that belongs only to God. This chapter thus lays the foundation for the final section of the book that will find its climax in the sweeping speeches of God himself. Verses 1-11 form the first section, verses 13-19 the second, and verses 21-27 the final section of this hymn to wisdom. Verses 12 and 20 provide a refrain or chorus and verse 28 gives the conclusion.

Let us imagine a pause after the petering out of the long and fractious disputation between Job and his three friends. Job has silenced the friends; but he has still to settle his account with God and, from his mood in chapter 23, Job seems to be as uncertain as ever on how to go about it. A figure steps forward from the surrounding audience and recites this magnificent poem whose single thought is that true wisdom belongs to God alone and cannot be found by men. We no longer know who he is, for the introductory rubric containing his name has disappeared, perhaps when the collection of fragments in chapters 24–27 was added. Who does he represent and what is the point of his message at this juncture? These are the questions which face the interpreter of this beautifully crafted stretch of Hebrew verse. On its own it is relatively easy to follow; but how was a despairing but still defiant Job meant to take it?

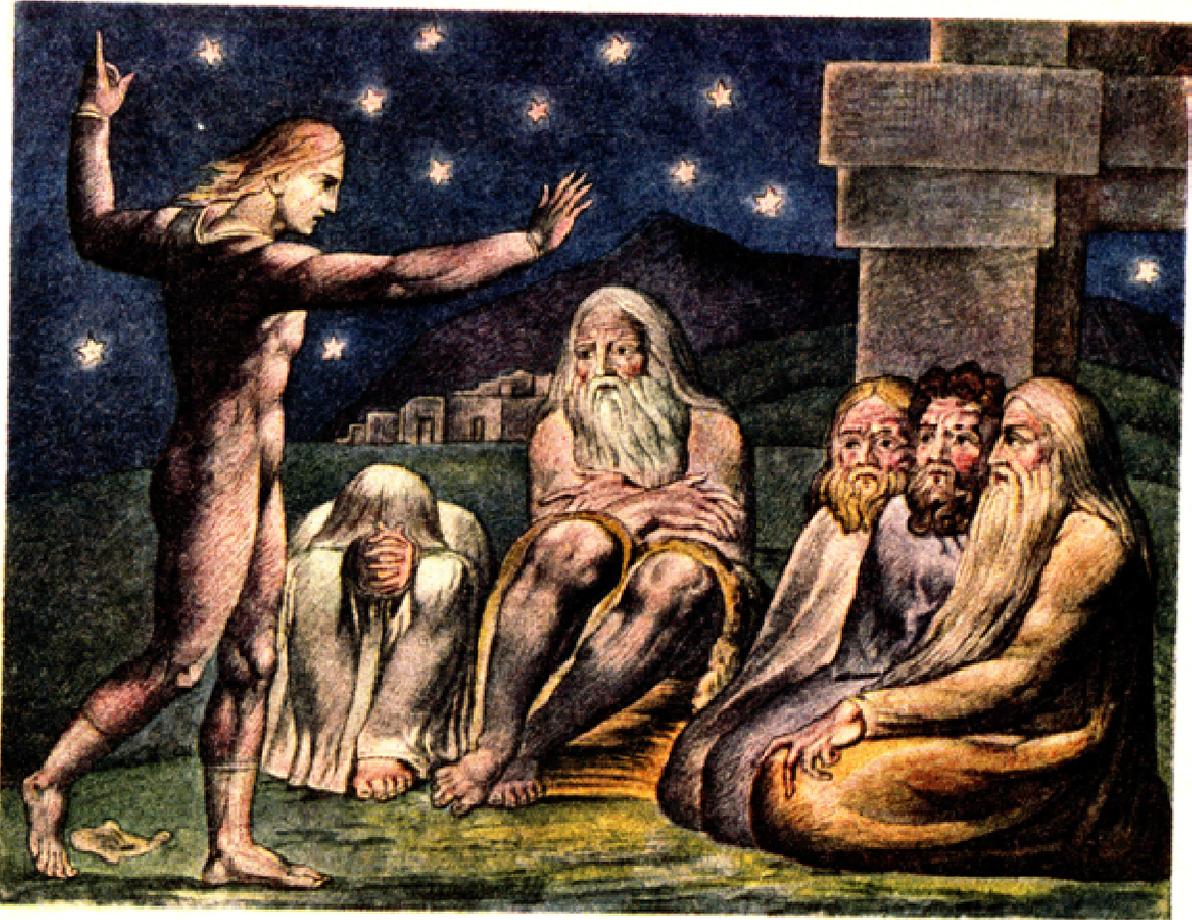
Verses 1-11 have been called "human skill in mining technology." (Hartley, p. 373) These verses contain the most detailed descriptions of ancient mining found anywhere in Scripture. However, as Habel (p. 396) observes, "The mining exercise is a paradigm for probing a mystery in the natural domain which parallels probing wisdom at a deeper level in the cosmic domain." All the human skill and insight used for mining symbolizes the human effort to find wisdom.

But verse 12 asks, "**where shall wisdom be found?**" Verses 13-19 point out that human ingenuity cannot find it. The most prized metals and stones cannot buy it. Wisdom is of the highest value, but we cannot purchase it. Verse 20 repeats the refrain, "**Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding?**" Verses 23-27 give the answer, "**God understands the way to**" wisdom. And verse 28 provides the conclusion, "**The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and turning from evil is understanding.**" This verse echoes the wisdom teaching of Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 and of 1 Corinthians 1:24.

Human understanding of the theology of retribution has failed to find the wisdom that encompasses Job's experience. The advice of Job's friends has dug deeply and uncovered many nuggets. But they have failed to achieve the true wisdom that will bring faith and understanding to Job. By means of this wisdom hymn the narrator points out that human understanding will never penetrate to the depths known by the wisdom of God. The final part of the book will painstakingly make its way toward God's wisdom to explain Job's dilemma.

Lesson 7 Study Questions

1. Speaking of Eliphaz's third speech in Job 22 Han says we see, "We can see a major reversal from Eliphaz's first speech. Why has Eliphaz's changed his mind so very much?"
2. Have you ever felt that your prayers were "bouncing off the ceiling"? What did you do about it?
3. Our main commentator, Hahn, says that the theology of Job's friends "requires them to declare" that human suffering and illness, even that of widows and orphans, is the result of sins. The Book of Job brings into question exactly that theology, sins = suffering. From what you have read thus far, do you think The Book of Job succeeded in changing that mindset for future Jewish peoples? Now take a look at John 9:1-2. Does this change your answer?
4. What is Job's complaint in verses 24:1-17? Do you ever feel the same way? What are some examples you know of in which wicked people seemed to go unpunished? How does it make you feel?
5. What does Bildad affirm about God in Job 25:1-3? How does it compare with Jesus' words in Matthew 5:45?
6. What truths about God does Job declare in chapter 26? If this chapter were the only chapter in the Bible what important truths about God would we miss out on?
7. What consequences of sin does Job describe in chapter 27?
8. What did you think of the Chapter 28 hymn? What did you learn - what is your take-away?



Lesson 8 Readings

Job 29:1-33:33

Job 29:1-33:33

Job 28 marks a major turning point in the development of the book. The three comforters, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, do not speak again. They are alluded to in chapter 32 and God speaks against them in chapter 42 but they have passed from the stage in the drama of the book of Job. Only Job, a new speaker, Elihu, and God will speak in the rest of the book. Job speaks in chapters 29-31.

In one sense these chapters mark the final response of Job to the friends and so some scholars see these chapters concluding the dialogue that began in Job 3. However, he is no longer speaking to his friends and so some scholars try to link the speeches of Job and Elihu who will speak in chapters 32-37. But Elihu's speech is as much a response to the three friends as it is to Job 29-31. It is best to simply identify Job's speech in chapters 29-31 and Elihu's speech in Job 32-37 as separate parts of the whole structure of the book. Job 38 will then mark the final portion of the poetic section as God speaks to Job.

Job's Summing Up of the Argument - Job 29:1-31:40

(Reminder: NAB reorders verses in Chaps 28 -42 because the translation method used included an analysis of strophic patterns)

Job's final argument has three main sections, each represented by a chapter. In chapter 29 Job remembers his life before the tragedies struck. Chapter 30 is constructed as a Hebrew lament, and chapter 31 is an extended oath of innocence.

It is possible to describe the entire sections of chapters 29-31 as a lament psalm (see [Lament Psalms](#)). Laments characteristically begin by identifying the distress that troubles the author. Chapter 29 sets up and highlights the distress of Job's loss (mentioned in chapter 30) by reminding us at length of how much Job had going for him. The oath of innocence that is expanded into chapter 31 was sometimes found in psalms of lament. Hartley (p. 385) describes the whole speech of chapters 29-31 as "an avowal of innocence." The author of Job was drawing on the legal customs of the Old Testament era. A person of that culture who was being accused by another could take steps to force his accuser to present the evidence. The "defendant" would swear an oath of innocence which was designed to force the accuser's hand. Exodus 22:10-11, 1 Kings 8:31-32, and 2 Chronicles 6:22-23 describe the procedure. The oath of innocence would place a curse on the one making the oath if he was not innocent. In Hebrew culture this amounted to placing oneself in God's hands to show guilt by fulfilling the curse or to show innocence by not performing it.

