

# Job

**Purpose:** Suffering and the Sovereignty of God

**Outline:** I. Prologue (1:1-2:13)

II. Dialogues (3:1-27:23)

A. Cycle 1: Consolation (4-14)

B. Cycle 2: The fate of the wicked (15-21)

C. Cycle 3: Specific accusations (22-27)

III. Interlude: Hymn to wisdom (28:1-28)

IV. Discourses (29:1-42:6)

A. Discourse 1: Job (29-31)

B. Discourse 2: Elihu (32-37)

C. Discourse 3: God – “Divine Discourse” (38-41)

V. Epilogue (42:7-17)

**Author:** Unknown

**Date:** The events may date back to the patriarchal era, and the writing of the book to the exile.

## **Reading Job** (January 4-15):

1:1-5 – Job is “blameless and upright” and a picture of this is described

1:6-22 – The Lord initiates the testing of Job [God ordains his suffering, but doesn’t create it]

*God is never the author of evil, but is always sovereign*

Job’s response to suffering is “sinless” by not charging God with wrongdoing (1:22)

*This is a key point of application. Whatever the suffering, do not charge God.*

The Satan = The Accuser, he tempts people to sin and then brings accusation

2:1-10 – Job’s response continues to be sinless, by not charging God; in distinction from his wife who says, “**Curse God and die!**” (2:9).

2:11-13 – Job’s friends and their faithful response. They say nothing and just mourn with him.

*This is a key point of application. Don’t solve the problem or ask “why” just mourn.*

The Book of Job takes us to a deeper level, by taking us to a higher God.

This book also questions the “**Doctrine of Retribution**” affirmed in much of the Bible (that the pious will prosper and the wicked will suffer. Therefore, if you are suffering, then it must be a consequence to sin; and if you are blessed, then it must be because you are living a righteous life). However, this is a “principle not a promise.” There are lots of times when the righteous suffer, and the wicked prosper. We are to live a righteous life not for prosperity, but for God’s glory.

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-Hebrew poetry the second (and third) line parallel or contrast the first line

“May the day of my birth perish,

And the night it was said, “A boy is born!”

=May the day and night of my birth, when it was said ‘a boy is born,’ perish.

-Hebrew poetry: Hyperbole, emotion, heightened expression. When the actual events took place, Job and the others probably did not speak in poetry – but the poetry best captures the gravitas.

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## **3:1-26 – Job Speaks**

-In the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” George Bailey wishes he had never been born, and gets to see what the world would be like if he was never born. When we suffer, we wish we had never been born rather than have to deal with this suffering. This is the experience of suffering. We forget all the blessings we have experienced, we are overwhelmed with the current suffering.

The Book of Job does not seek to answer “why” (the origin & purpose of suffering); but does show what we should do (and not do) when suffering. Here Job “laments,” not complains.

### **Chapters 4-5– Friend #1: Eliphaz Speaks Generically**

-*Generic Truth (4:1-11)*: What he says is true, even compassionate, but not wise or helpful. He rightly recognizes that speaking may bring offense, but being silent may not be helpful. He also recognizes that the retribution is not always true; but gives false assurances that the righteous are never destroyed (that everything will turn out okay).

-*Generic Vision (4:12-21)*: Eliphaz claims to have had a vision, but his supposed vision brings no new revelation. *When searching for an answer to a difficult situation – no answer comes – we drift back to generic statements: “Well, no one’s perfect. Well, you can pray about it? Well, God has a purpose.”* These responses seem unsatisfactory – because they are. Wisdom searches for answers – and when it doesn’t come easily or quickly, it searches longer.

-*Generic Praise (5:1-16)*: Eliphaz attempts to identify with Job in 4:8 & 5:3, but misses the mark because it isn’t what Job is experiencing. Verses 9-16 are wonderful words of praise, but Job did not need Eliphaz to offer a prayer of praise, he needed a friend to join him in prayers of lament.

-*Generic Conclusion (5:17-27)*: Eliphaz has a right premise (v.17) and right doctrine (vv.18-26), but a wrong conclusion (v.27).

Blessed is the man whom God corrects – this is absolutely true, except when it’s not. God is not correcting Job. This is simply God’s “frowning providence.” Lament with your friend!