Thus the original Hebrew readers of the book of Job would have recognized that in chapters 29-31 Job was calling for God to either destroy him or declare his innocence by dropping the attack (which we know to have been a test). The speeches of Elihu then intervene and build suspense as the readers wait for God's response.

Chapter 29 begins with Job remembering the good days when God had blessed him and been attentive to his every need.

But the chapter is invaluable not only for its insight into Job's bitter grief, but for the ideal of Hebrew morality it sets forth. It is a classic description of an old Hebrew community living in a small country town in the spacious days of the Israelite monarchy. The society of which Job speaks was one where righteousness mattered and justice was appreciated, and which was therefore integrated and whole. In Hebrew thinking, righteousness meant behaving appropriately, and justice meant giving every man his due. And what was appropriate and what was one's due depended on one's station in life. One was not jealous or envious of those whom God had called to a higher station, nor did one act superior to, or take advantage of, those whom he had called to a lower. It was this appropriateness, this harmony, that the Wisdom movement had tried in the Book of Proverbs to discern and commend, an appropriateness and harmony which was in tune with the way things were done in heaven. Where such appropriateness and harmony were present in a community, God would be bound to shower his blessings upon it; and where they were not present, where the commonality of men refused to acknowledge their place, and the rich and powerful indulged in exploitation of the poor for their own selfish ends, it was only to be expected that society's fabric should collapse and chaos reign. We who live in a democratic and egalitarian age will not be overly impressed by Job's picture of the "good old days".

The Hebrew word in verse 2 often translated "watched" is the same word used in the Aaronic benediction of Numbers 6:24-26 where it describes God's keeping. Job's memory of God watching over him recalled the days when he experienced God's kindly care protecting him from an array of troubles. Verse 3 describes this blessing as a time when God's light shone on his path. Verse 3 sounds much like

Psalm 119:104. **Darkness** was a symbol of danger, death, and evil in the Bible. But darkness holding to God's hand is safer than broad daylight when we are walking in our own strength and wisdom. Verse 3 is ironic for Job is remembering God's light for having dispelled the darkness. Yet his life since tragedy had struck was the darkest of all and though Job often seems unaware of it, God's light was still guiding him.

Both the NIV and NRSV use the word "**prime**" (NAB Uses "flourishing") in verse 4 as Job remembering his "prime." The Hebrew word literally speaks of harvest. Job believed that he had been living in a time when he was harvesting the rewards for a lifetime invested in obedience to God. Again this is ironic for Job sees the harvest as past but in reality it is the harvest of his previous devotion to God that is sustaining him in these darkest hours. Verse 4 also speaks of a time of **friendship** (Nab "sheltered") with God (though some versions speak of the protection of God). This is a beautiful expression to describe the closeness that Job felt with God. One of the tragedies of modern life is that friendship as a lifetime of growing sharing and openness has almost become a lost blessing. Job reflects the reassurance that long fellowship with God brings. Verse 6 concludes the opening reflection on God's blessings by recounting the material blessing of wealth in typical ancient terms.

Verses 7-10 describe the respect that Job had previously received in his community. Andersen (pp. 231-232) points out that rich people are often not well liked. "They are more likely to be feared, envied, or even hated." The **gate of the city** mentioned in verse 7 was the place of meeting where business was transacted. The older men sat at the city gate to give advice and counsel. Job had not only enjoyed such respect he received the greatest deference shown to anyone in the area. These verses reflect Job's memory of being the most respected man in his community.

Verses 11-17 describe the way in which Job sought justice for others. These verses follow naturally after verses 7-10 since it was in his capacity as the respected elder at the city gate that he would have made decisions that aided the poor and oppressed (but NAB reorders them to the end of Chapter 29). The poor, orphans, widows, the destitute, blind, and lame were regularly mentioned in the Old Testament to be protected. God seems to have taken special interest in caring for those of whom he knew people tend to take advantage.

Verse 14 uses typical biblical language. Job describes himself as putting on **righteousness** (NAB "honesty") and being **clothed in righteousness** (NAB "justice"). The language of putting on a virtue or life characteristic is used in the Old and New Testaments. The **robe** was used for dress occasions and the **turban** symbolized Job's status as the highest ranking elder at the city gate. This language of being clothed in righteousness implies that the desire for justice completely enveloped Job and controlled his actions and desires.

Verse 17 shows Job going beyond individual expressions of mercy for the helpless. He also tried to break the power of wicked people who perpetrated injustice against the poor. It is easy in our culture to occasionally do deeds of mercy for the poor without exerting any effort against the structures and habits of our society that produce problems for the needy. Job did not make that mistake.

Verses 18-20 describe Job's expectation for a long life. These verses reflect the fact that before tragedy had struck him Job shared the doctrine of retribution with his friends. Because he had pursued righteousness so energetically and experienced the blessing of God he assumed that God would grant him a long and prosperous life. Most translations speak of "honor" or "**glory**" in verse 20 but the Hebrew consonants can be supplied with vowels to mean "liver." To speak of a fresh liver means a sense of well-being filling Job's consciousness. He sensed God's blessing in his life and he had expected that it would continue without interruptions or surprises. That is the reason the tragedies that befell him were so difficult for him to handle. Verses 21-25 return to the theme of Job's respected position in the community.

Chapter 30 begins the lament proper with the words, "**But now they mock me**" (NAB "hold me in derision"). Verses 1-15 describe the disgrace that Job is experiencing. There are two sections to this part of the chapter. Verses 1-8 describe those who mock Job and verses 9-15 describe their mockery. Verses 16-23 form the second section of the lament and are an accusation against God for his role in Job's troubles. The final section, verses 24-31, can be understood as summing up his pain in what might be called a self-lament.

Job 30:1-8 describe those mocking Job in his present troubles. Young men were supposed to respect their elders in Hebrew culture. That these young men would make fun of Job is a sign of how far he has fallen more than an indication of their bad manners. However, these mockers are not upstanding citizens. In the former days Job says, he would have hesitated giving their fathers a job taking care of the **dogs**. In Jewish culture dogs were very much despised and taking care of the dogs was one of the lowest jobs that could be imagined. People who lived on the margin of society so despised that they were not welcome to live in any village or town regarded themselves as better than Job in his present condition.

In verse 8 Job literally calls them "sons of a fool and also sons without a name." The NIV translates as "a base and foolish brood" while the NRSV has "**a senseless, disreputable brood.**" In biblical culture a person's name was the chief vehicle for that person's identity. To have no name was to have no honor, no value, no sense of belonging, and no place to belong to. Job had fallen so low that the lowest scum of society laughed at him and considered themselves lucky compared to him.

Verses 9-15 describe the mockery Job had to endure. The low class rabble mentioned in verses 1-8 make up little ditties to sing as taunt songs making fun of him. He was spit on, knocked around, and tripped. In addition to such abusive behavior Job declares that God has also joined in making sport of him. Verse 11 declares that God has loosened his string. Most modern versions interpret this to mean that God had unstrung his **bowstring** and thus disarmed him. Hartley (p. 400) argues that the string or cord should be understood as a tent cord. God has loosened the cord that keeps the tent taut and upright. Thus the tent sags - an interesting metaphor for Job's feelings of being let down by God. It is interesting that in the midst of detailing the mistreatment he receives from others Job mentions his feelings of being attacked by God. When all of life crashes in upon us, it is usually God we blame rather than ourselves, others, or just the circumstances of life.

The single accusation against God in verses 9-15 gives way to a whole section accusing God in verses 16-23. Verses 16-19 speak about God using the third person singular. God painfully pierces Job's bones, leaving him sleepless. After such physical affliction God tosses Job aside like litter in road ditch. Emotionally Job feels flung around by someone infinitely more powerful than he. This rough treatment from God causes Job to shift to the second person singular in verses 20-23 and address God directly. Hartley (p. 402) points out that these verses form the structural center to Job's whole speech found in chapters 29-31. More than anything else the author wants us to get the message of these verses. "**I cry to you and you do not answer me. I stand and you only stare at me.**"

One of the deepest human needs is the need to make sense out of life. To be able to cope with life's darkest hours a person must hear other human beings expressing the horror of such circumstances. To live in terror of life while other people act as if nothing bad is happening is a powerful way of invalidating one's existence. Most of all a person - at least a person of faith - needs acknowledgment from God that his or her suffering is real and has meaning. Job's greatest pain was not in his body but in his heart. The silence of God was condemning Job to meaninglessness - the most painful torment a human can endure. Whatever the form of grief and pain people endure they prefer to talk about it rather than to have others ignore it. We often excuse ourselves saying we don't want to remind the sufferer of their loss. In fact, sufferers do not forget their pain. What they need most is someone to acknowledge that their sense of loss and pain is valid. Our avoiding people who suffer only adds to their pain and reveals our own shallowness of understanding.

Job sums up the matter in verses 24-31. Surely God would help a person who cries out to him. If even a human being helps another human in distress certainly God would intervene to help. But God has increased Job's pain. "Job can hardly believe God's abusive behavior," writes Hartley (p. 405). So with poetic language he catalogs again the pain of his life.

Chapter 31 is an avowal or oath of innocence. The structure of this oath is, "May God do such and such if I do (or don't do) so and so." Frequently these oath formulas were abbreviated to just one of the clauses. This happens in English when we use expressions like, "God is my witness" (short for "God is my witness that if I am lying he may strike me dead.") or "cross my heart and hope to die" (short for "I cross my heart and hope to die at God's hand if I am not telling the truth"). In Hebrew the abbreviation simply consisted of the "if" clause (vv. 5, 7, etc.) with the actual curse of what God should do omitted. The pattern is clear in chapter 31 if one notices all the time "if" appears introducing some behavior.

Various scholars have discovered between 10 and 16 specific sins mentioned in chapter 31. Hartley (pp. 408-409) lists the following 14 sins:

1. Lust (vv. 1-4)
2. Falsehood (vv. 5-6)
3. Covetousness (vv. 7-8)
4. Adultery (vv. 9-12)
5. Mistreatment of one's servants (vv. 13-15)
6. Lack of concern for the poor (vv. 16-18)
7. Failure to cloth the poor (vv. 19-20)
8. Perverting justice for the weak (vv. 21-23)
9. Trust in wealth (vv. 24-25)
10. Worship of heavenly bodies (vv. 26-28)
11. Rejoicing at a foe's misfortune (vv. 29-30)
12. Failure to show hospitality (vv. 31-32)
13. Concealing an unconfessed sin (vv. 33-34)
14. Abuse of the land (vv. 38-40)

This is an amazing list of sins that Job denies having ever done. Some of them are observable sins while others would be secrets of the heart. Only two (adultery and covetousness) are part of the ten commandments but all are part of the *torah* of God's guidelines for living as part of the covenant community. This is not the list of a legalist like the lawyer of Luke 10:25-29 who would reduce the definitions of God's commandments until he was guiltless. One must go to the Sermon on the Mount to find such a concentrated acknowledgment of the heart as the source of sin. Perhaps more than anything else in the dialogues and monologues this chapter reveals the integrity and blamelessness of Job.

Job's insight into relationship with God is revealed in verse 1 (found just before verse 9 in the NAB), "I **have made a covenant with my eyes.**" Even Old Testament leaders understood that relationship with God was much more than obeying rules and regulations. To accuse them of being legalistic is a serious misunderstanding. Job shows that they understood the covenant quality of faith. Commitment to the right motives of the heart to produce the right actions in relationships was the foundation of Job's spirituality. We would do well to study the role of heart attitudes in chapter 31 and seek to emulate Job at that very point.

The Speeches of Elihu - Job 32:1-37:24

The final line of Job 31:40 reads, "**The words of Job are ended.**" This is probably an editorial comment added by a later scribe. Though Job will briefly speak again in chapters 40 and 42 the message that he wanted to convey has been spoken with finality in chapters 29-31. Job 32:1 then comments that Job's

friends are also silenced though for a different reason. Job's confidence of his own righteousness was so audacious to them that they decide no sense can be talked into him. However, not everyone is silenced by Job's daring challenge to God. In typical Hebrew fashion Elihu takes center stage with no introduction. For six chapters he will hold forth with four speeches before God is finally allowed to speak and bring the whole issue to resolution.

Many scholars do not believe that these speeches of Elihu belong to the original form of Job. They point to the poorer quality of poetry, the generally repetitious content of the speeches, and the claim to new insight as evidence of the hand of a later editor "adjusting" the message of Job to be more compatible to later readers. John Gibson (pp. 219-220) declares that the speeches of God found in chapters 38-41 dramatically and theologically belong after Job's oath of innocence. However, Gibson's final comment reveals his point of frustration, "Our patience has been stretched to the breaking point and cannot be asked to endure another intrusion of human words."

The speeches of Elihu, which with many other scholars, I do not regard as original to the Book of Job. It is my view that both *dramatically* and *theologically*, the speeches of the Lord from the whirlwind must follow at this point. Our patience has been stretched to breaking point and cannot be asked to endure another intrusion of human words.

However, Andersen (pp. 49-52) makes a solid case for including the speeches of Elihu as the work of the original author of Job. While many readers would sympathize with Gibson's protest at another round of arguments the speeches of Job 3-31 should remind us that Hebrew writers valued (rather than rejecting) repetition. Brevity and conciseness is our concern but it is not the problem of elders who sit at the city gate all day to ponder and debate the meaning of suffering and evil.

Andersen points out that the book of Job as it now stands has two commentaries on the speeches of chapters 3-31. Elihu voices the human response to Job and his three comforters in chapters 32-37. God will then speak his response in chapters 38-41. Though modern readers grow weary of the subtle developments, the author of Job has several more variations on the arguments that he wants to present before allowing God to set the whole matter in ultimate perspective. Hartley (p. 428) points out that Elihu delivers four speeches - one more than any of Job's three comforters. This single fact is testimony to the importance the author of Job placed on the speeches of Elihu.

Elihu is introduced in Job 32:2-5 with two major points of emphasis. Elihu is young and Elihu is **angry**. Verse 4 points to Elihu's youth as the reason he had waited so long before speaking. As long as his elders spoke biblical culture required him to be silent. But when they quit talking Elihu spoke. The description of Elihu in verse 2 as being the **son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram** also suggests his youth. Age and personal accomplishments would have allowed a simple reference to Elihu by his name. The emphasis on Elihu's youth up front would tend to prejudice ancient readers against what he said. The fact that young Elihu repeats much of what the three friends have said is a powerful but subtle way in which the author of Job reduces the force of those arguments. It also leaves the ancient readers ready for a strong reply to Elihu which prepares the way for Yahweh's speeches that follow.

The opening paragraph of chapter 32 also emphasizes Elihu's anger. He is **angry at Job** because he felt Job made himself more righteous than God. Elihu is **angry also at Job's three friends because they found no answer** to Job. He became angrier yet at the three friends when they gave up arguing with Job. This emphasis on anger is not designed to justify anger. Rather it is designed to draw the reader into the story. If the original readers were put off by Elihu's youth they would be drawn in by his anger for several reasons. His anger would reflect their own frustration - with either Job or his friends or both. There is a sense of identification with Elihu's anger. The other function of Elihu's anger is that this emphasis on it raises one's curiosity. If Elihu is so angry what is he going to do about it? By means of emphasizing Elihu's anger and youth the author has skillfully pulled his readers into another set of speeches and yet warned them not to take those speeches too seriously.

Elihu's first speech appears in Job 32:6-33:33. He defends his right to speak in verses 6-22 of chapter 32. Chapter 33 continues this defense in verses 1-7 before turning to the main point of this first speech in verses 8-30.

Elihu's main reason for speaking is that the friends have stopped. He mentions his youth and that he gladly deferred to age but none of them had succeeded in answering Job. Thus with the brashness of youth Elihu volunteers to solve the problem his elders could not handle.

Verse 8 attempts to justify his words by claiming the "**breath of the Almighty**" as the source of his inspiration. In this Elihu echoes Eliphaz's claim to special revelation from God via a dream. While "**the breath of the Almighty**" is a poetic way to speak of inspiration the creation account attributes the breath of God to every human being as that which makes us living beings. Elihu fails to explain how the breath of God inspires him to wisdom when that same breath only keeps other human beings alive. Like a stammering young preacher Elihu flails around seeking the right words while repeating himself in ever increasing emotion. Rowly (p. 209) responds to Elihu's self important claim in verse 18, "**I am full of words,**" with the dry observation, "none would dispute this."

But regardless of his verbal fits and starts Elihu is claiming the right to speak. Chapter 32 addresses the silence of the comforters as the reason he must speak. Chapter 33 addresses Job and the first 7 verses defend Elihu's right to challenge Job. Verse 4 again claims the inspiration of "**the breath of the Almighty**" as the authority empowering him to speak. Unlike the friends Elihu attempts to identify with Job in verses 6-7. Despite his youth and staggering style Elihu has some important insight. He acknowledges that he and Job are both **clay** formed by God's creative hands. This creates the possibility of real discussion though Elihu will quickly declare his conviction that Job is wrong.

Verses 8-30 form the heart of Elihu's first speech. Here he gives a summary of Job's main statements and attempts to refute them. In verses 8-12 he paraphrases Job's claim to integrity and rejects it in verse 12 with the observation that **God is greater than any** human being. This reveals Elihu's problem. No one - and especially not Job - would deny that God is greater than man but that truth does not address Job's claim to virtue.

Verses 13-18 introduce Elihu's second argument against Job. Job had claimed that God was silent to his cries. Elihu points out that God speaks in different ways to different people. Verses 15-18 describe a **dream or a vision of the night** as a means by which God can speak. Verses 19-22 suggest that **pain** and the difficulties of life are another avenue by which God speaks to people. Verses 23-24 mention an **angel** as a vehicle by which God can speak to translate his will into human understanding. None of this is new insight or especially profound but Elihu has a purpose in mentioning these ways that God can communicate. Verses 25-30 describe the renewal that can come when a person acknowledges that God has spoken and confesses his or her sin. God's purpose in speaking is to bring people to repentance.

All of this sets the stage for verses 31-33 where Elihu invites Job to answer. The flow of his argument suggests that he really wants Job to confess his sin and repent, but he graciously avoids calling for that directly. On the positive side Elihu is telling Job that God has not been silent but has been speaking to him even by means of suffering. This is a message of hope that calls for Job to stop accusing God foolishly and to begin thanking God for what he has revealed by means of pain. While we may conclude that Elihu is right the speeches of God will show that there is more to it than that for a person of faith.