### **Chapters 6-7– Job Responds to Eliphaz**

-*Job Laments Out Loud (6:1-13)*: “Without lament what is a miserable Christian supposed to say?” Job laments not with suicidal words, but entrusting all things to God (6:9); and is simply out of strength (vv.1-13).

-*Job Laments to Friends (6:14-30)*: Job is disappointed in his friends, not what they are awful, but he calls them “undependable as intermittent streams” (v.15). Verse 24 is not an invitation for his friends to show him his sin, as much as it is an invitation for his friends to see that there is something else going on.

-*Job Laments to God (7:1-21)*: Job determines that he will not stay silent, but will lament to God. Crying out to the Lord is crying out in faith. Not only is it okay to cry out to the Lord, it is good and right to cry out to the Lord.

*The Crook in the Lot* is a book by the puritan pastor Thomas Boston (first published in 1737). It is a collection of sermons based on Ecclesiastes 7:13 – “**Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?**” Sometimes we look at “our lot in life” and see that God makes it crooked – putting in seasons of sadness and trial.

Boston writes, “*The truth is, the crook in the lot is the great engine of Providence for making men appear in their true colours, discovering both their ill and their good; and if the grace of God be in them, it will bring it out, and cause it to display itself. It so puts the Christian to his shifts, that however it makes him stagger for awhile, yet it will at length evidence both the reality and the strength of grace in him*” (Boston).

***Remember the Book of Job is not so much about “why do the righteous suffer” as it is about “how the righteous suffer.”***

### **Chapter 8– Friend #2: Bildad Speaks Impatiently**

-*Impatient Accusations (8:1-7)*: Bildad overhearing Eliphaz and Job, now presumes that because of the retribution principle that Job’s children died because of their sin.

-*Impatient Appeals (8:8-19)*: While Eliphaz appealed to a supposed vision, Bildad appeals to tradition. We’ve always done it this way – the retribution principle is always this way.

-*Impatient Application (8:20-22)*: Bildad applies the retribution principle to Job, without considering what Job has suggested (that he is innocent, and this is a frowning providence). He then gives false assurance that everything will be okay in the end (if you repent).

### **Chapters 9-10– Job Responds to Bildad**

-*Job's Legal Dilemma (9:1-35)*: How can he make a legal appeal to God (note the legalese language here (contend, dispute, argue, innocent, plead, judge, summon, pronounce, court, charges, witnesses). Job agrees with the retribution principle as a principle; but if Job is right that in his particular case this principle doesn't apply, then what is he to do?! How can he find out if he is truly innocent?! Job seeks an arbiter (9:33) to argue his case impartially.

-*Job's Theological Dilemma (10:1-22)*: Hospitals and funeral homes are not the places to argue theology. In times of sickness and sadness you cannot think clearly. What charges do you have against me?! (10:2). God, you are the one who created me (vv.-12). If I am guilty woe is me; and if I am innocent woe is me because of the weight of this suffering and threat of further affliction. Why would God make humans just to watch them suffer in misery?

### **Chapter 11– Friend #3: Zophar Speaks Condemningly**

-*1<sup>st</sup> Accusation (11:1-3)*: Zophar falsely accuses Job of mocking God. "Compassion" literally means "to suffer together" – putting yourself in the other person's place. Empathy. Zophar does not do this. "They cannot see Job's anguish as he tries in vain to discover the 'smiling face' hidden behind God's 'frowning providence'" (Francis Anderson).

-*2<sup>nd</sup> Accusation (11:4)*: Zophar falsely accuses Job of calling himself pure. Job does not say he is perfect, but that he is "blameless" (God calls him blameless in 1:1). Ephesians 1:4 – "**For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.**"

-*3<sup>rd</sup> Accusation (11:5-12)*: After essentially calling Job arrogant (in vv.2-4), he then says that he wishes God would speak – presuming to know what God would say. Now who's arrogant?! He then goes on to call Job "witless/stupid" and a "wild donkey's colt" (you son of a donkey). With friends like this, who needs enemies?!

-*4<sup>th</sup> Accusation (11:13-20)*: Zophar suggests not only that Job just needs to repent ("put away the sin that is in your hand") but that if he does so, that he will forget his trouble "recalling it only as waters gone by." Clearly, Zophar has no compassion for the depth of Job's suffering.

### **Chapters 12-14– Job Responds to Zophar (and Bildad & Eliphaz)**

Only Job's closing speech (chapters 29-31) is longer. This is a reply to the first round of speeches, and a transition into the second round of speeches that are coming.

-*Sarcasm (12:1-6)*: "**Doubtless you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!**" "You know everything, and everyone else knows nothing. It's a good thing we have you around or we would all be lost." "**Men at ease**" When everything is going well for you it is easy to be judgmental and have contempt for those who have trouble. "Oh stop you're crying, everyone has it hard."

-*Sovereignty (12:7-25)*: God is never the author of evil, but he is always sovereign. "**Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish**" (Luke 13:4-5). When a building (or bridge) collapses, or a storm hits a city, we often see that 18 died, but 800 didn't. The 18 were not "more guilty." By God's mercy way more were saved than were lost.

-*Speaking (13:1-12)*: Job simply seeks a way "**to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God.**" He also seeks for his friends not to speak presumptuously on God's behalf.

-*Silence (13:13-28)*: Job desires some silence from his friends, that they would be quick to listen and slow to speak to him. Job also desires that God would silence the suffering, so that he might then be summoned and come to understand.

-*Shadows (14:1-12)*: "**Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.**" Fleeting shadow.

-*Statement (14:13-17)*: Statement of faith in these verses.

-*Shaken (14:18-22):* Job is shaken, but he continues to seek God.

### **Chapter 15 – Cycle Two/Friend #1: Eliphaz Confronts**

-Eliphaz in his first speech had been the most compassionate, and gentle, in speaking; but not this time. As Job has grown increasingly impatient with his friends, so his friends have grown increasingly impatient with him.

-Insistence on the Retribution Principle guides Eliphaz: The wicked suffer and the righteous are rewarded. “The gray-hair and the aged are on our side” (v.10) – this principle has always been, says Eliphaz. However, we know that sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

### **Chapters 16-17 – Cycle Two/Job Responds to Eliphaz**

-Friends bring comfort. What would that sound like from Job’s friends? It would start with some understanding. It would start by affirming what could be affirmed. Notice that Job’s friends simply challenge what Job says – they don’t affirm much of anything. They set up a scenario where they must be 100% right, and Job 100% wrong. That is almost never the case.

-Notice Job’s repeated faithful acknowledgment that all this is from the Lord. It is called God’s “frowning providence” – when God ordains trials in our life. But it is encouraging to know that these trials come from the Lord.

-The same God who has ordained your suffering, has also ordained one to speak on your behalf (see Jesus in Job 16:20). Job wants to bring his case to the courts of heaven.

-“My spirit is broken” does not mean Job has “lost hope.” Far from it. Job is still filled with hope. But his hope is not in death. He sees death as the only possible conclusion. He will die and then stand before the great judge on his throne and declare him innocent.

-*The Puritan Pastor Richard Sibbes wrote, “Cast yourselves into the arms of Christ; and if you perish, perish there.”*

### **Chapter 18 – Cycle Two/Friend #2: Bildad Confronts**

-Calm down and let’s talk rationally is Bildad’s solution. He then waxes poetic to convince Job that the wicked suffer in this life – contrary to Job’s suggestion that sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

### **Chapters 19– Cycle Two/Job Responds to Bildad**

-Who died and made you God is Job’s reply (v.4, 22). Job simply seeks pity (v.21) and compassion (the word compassion literally means “to suffer with”) rather than speeches. Job knows that in the end God will vindicate him. “I know that my Redeemer lives” (v.25) is often used by Christians in reference to guilt and judgment; but here Job refers to God who will redeem/vindicate him after he has died.

### **Chapter 20– Cycle Two/Friend #3: Zophar Confronts**

-Zophar is personally offended by Job’s responses to the other two friends. So much so, that we do not hear from Zophar again after this – even though the other friends speak a third time.

-Zophar is self-righteous because of his health and prosperity. He is doing well and he has determined that this is because he is good and wise. Job is doing poorly, and he has determined that this is because Job is wicked.