Lesson 8 Study Questions

1. Concerning Chapter 29, what did you think of the Hebrew morality described by Gibson as “what was one’s due depended on one’s station in life”? Is this consistent with the rest of Wisdom thinking?
2. Hahn says, “One of the deepest human needs is the need to make sense out of life.” It Job getting close? Are you personally close to making sense out of human life?
3. What contrasts are drawn in chapter 30 when compared with chapter 29?
4. What did you think of the first part of speeches of Elihu? Do you agree with Gibson that, “Our patience has been stretched to the breaking point and cannot be asked to endure another intrusion of human words”? Or did you appreciate what Elihu had to say?
5. Why was Elihu angry? Was he right to be angry for that reason or wrong? Why?
6. What verses in chapter 31 deal with hardness of heart against the poor? In addition to these verses read Matthew 25:41-45. What is the biblical standard for treatment of the poor? What do you need to do to better fulfill this biblical expectation?
7. In verse 33:14 Elihu states that God speaks in several ways. What ways that God communicates does Elihu then describe in the following verses? What other ways are there?



Lesson 9 Readings

Job 34:1-37:24

Job 34:1-37:24

The Speeches of Elihu - Job 32:1-37:24 (cont.)

The speeches of Elihu began in Job 32. The first speech made by this young man expressed his anger at Job's friends for not adequately answering Job. Then in chapter 33 Elihu addressed Job directly and urged him to learn the lessons God wanted to teach him. The final verses of Job 33 reflect well the

immature character of Elihu. In verse 31 he appeals to Job to be quiet and listen to him. Perhaps Elihu felt that Job's responses to the comforters had interrupted their train of thought. He wants the privilege of speaking his whole piece before Job replies. Yet, such a request was highly inappropriate for a young man in that culture to make of an older man who had been as respected as Job. So in verse 32 he offers Job the privilege of the floor if he has something significant to say. But verse 33 flip-flops back and urges Job to be quiet and listen.

Elihu has not enjoyed a good reputation in the history of biblical interpretation. Several of the early church fathers thought him to be overly arrogant. Some modern scholars have been so disgusted with Elihu that they skipped commenting on his speeches with a few dismissing sentences. However, Elihu's role in the book of Job is different from that of the three comforters. They were Job's peers and were committed to seeking his restoration. Elihu, on the other hand, was a young man with a promising future. He attempts to offer a change in perspective that will encourage Job and provide hope while everyone waits for God to respond. To his credit Elihu focuses more on God than on human susceptibility to sin and error. His point that God may permit or even bring suffering to cause growth and maturity is a valid point. It is not the answer in every case, but it does reflect a genuine biblical insight that is expressed frequently in Hebrews 12:1-17 and in 1 Peter.

Elihu's Second Speech – Job 34:1-37

Since Job did not speak up when Elihu offered him the opportunity in Job 33:32, the young philosopher's second speech follows in chapter 34. The primary point of this speech is to defend God's righteousness against Job's complaint. Elihu especially emphasizes the fact that God does not show partiality in judgment. He seems to fear that Job would or perhaps already had rejected God's discipline of suffering. If so, Job would face God's final punishment of death - an end Elihu hoped could be avoided. The first four verses are a summons to listen. The main part of the chapter, verses 5-33, present Elihu's argument. The final verses voice Elihu's judgment against Job.

The invitation to listen in verses 1-4 reflects Israelite culture and Old Testament values. Israelite culture is noteworthy in its lack of pictures and sculpture. God had forbidden the construction of any image that would claim to be a visual representation of himself. This prohibition of idolatry appears to have been extended by the Israelites into a rejection of most kinds of visual art. Perhaps it was a way of marking themselves off against the pagan cultures that surrounded them. For Israel the ear rather than the eye was the focus of artistry. Thus verse 3 celebrates the delight that comes from words with zest and taste. However, words simply for the sake of word artistry fall short of the biblical standard. Verse 4 speaks of the two values most prominently urged in the Old Testament. That which is **right** and that which is **good** stand above other values for the Old Testament and Elihu urges those who are wise to **choose** those values. The emphasis on choosing the right and the good brings to mind Joshua 24:15, "choose this whom you will serve."

The main argument begins in verses 5-9 with Elihu's summary of Job's position. Though the three comforters were never accurate in their presentation of Job's position, Elihu is. He correctly states four points that represent Job's complaint. Job declares that he is **innocent**. The word translated "**innocent**" in most modern versions is the Hebrew word for "righteous" (as the King James correctly shows). The second part of verse 5 complains that God had deprived Job of justice. The Hebrew word (*mishpat*) includes both the idea of due process to achieve justice ("**right**," NRSV) and the resulting fair treatment. By refusing to answer, God was denying Job the due process by which he could understand what God had against him. The two parts of verse 5 express the heart of Job's complaint. Though Job had never used the exact words of verse 6a they express his concern. Though Job claims to be innocent God is treating him as if he were guilty and thus treating him as a **liar**.

Elihu is most concerned about Job's attitude. Verses 7-9 reveal this concern. The scorn or scoffing of the community should have brought humility to Job along with the humiliation. Instead Job's persistent claim of innocence seemed liked hardened arrogance to Elihu. Such arrogant rejection of public

criticism moved Job into the company of the wicked. Verse 9 reveals the smallness of Elihu's mind. Job's questioning implied that there was no advantage to serving God if God was going to treat him as he had. Elihu then accuses Job of teaching such a position when, in fact, Job was struggling to understand why life wasn't working the way he had been taught.

Verses 10-30 then state and defend Elihu's main point that God is righteous. Verses 10-15 state the point. Verse 12 makes the point most concisely, "**the Almighty will not pervert justice**" (NAB "cannot violate justice") Verse 11 states the matter in terms of the practical procedures - God repays people **according to their deeds** (NAB "he requites men for their conduct.") Verse 10 puts the matter negatively - God does not **do wrong**.

These verses approach the central problem of the book of Job but they do not answer it. If verse 11 is correct why is Job suffering? If verse 12 is wrong then Job has no basis for appeal and the whole biblical world view is wrong. The pagan gods of Israel's neighbors were capricious. They threw thunderbolts in their anger and humans frantically tried to appease them, but with no way of knowing what the gods really wanted. In contrast the God of Scripture acts on the basis of righteousness rather than whim. His wrath is unleashed against wickedness. That means that we always know how to live in a way that pleases God. Elihu's point is quite correct, but it fails to explain why Job has suffered.

Verses 16-30 defend this position. Elihu points out God governs the universe. Such responsibility without justice and judgment is inconceivable. Verse 19 notes God's impartiality. This is a frequent biblical theme. The Hebrew expression for showing partiality is very interesting. It literally means "to lift up a face." The picture is of a king who moves along a row of people bowed before him lifting their face to see if he recognizes them before deciding what to do with them. Verse 19 points out that with God rich and poor alike receive the same treatment. James 2:1-9 points out that equal treatment of all people regardless of their appearance, wealth, or status is expected of the church. James 2:8-9 makes it clear that the commandment to love one's neighbor as one's self forbids showing partiality. This is a point in which our cultural bias and prejudices are condemned by biblical teaching.

Contrary to much popular opinion today Elihu declares in verse 23 that there is not a set time for a person to appear before God. The Hebrew text is not completely clear and English translations offer a variety of opinions. The New Revised Standard Version follows many recent scholars in rendering it, "**For he has not appointed a time for anyone to go before God in judgment.**" The popular idea that a person dies "whenever their number is up" has no basis in Scripture. Elihu's point here is that God is free to act in any way at any time. Neither kings nor fate force God into any specific timetable or course of action. God can judge without investigation for he is accountable to no one. Verse 29 appears to confirm this perspective.

The Hebrew text of verses 29-30 (NAB has no v. 30) are also difficult to decipher. However, the point appears to be that there are times when God remains silent and allows the course of human history to carry out his will. Elihu suggests that no one can condemn God at such a time because humans do not know how the course of events will finally turn out.

Elihu is very correct assuming that we can know that God is using the events of human history to accomplish his will. Such an assumption is part of the faith of the Old Testament. However, as Andersen (p. 254) points out, there are potential dangers to such a view. Some Christians have taken this view point as a reason not to resist injustice and evil. Rather than denouncing oppression some people have shrugged their shoulders and said that God would eventually work things out. No doubt God will work things out through the course of history eventually, but God works through human decisions. If we will resist evil and fight injustice we will be part of the human history that God uses to accomplish his will.

Elihu returns to a common theme in Job 34:31-37 as he calls for Job to repent. The words that Elihu suggests Job pray in verse 32 are appropriate for anyone at any point of spiritual life. It is a prayer for God to teach us what we do not understand and a promise to stop any evil that is part of our lives.

Elihu's second speech has moved in a different direction from his first speech. The sense of compassion and openness of the first speech has given way to an urgency to defend God. Elihu has become concerned that he must protect God's righteousness from the kind of questioning that Job is doing. The three friends of Job believed God was punishing their friend for some sin that if he would repent God would relent. Elihu believed that Job's error was in questioning God. This second speech then warns Job "that he will have to abandon his complaint against God and his avowal of innocence if he is ever to find reconciliation with God. In this way Elihu prepares Job for a proper response to" God's speeches that will follow (Hartley, p. 462).

Elihu's Third Speech – Job 35:1-16

Elihu's third speech focuses in more intently on the issue of Job's complaints against God. Verses 1-4 paraphrase the position taken by Job and verses 5-16 contain Elihu's speech on God's sovereignty and justice.

Job has never stated that he is more righteous than God as verse 2 claims. However, he has defended his own innocence so strongly and has accused God of treating him unjustly that he seemed to assume that he was more righteous than God. The issue of verse 3 is more subtle. Once again Job has not exactly said what Elihu says that he has, "**How am I better off than if I had sinned?**" However, Job's rejection of the theology of retribution held by his three comforters amounts to the same thing.

In fact, Elihu has hit on one of the major issues of the book of Job, namely, why serve God? Job has claimed that God has treated him as a sinner when he was righteous. It is a fair question to then ask, how was Job better off than if he had sinned? The answer is clearly that Job is better off because his integrity is intact, his faith is recovering, and he has been obedient in the most difficult time of his life. However, the payback has been entirely spiritual rather than physical. If a person believes in serving God for material blessings that person must conclude that Job might as well have sinned.

Because Elihu is so bound up in retribution theology he assumes that Job must have served God just for the material benefits. As a result he concludes that Job would now be wishing that he had eaten, drunk, and been merry for all the good his righteousness had done. Job has not drawn that conclusion, but Elihu makes his speech in verses 5-16 on that assumption. He begins by appealing to nature in verse 5. If Job would only ponder the universe's vast expanse he would surely conclude that he could accomplish nothing against the Creator of such a world. Wisdom literature often appeals to various aspects of creation as instructive of how human beings should live. Elihu emphasizes the contrast between God's greatness and human smallness.

Verses 6-7 point out that neither sinfulness nor righteousness affects God. Neither an individual sin nor a multitude of sins can reduce God's majestic holiness. On the other hand righteousness is not a gift that God "needs." God seeks righteousness but not to make up for something that he lacks within himself. Elihu's point is correct, but it does not address Job's complaints. Job already understands this truth and has said nothing contrary to Elihu's statements here.

Verse 8 then affirms the impact of both sin and righteousness on **other human beings**. Once again Elihu's actual words are true, but his implication is wrong. It is true that wickedness has a powerful social impact that often snowballs by encouraging others in their wickedness. It is also true that righteousness affects others by encouraging them in their uprightness. However, Elihu implies that such social impact is the only result of either wickedness or righteousness. That is not true and Job has never implied such a position.

Job 35:9-16 then address the question, "Why doesn't God answer prayer?" This is a very practical question in many people's lives who, like Job, do not seem to be getting the answer from God they want to hear. There are many quick and easy answers to the question of unanswered prayer. "You didn't have enough faith," or "You prayed from the wrong motive," or "You must have some hidden and unconfessed sin," are answers that are often given to people desperate to know why God doesn't answer them. There is enough plausibility in these answers that many people accept them as the real answers. Of course, it is possible that a person has prayed without faith or from the wrong motive or with hidden sin. However, often God does not answer prayer and none of those reasons are true. That was Job's case and the typical human answers were of no use to him. Andersen (p. 257) points out that if perfect faith, totally pure motives, and perfect sinlessness were required probably no prayers would be answered.

Elihu points to wrong motives and sinfulness as the reasons God does not answer in verses 12-13. In his mind answers to prayer are as automatic as punishment of the wicked. Therefore it is the fault of the one who prays if his or her prayer is not answered. Pride or emptiness is the reason God does not respond. Clearly Elihu is not just speaking theoretically here. He specifically has Job in mind as verse 16 makes clear. For Job to complain that God does not answer him and that he can not see God is "impertinence" since the fault clearly lies with Job (Andersen, p. 258).

Elihu's Fourth Speech – Job 36:1-37:24

Elihu's fourth and final speech returns to a more compassionate tone. There are two major sections in this speech though not all scholars agree on the exact point of transition from the first to the second part. The first portion of this speech appears in Job 36:1-21 and contains the culmination of the human arguments that have appeared throughout the book. The second part of the speech is found in Job 36:22-37:24 and it prepares the way for the speeches of God that will characterize the final section of Job.

Elihu begins with an appeal for patience in Job 36:1-4. It is possible that the author of Job is being ironic at this point. Though Elihu pleads for patience the readers' patience with human answers is nearly exhausted by this point. The arrogance of Elihu in verses 3-4 leaves one wondering if the author intends for the readers to react with disgust. The final line of verse 4 is literally a claim in the Hebrew text to be **perfect in knowledge**. In support of those who believe the author intends the readers to take Elihu seriously is the fact that the following verses present "a more mature and engaging statement of orthodox theology than anything found elsewhere in the book" (Andersen, p. 258).

Verses 5-12 restates the theme that God sends trouble to test and train people. Elihu affirms in verse 6 that God will not preserve the wicked forever but will bring judgment to them. On the other hand God "**does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous**" according to verse 7 (NAB drops "He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous" from the beginning of v. 7). Verse 9 assures us that God will always let the righteous know if they stray from the right. Verse 10 further develops the idea by promising discipline or **instruction** (the frequent word from Proverbs, *musar*) (NAB, "correction") to those who need to change their lives.

Verses 11-12 present the two possible responses to this discipline. Verse 11 points out that the erring righteous can **listen** (NAB, "obey") to God's direction and **serve him**. Two important Hebrew verbs are used in verse 11. The first is *shema* and means both to listen and to obey. Hearing without obedience was an expression of rebellion against God in Old Testament thought. The second word is '*abad* which means to serve and also to worship. It is an important insight of Hebrew thought that to listen obediently to God and to serve him is an act of worship. Thus worship is not confined to the sanctuary but is obedient service to God in every moment of the day. Authentic worship in the sanctuary sums up a life of obedience service to God throughout the week.

Verse 12 poses the alternative response. One can refuse to listen obediently to God. The pain and problems of life are words of discipline and instruction. Those who will not hear and obey those instructions will **"die without knowledge."** The author of Job has an intriguing play on words in the Hebrew text of verses 11-12. One may (and should) hear (*shema*) and serve (*'abad*) God. However, it is also possible not to hear (*lo shema*) and to cross (*'abar*) the river of death. From the perspective of the Wisdom literature to **die without knowledge** reflects the worst possible end to which a person could come.

Verses 13-14 further describe that end of an unrighteous person and verse 15 sums up Elihu's teaching on God's discipline. The second person singular "you" addressing Job personally marks a new section in verses 16-21. These verses call on Job to accept God's discipline that is coming through his tragedy and to be careful to not continue on the way to sin to which Job's questioning spirit is leading.

The final section of Elihu's speeches turns our attention to God. Job 36:22 begins with the Hebrew word that calls for attention, **"Beware"** or "Behold." That verse states that **God is exalted in his power.** But the sovereignty of God is linked to God as an effective **teacher.** Verse 24 calls on Job (and us) to **extol God's work.** Praise of God through the songs of God's people is the best antidote for self pity and discouragement.

Verses 26-33 exemplify this praise as Elihu sings the greatness of God. God's eternity (verse 26), creativity (verses 27-30), and providential guidance (verse 31) are extolled. Job 37:1 turns to Elihu's personal response to God's greatness as he testifies to his heart leaping out in joyful praise. The theme of God's power over the weather is a connecting theme throughout Job 36:26-37:13. Thunder, lightning, snow, rain, wind, ice, and clouds are mentioned as vehicles of revelation of the greatness of God. Any people of any culture could appropriately sing such praises. However, these words would have been especially powerful in their original Old Testament context. The claim of Baal worshippers was that Baal controlled the weather and especially the storms (see [Baal Worship in the Old Testament](#)). Elihu sings the praise of a God who is more powerful than the rival gods of the surrounding nations because he controls the weather that they claim as their territory.

In Job 37:14-20 Elihu appeals to Job to give personal attention to God's greatness that is demonstrated in the weather. It is no advantage to know all this about God theoretically if no application is made to one's own life. Verses 21-24 conclude Elihu's final speech by exalting God. Verse 24 specifically calls on all people to fear God. The final line is difficult to translate but Hartley (pp. 483-484) argues for, "Indeed, all the wise of heart see him." The fear of God and the opportunity of wise persons to see him prepare us for the revelation coming in the speeches of God. Verse 24 agrees with the final line of the hymn of wisdom in Job 28, **"Behold, the fear of the Lord is wisdom."**

The Speeches of Yahweh - Job 38:1-42:6

The climax of the book of Job comes with the speeches of Yahweh beginning in chapter 38. After 35 chapters of human discussion that has often seemed futile and meaningless, God finally speaks. Yahweh has not spoken since Job 1-2 and there he had only spoken to the *satan*. The covenant name "Yahweh" has not appeared in Job since chapter 2 (many versions translate this proper name as Lord in small caps, but the Hebrew word יהוה, *Yahweh*, what is written in the text). All the chapters of human discussion used the impersonal term of the God of power, *El*, to refer to God.

Yahweh responded to **Job out of the whirlwind.** The emphasis on God's control of the weather in Elihu's final speech has prepared the way for the author to present Yahweh speaking from the whirlwind or tempest. Hartley (p. 487) catches the mood when he writes:

In breaking his silence Yahweh fulfills Job's deepest yearning. Although the plot requires a word from God, his coming surprises everyone. The air is full of excitement. The greatest wonder of all is that

God himself speaks to a mere man. Job has had to wait for the moment of God's choosing. It is important also to note that Yahweh comes out of concern for his servant, not because he has been coerced by Job's oath of innocence (Ch. 31). In answering Job he expresses his merciful goodness to his suffering servant.

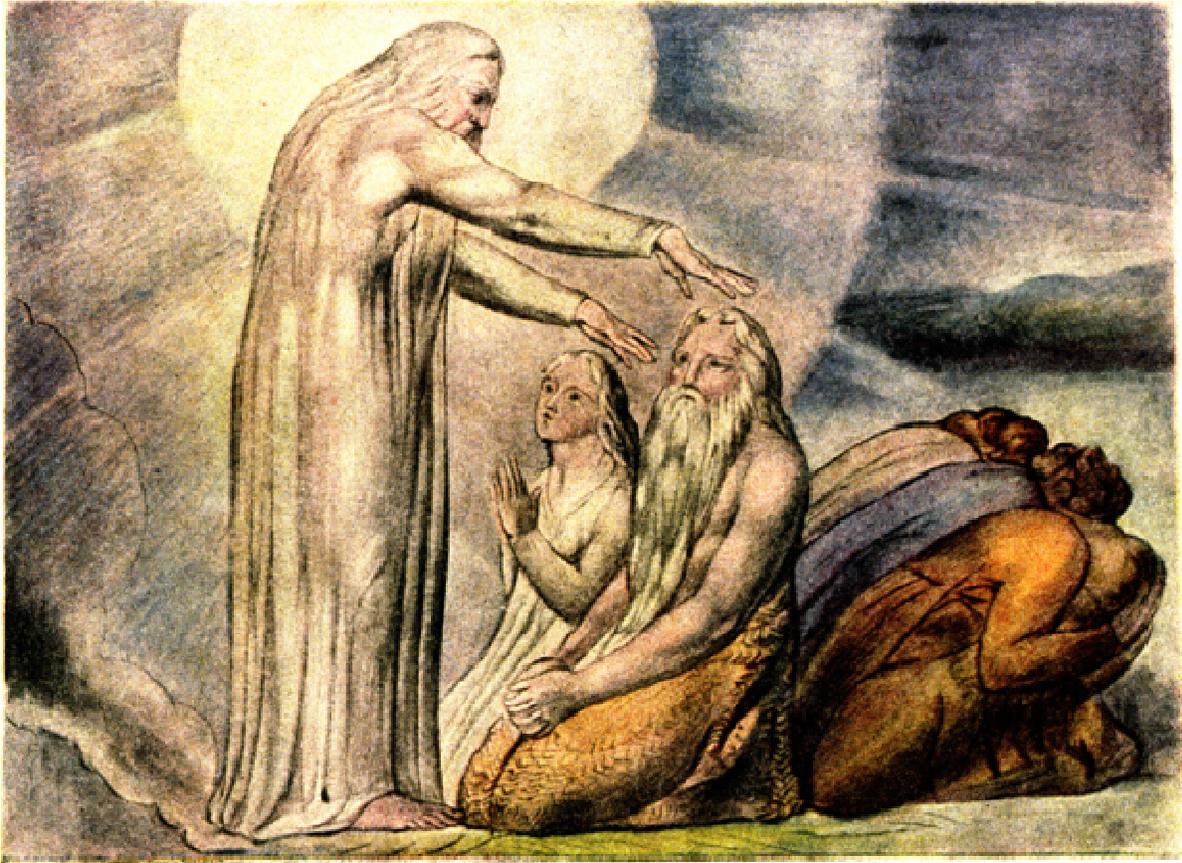
For all the sense of anticipation and now fulfillment that comes with Yahweh's speeches they do not answer directly the questions that have filled the book of Job. No mention is made of Job's claim to innocence; his complaints are ignored; and no punishment or reprimand for wrong doing is directed toward Job. Instead God the Teacher (Job 36:22) begins to open up the truth that pertains to Job.

The Yahweh speeches consist of two speeches by Yahweh each followed by a brief response by Job. The Lord's first speech appears in Job 38:1-40:2 with Job's response coming in Job 40:3-5. The second Yahweh speech is found in Job 40:6-41:34 with Job's response appearing in Job 42:1-6.

A variety of literary techniques and genres have been used to develop these speeches. Analyzed from the response that these speeches elicit it is most appropriate to call them hymns of praise. Yet the most common feature within them is the rhetorical question. Rhetorical questions were not used in Old Testament hymns of praise. From the perspective of Israelite culture the rhetorical questions suggest the literary form called disputation. A disputation is not a formal indictment but it offers the accused (Yahweh) an opportunity to challenge the complaints of the accuser (Job). The rhetorical questions draw Job (and us) into agreement with God and create a fellowship of shared convictions. Rather than using his power or authority to force Job into submission Yahweh invites his servant into the fellowship of agreement by use of the rhetorical questions. This breaks down Job's defensiveness and offers him the opportunity to shift from demanding God's acknowledgment of his innocence to accepting God's true character. As Hartley (p. 489) notes, "Then Job may trust his honor and his destiny to Yahweh, confident that Yahweh is sovereign and that he rules in justice and in kindness."

Lesson 9 Study Questions

1. Why doesn't Job speak when given the chance at the end of Chapter 32 between Elihu's first and second speeches?
2. Elihu declares in verse 34:23 that "For he has not appointed a time for anyone to go before God in judgment." What do you think of our commentator's contention that "The popular idea that a person dies "whenever their number is up" has no basis in Scripture?
3. Hahn says that Elihu is correct that God is using the events of human history to accomplish his will but warns against the belief that "God would eventually work things out." Why, what is the pitfall of leaving things for God to work out? - see page 65.
4. In verse 34:32, Elihu suggests that Job pray for two things. Hahn comments that what is suggested of Job is appropriate for any individual of Job's time as well as our own time. What does Elihu say Job should pray for?
5. We learned at the beginning of our Study of Job that it is considered perhaps the most the most theological book of the Old Testament - That Job and the others are, at a base level, discussing God's relationship with man, our understanding of God and man's and humankind's relationship with God. Elihu's third speech hits upon perhaps the most basic theology question of them all; why should we serve God or even care about our relationship with the Deity. How would Job's companions answer this question? How would the New Testament writers like Paul answer this question?
6. Every one of us at some point has asked why doesn't God answer my prayers. Elihu in the last half of Chapter 35 gives answers; because of unrepented sin or because you pray with the wrong motive. How would you answer the question about unanswered prayers?



Lesson 10 Readings

Job 38:1-42:17

Job 38:1-42:17

The Speeches of Yahweh - Job 38:1-42:6 (cont.)

The long poetic section of Job comes to an end with the speeches of Yahweh and Job's replies in Job 38:1-42:6. A brief narrative epilogue corresponding to the prologue concludes the book in Job 42:7-17.

Yahweh's First Speech – Job 38:1-40:2

The fourth and final division of the Lord's first speech also comes under the heading of God's rule or providence over his creation

The main subject of Yahweh's first speech is questioning Job about the universe. Job 38:1-3 introduce Yahweh and challenge Job to respond. Then the main body of the speech, Job 38:4-39:30, deals with creation. Job 38:4-24 contains a series of questions about the structure of the world. Job 38:25-39:30 then shifts to questions about the way the world is maintained. The speech concludes in Job 40:1-2 with an invitation to Job to respond to Yahweh's questions.

The introduction to this first speech declares that Yahweh answered Job out of the "tempest." The Hebrew word can also be translated "**whirlwind**" or "storm." The Lord has appeared in a storm of thunder, clouds, and smoke at Mount Sinai. He had spoken to Ezekiel from the wind of the tempest (Ezekiel 1:2-4). The Psalms and the prophets frequently speak of Yahweh coming in a tempest or storm to bring judgment upon the nations. The storm hid Yahweh from human scrutiny. Thus divine mystery and power are communicated and maintained by the storm.

Of course, the storm motif also challenges the claim of Baalism that Baal is lord of the storms ([Baal Worship in the Old Testament](#)). From the storm Yahweh addresses Job. The mention of this fact in verse 1 along with the fact that Yahweh is God's covenant name places the speech within the context of personal relationship. Though God will challenge Job's claims he does not reject Job nor "de-christianize" him from the people of faith. Further, Yahweh's respect for Job is shown in verse 3 when he challenges his servant to answer "**like a man.**" The Hebrew word for **man** is *geber* which means a strong man or a mighty warrior.

Yahweh, however, does accuse Job of speaking **words without knowledge** (NAB, "words of ignorance") and of "dark counsel" (NAB "obscures divine plans"). To be accused of speaking words without knowledge is a serious charge in the Wisdom literature. Fascinatingly, Yahweh does not accuse Job of sin, just of foolishness and a lack of adequate understanding. Job has demonstrated broad understanding of the ways of God and has generally conducted himself well considering the pain of his life. If God accuses Job of lack of knowledge one wonders what God must think of those whose understanding is far more limited than Job but who speak with total confidence about God and his ways. Even the wise and righteous Job lacked the understanding to explain adequately the counsels of God.

Yahweh then challenges Job in verse 3 to "**gird up your loins.**" Girding one's loins meant tucking the ends of one's robe into one's belt in preparation for serious activity. It is possible that Yahweh is calling on Job to enter the serious and difficult work of theological thought. More likely, Yahweh is challenging Job to a spiritual wrestling match. This figure of speech puts Job on the defensive. Earlier in the book (Job 13:22) he had said to God, "Call and I will answer or let me speak and you reply to me." Yahweh now calls to Job. Whether Job is capable of answering remains to be seen.

The first division of the Lord's initial speech (38:4-15) contains three questions concerning the world's creation.

In Job 38:4-15 Yahweh asks Job to consider the beginning of creation. Three figures of speech are used in this section. Verses 4-7 compare God to a master builder who **laid the foundations of the earth** (NAB, "founded the earth"). Verse 6 even speaks of the trenches for footings and the **cornerstone**. The point of these verses is that God works with the vast expanses of the universe with the same ease and competence that carpenters demonstrate over small stones and boards to build a house. Verse 7 points out that God did not operate in isolation at creation. The "**the morning stars sang together**" and "**heavenly beings shouted for joy**". It is possible that the phrase, "**morning stars**" referred to spiritual beings rather than literal stars.

Verses 8-11 compare God to a midwife who delivered the sea. Verse 9 describes the clouds as the swaddling clothes of the newborn babe, the sea. However, in verses 10-11 the metaphors change. The sea is no longer a babe, but a fearful power that must be contained. Old Testament writers feared the sea. Genesis 1:2 portrayed the waters as the chaos out of which God brought creation, order, and meaning (see Voice Bible Study, Genesis, Lesson 2). Verses 12-15 compare God to a general who commanded the light to shine. Yahweh's control of the storms affirmed his superiority to the Canaanite god, Baal (see Baal Worship in the Old Testament). These verses claim God's control over the sun. The gods of Egypt and Babylon were sun gods so this is a claim to Yahweh's superiority to those deities.

In verses 16–18 the subject is the underworld, that huge area beneath the sea and the earth where it was believed men's spirits went after death.

In verses 19–21 there is another allusion to the creation of light and darkness at the beginning of time

Job 38:16-24 ask Job about his awareness of and experience with the boundaries of the universe. Whether it be the depths of the sea (verses 16-18), or the horizon where light and darkness dwell (verses 19-21), or the **storehouses of the snow, hail, and wind** in the heights of the heavens (verses 22-24), Yahweh challenges Job to compare knowledge with him. If Job was able to answer with understanding it would show his ability to interact with Yahweh as a peer. This would allow him to make the demands that he has made. However, Job's ignorance of such mysteries - as all human beings both then and now are ignorant - painted in bold contrast the sovereignty of God and the smallness of any human being, even Job who is upright.

The third division of the speech (vv. 25–38) also contains questions about the phenomena of the heavens, but they concern not so much their remoteness from the earth as who controls and directs them.

The questions shift again in Job 38:25-38. Yahweh asks Job about his understanding of the daily activity involved in maintaining and directing the universe. The very nature of the questions shows that Yahweh understands these matters and handles them as easily as a daily routine. Verses 25-27 describe the process of conveying rain from the clouds to the earth, even to the desert places where that rain causes plants to sprout. Verses 28-30 further develop the question regarding rain by asking how rain originates. It has no father or mother but Yahweh brings it into being in a variety of fascinating forms - rain, gentle dew, frost, and ice. Part of the point is Yahweh's creative genius to be able both to create and to manage such variety and intricacy. Verses 31-33 shift to questions about the constellations, **Pleiades, Orion, and the Bear**.

Verse 32 contains a Hebrew word the meaning of which is unclear. The King James and Revised Standard traditions simply transliterate the Hebrew word, **Mazzaroth**. Attempts to give its meaning include signs of the zodiac (New English Bible), constellations (NIV), and planets (Hartley). Its place in the structure of verses 31-32 shows that it has some astronomical meaning.

The ancient world, especially Egypt and Babylon, was very interested in the stars and constellations. They believed that human destiny was controlled by the stars and constellations. Thus every effort was made to understand and thus control the stars. Those efforts usually ended up with naming the stars and constellations and a rough description of the repeated patterns of the sun and stars. Planets caused great difficulty because they did not seem to be regular in their patterns of motion across the sky. The mystery and power attributed to the stars caused most people of the ancient Near East to worship them as gods. Israel was an obvious exception as Job shows (see "Lucifer" in Isaiah 14:12-17). In fact, the Old Testament regards the sun and stars as servants of Yahweh. This is another way in which Israel proclaimed her faith that Yahweh was superior to all the rival deities of the surrounding nations. One can summarize the thrust of verses 25-38 by noting that they all deal with what modern humans would call the inanimate aspects of nature. The following verses turn to the animal world.

The fourth and final division of the Lord's first speech also comes under the heading of God's rule or providence over his creation

Yahweh's penetrating questions about Job's understanding of creation shifts to the animal kingdom in Job 38:39-41:30. The positive affirmation of these questions is Yahweh's fascinating creativity and power. Some of the animals are noteworthy because of their beauty. Yahweh is the creator of that beauty. Other animals strike terror into the human heart because of their ferocious nature. No human can tame or control them. But Yahweh is their master. The animals that are mentioned include **the**

lion, the raven, the mountain goats, the hind (deer), the wild ass, the wild ox, the ostrich, the horse, the hawk, and the eagle.

Most of these animals inhabited the desert and uninhabited areas of the ancient Near East. The biblical world also thought of these regions as the dwelling of demons and evil spirits. Thus Yahweh's control over these wild animals also is a claim of his power of all evil spiritual forces and beings. Further, some of these animals represented a major threat against human civilization as the ancient world experienced it. For example, **the lion** threatened the sheep of the shepherd and **the wild ass** threatened the cultivated land of the farmer. Ancient picture writing in several Near Eastern cultures portrayed a king's power by emphasizing his control over the wild animals of the region. Hartley (p. 504) points out:

With these portraits Yahweh asserts his lordship over the entire earth - the cultivated land and the wilderness, the domesticated animals and the wild beasts. No part of the world lies outside his rule. No hostile forces exist beyond his authority. That which seems unruly and demonic to mankind is assuredly subject to God's rule...As Lord of the universe he governs the whole world for the well-being of every creature, including those mankind despises.

This powerful picture of God is important for contemporary Christians. Yahweh has challenged Job with questions about what we call nature. In the time and culture of Job there were virtually no answers to these questions. The scientific advances of the past four hundred years would cause some to feel confident about answering these questions. In fact, scientific study has pushed back the boundaries of our knowledge of nature in incredible ways. However, the powerful insights of science do not invalidate Yahweh's claims. We know almost infinitely more about "how" nature works than people did in Job's time. We can describe the beauty of creation with far greater precision and detail than could the author of Job. However, we still do not know the "why" of creation. Science can describe a cause and effect chain of events that moves from the present far back toward the origins. But there is still and always will be a point at which science cannot explain why the original cause worked the way it did nor why the universe is constructed with the amazing set of relationships that are there for science to study.

The ancient world resorted to demons and defied stars and storms to explain the universe. Life was fearful because one had no idea why and when natural disasters would strike. Biblical faith responded that Yahweh controlled the world. Yahweh, the God of covenant love, the God of justice and mercy, the God of order and right, rules the universe. Life with its uncertainties did not have to be feared - Yahweh was in control. The modern, naturalistic explanation of the universe reduces all reality to that which can be scientifically measured. Life is meaningless because there is no purpose for the universe. Biblical faith responds that Yahweh still controls the universe and has a purpose for human life. Though sin has derailed God's original plan redemption through Christ has re-defined our purpose, meaning, and ultimate goals (Romans 8:18-25). Science enables the believer to understand better the infinite creativity that Yahweh has used in constructing and maintaining the universe. The awe that Job 38-39 would have inspired in its original readers is still the appropriate act of worship from us.

Yahweh's first speech ends with the invitation to Job to respond in Job 40:1-2. The forcefulness that Job had shown throughout the book in defending his own rightness and demanding an answer from God implied that God needed correction. After two chapters of questions that revealed Job's lack of knowledge and Yahweh's fullness of understanding, Yahweh offers to Job the opportunity to make his speech.

Job's Response to Yahweh's First Speech – Job 40:3-5

Job's response is noteworthy for several reasons. First is its brevity. Job had not lacked for words in his various speeches throughout the long dialogue section of the book but he has nothing further to say at this point. It is a bit surprising that Job has so little to say in the light of what Yahweh has said. Some

interpret Job's silence as resignation to God's superiority. In such an interpretation it is hard to understand why Yahweh then speaks again. Others see Job as rebellious against Yahweh's words. They see his silence as an angry refusal to back off from any of his claims of righteousness or any of his demands for God to grant him a hearing.

What Job says is that he is insignificant compared to God. Hebrew used the word "heavy" for the glory of God. Job uses the opposite word to describe himself. He viewed himself a light (we would say a lightweight) or **small** compared to God and his glory. It appears that Job is neither resigned nor rebellious. Rather, he is overwhelmed by the reality of God. It is clear to him that his earlier statements don't fit with the reality of who God is and how God operates. In that sense there is nothing Job can add to what he said to make it more persuasive. Job is in the process of realizing that God is in a totally different league. However, the impact of his tragic experience is also still powerful. He is not ready to retract what he had said either. The author portrays Job very realistically. He is in that "almost paralyzed" state of the dawning awareness that what he had said doesn't make sense, but still convinced that he was right. A response of being almost speechless accurately reflects the human experience in such a situation. This obviously means that Yahweh must speak again.

Yahweh's Second Speech – Job 40:6-41:34

There are some similarities between Yahweh's first and second speeches. Yahweh continues to use rhetorical questions both to question Job's claims and to assert his own sovereignty. He also continues to appeal to nature. However, this second speech is sharper, more to the point. It will force Job to confront the reality of who God is. This second speech has two main sections. The first, Job 40:6-14 challenges Job's demands for justice from God. The second part, Job 40:15-41:34, presents a picture of two amazing beasts, Behemoth and Leviathan.

Job 40:6-14 confronts Job with the flaw in his earlier statements. By defending his own righteousness and angrily denouncing God for allowing his suffering to go unexplained Job has nearly charged God with injustice. Yahweh's first point in verse 8 is translated in different ways. The NRSV has, "Will you even put me in the wrong?" The NIV translates, "Would you discredit my justice?" Nab translates it "Would you refuse to acknowledge my right?" Hartley (p. 519) gives, "Would you impugn my justice?" Notice that Yahweh does not charge Job with any specific sin. The righteousness of Job that has been maintained throughout this book is not questioned; it is still intact. However, Job's attitude reveals a lack of understanding of the reality of God as well as ignorance of the ways of God.

Job has two specific and related problems that Yahweh is addressing. The first is pride. By his strong insistence on his own righteousness Job is in danger of putting more confidence in his righteousness than in God's righteousness. Hartley (p. 519) wisely notes that pride is most treacherous when it arises from commitment to the correct position. Religious history provides too many examples of that truth. Job may have the right to complain to God about his circumstances, but he must beware of missing out on purposes God has for him that he has not yet imagined.

This pride that imagines one can correct God is original sin first portrayed in Genesis 3. The upshot of it is to begin to live as if one were an equal of God or even capable of instructing God. Andersen (p. 287-8) correctly understands these verses when he states:

There is a rebuke [here] for any person who, by complaining about particular events in his life, implies that he could propose to God better ways of running the universe than those God currently uses. Men are eager to use force to combat evil and in their impatience they wish God would do the same more often. But by such destructive acts men do and become evil. To behave as God suggests in 40:8-14, Job would not only usurp the role of God, he would become another Satan. Only God can destroy creatively. Only God can transmute evil into good. As Creator, responsible for all that happens in His world, He is able to make everything (good and bad) work together into good. The debate has been elevated to a different level. The reality of God's goodness lies beyond justice. This is why the

categories of guilt and punishment, true and terrible though they are, can only view human suffering as a consequence of sin, not as an occasion of grace.

Obsession with our own rightness reduces God to our level and robs us of the opportunity to experience the fullness of his grace.

To give Job the chance to experience God in his reality God must break through Job's insistence upon his own rightness. Yahweh's strategy is to challenge Job to function with the god-like attributes that are implied by Job's claims. "Put on the garments of God such as **majesty, glory, and splendor,**" Yahweh challenges in verse 10. "Overcome **the proud and the wicked,**" verses 11 and 12 dare Job. If Job can pull off those accomplishments then Yahweh will listen to him. In fact, verse 14 points out that if Job can do such things then he can save himself. If Job were God he wouldn't need God. Our own need of God should be adequate confirmation of the fact that we are not God and cannot fulfill God's role in our lives no matter how hard we try nor how much we want to do it.

The second major section of Yahweh's second speech focuses on the amazing beasts, **Behemoth** in Job 40:15-24, and **Leviathan** in Job 41:1-34. The nature and meaning of these two beasts is debated. Some scholars believe that they were purely mythical creatures while others argue that they were actual animals in the ancient world. Scholars who argue for actual animals usually identify them with the hippopotamus and crocodile. Hartley (p. 521-2) points out that these verses contain enough realistic description to rule out purely mythical creatures. However, "into the factual description the author skillfully blends fanciful metaphors drawn from mythical accounts of monsters in order that these beasts may represent both mighty terrestrial creatures and cosmic forces." These "fanciful metaphors" contribute to a sense of irony and absurdity designed to shock Job out of his continued defense of his innocence. "Yahweh is laying bare the pride that underlies Job's defense of his innocence. If Job realizes his own creatureliness, he may humble himself and admit anew God's authenticating presence in his life. God's hard questioning of Job is a witness to his grace." (Hartley, p. 521 paraphrasing Weiser's German commentary)

Job 40:15-24 deals with **Behemoth**. This animal is usually identified as a hippopotamus though some scholars argue that it represents a buffalo. The strength and selected body parts of the Behemoth are described in verses 15-18. Its prominence in creation is highlighted in verses 19-20 and verses 21-23 describe selected behaviors of this strange animal. Verses 19 and 24 reveal the purpose of mentioning Behemoth. Only God the maker of Behemoth can successfully fight against it and capture it. Job would not dare to go up against such a terrifying beast, but God controls Behemoth.

Chapter 41 of Job is devoted to **Leviathan**. Some understand Leviathan to be the crocodile while others see him as a serpent-like sea monster. Psalm 74:14 describes the Exodus from Egypt as God defeating Leviathan and Isaiah 27:1 looks forward to the day when God will destroy Leviathan again in the final apocalyptic battle. This chapter inter-weaves descriptions of a crocodile with pictures of the mythical monster that Canaanite religions viewed as the evil deity. The point is that Job could not successfully conquer the earthly creature we call a crocodile. Much less was he capable doing battle with the cosmic figure representing the forces of evil. Job could not. But Yahweh could. Job must decide whether he will argue his case against God (and lose) or submit to God by accepting in trusting faith both the blessing and the curse, both the riches and the ash heap.

Job's Final Response – Job 42:1-6

Yahweh's second speech does not seem to have a satisfactory ending. The author has skillfully constructed the book in such a way that it seems that Job interrupts Yahweh with his response. He (Job) is finally convinced and it is not necessary for God to say more. He acknowledges that he has spoken beyond the boundaries of his understanding. Verse 5 powerfully declares that Job had heard of Yahweh in the past. Perhaps this is even a reference to the first speech acknowledging the beginning penetration of God's word into his thick skull. But the final line of verse 5 is the key, "**But now my eye**

sees you." Job had asked to see God. Now he confesses that he has seen God in the speeches of Yahweh. Verse 6 then declares the only appropriate human response to an authentic vision of God, repentance and being humbled. Though Job's moral integrity and righteousness is not in question he understands that a vision of God in his reality must lead to confession and repentance.

The Epilogue - Job 42:7-17

The epilogue concludes the book with eleven verses of narrative. These verses correspond to the narrative prologue of the first two chapters. Some people are offended by the epilogue. They feel that the restoration of Job's family and fortunes undermines the whole point of the book. They often argue that these verses were added on by a later writer who totally misunderstood the book. Such persons miss two important points.

First, the epilogue is a necessary literary conclusion. It answers the prologue and helps form the brackets that support the long, long section of dialogue. Secondly, for the book to be meaningful in the context of Israelite culture Yahweh must announce his judgment (decision) on the whole matter. The epilogue does this in two parts. Verses 7-9 announce Yahweh's verdict on the friends who, siding with the *satan*, try to convince Job that material blessing was the only reason for and evidence of serving God. Not only are the three friends wrong; they must be atoned for by Job's prayers.

Verses 10-17 announce Yahweh's verdict on Job by means of a story rather than by means of a proclamation. In Israelite culture the story of Job's restoration and being blessed more in his later years than in the earlier years effectively communicated God's pleasure with Job. As a modern writer (named Job, no less) puts it, "God's answer to Job is expressed not only in argument, but in action. After the severity of the sermon, there is an element of surprise in his being awarded the gold medal of divine approval, coined no longer in mere words, but in complete rehabilitation." (Job, p. 115).

Lesson 10 Study Questions

1. Job and his fellows have debated about God for 35 chapters. These are learned men of their time and clearly had study and thought on the matter previously. Yet God tells Job he spoke "words of ignorance". Our author asks "what God must think of those whose understanding is far more limited than Job but who speak with total confidence about God". What do you think?
2. Since about 1600 with the invention of the telescope advances in science have come more rapidly than in any other similar 400 year period of human history. We now know much, much more about the world we live in than Job knew about it. Does this explosion in scientific advancement invalidate some or all of the points that Yahweh's point made in the disputation questions he asks?
3. Have you ever spoke or thought that what fate brought was not right and things should have happened differently; that if you were "in charge" there would have been a different outcome? It is a difficult question to contemplate but what does Yahweh tell Job about such behavior?
4. At the end of the Lord's first speak Hahn comments that he is surprised that Job had so little to say. Were you surprised also? Why or why not?
5. Yahweh never does answer Job's questions. The ending of the book of Job could leave one wondering what exactly we are supposed to learn about God from this. Is the Books of Job's that God is all powerful and capricious? Or is the message that mankind should not expect to always God's providence? Or is there another take-away?

6. The book of Job seems to try to correct the strict theology of retribution contained in the other Wisdom Book. It seems to say that bad things can and do happen to good people. How does the epilogue add to or detract from this teaching?

The author "Hartley" quoted so often by Hahn is John E. Hartley, Distinguished Professor of Old Testament in C.P. Haggard Graduate School of Theology. The book quoted is *The Book of Job* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)

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