-*Puritan Pastor Thomas Brooks wisely wrote – “Adversity hath slain her thousand, but prosperity her ten thousand.”*

### **Chapter 21– Cycle Two/Job Responds to Zophar**

-Job is not asking for his friends to be “only” consoling, but at least be consoling. Comfort & encouragement certainly includes affirmation of truth, but there must also be an affirmation of experience even if there is a misunderstanding of experience. Christ enters into our suffering.

-Job says my complaint is not directed to men, my complaint is to God. Not only is it okay to complain to God – that is the most faithful response. It is our natural response to complain to anyone and everyone. When bad things happen, it is faithfulness to ask God about it.

### ***Chapter 22– Cycle Three/Friend #1: Eliphaz Accuses***

-Like a parent or teacher who only seems to notice when a child is doing something wrong, Eliphaz pictures God indifferent to man’s goodness and only takes notice of man’s wickedness.

Eliphaz had been the least caustic, but is now very accusatory. He accuses Job of social sins against the poor, fatherless, and widow. He has no proof of this, except that Job is suffering.

Perhaps you aren’t suffering for sins of commission, but sins of omission.

-vv.21-30 is a collection of calls to repent. They are quite good, except that they don’t apply to Job’s situation.

### ***Chapters 23-24– Cycle Three/Job Responds to Eliphaz***

-More and more we see that Job’s speeches taken up with rejection of his friends’ assumptive conclusions and wisdom on the one hand, and increasing demands of God for a court hearing on the other.

-Chapter 24 is incredibly profound as Job asks God the kinds of questions many ask today: Why is God silent and seemingly indifferent in the fact of suffering and misery in the world. Why doesn’t God confront those who oppress and take advantage of the marginalized and victimized?!

### ***Chapter 25– Cycle Three/Friend #2: Bildad Accuses***

-Bildad offers nothing new here in the briefest speech and Zophar is already fed up and doesn’t speak a third time. Bildad actually sounds like far too many people in our Reformed theological circles who have a sort of wormology. It is true that we believe in the total depravity of man. Total depravity does not mean that man is a maggot or a worm. Maggots and worms are maggots and worms. Man is created in God’s image. We are all image bearers. Even the worst of sinners is still an image bearer. Job does not claim to be sinless, but he knows that his sins have been forgiven so that he can be declared righteous; and he lives an actively repentant life.

### ***Chapters 26-27– Cycle Three/Job Responds to Bildad***

-Job’s response initially drips of sarcasm. Job is not seeking to wound Bildad, or the other friends, he is still trying to get them to understand him – or at the very least to understand their misunderstanding. He is actually using sarcasm as an attempt to benefit those who listen.

-The rest of chapter 26 exalts the Creator God, taking its cue from Bildad’s statement (25:2). Chapters 27 concludes the cycle of speeches in which the the friends became more and more antagonistic and Job increasingly isolates himself and directs his statements to God.

-We come to an ironic twist. Job demands to take God to court – with Job as accuser and God as defendant. When God has already been taken to court – with Satan as accuser and God as defendant. But let us never forget that it is God’s courtroom.

### ***Chapter 28– Hymn to Wisdom***

-*Deep Treasure*, the theme of vv.1-11, is part of God’s creation, and found and developed by mankind.

-*Deeper Treasure*, the theme of vv.12-19, is the search for wisdom.

-*Deepest Treasure*, the theme of vv.20-28, is discovering “The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.” The placement of the Hymn to wisdom in chapter 28 suggests that true wisdom has not yet had its say. Human wisdom, puny as it is, can only come through the fear of the Lord – trusting in his wisdom rather than our own.

### **Chapters 29-31– Discourse #1: Job**

-Job recalls his past high position (ch. 29), laments his current distress (ch. 30), and most significantly, takes an oath of innocence (ch. 31). This oath is intended to force God to act.

### **Chapters 32-37– Discourse #2: Elihu**

-Keeps the reader in suspense about how God will respond to Job’s oath. Elihu first insists that God governs justly. Then Elihu affirms the retribution principle, but rejects the corollary. Elihu’s perspective is partially affirmed in 40:8, but Elihu has still not offered an accurate identification of the cause of Job’s suffering.

### **Chapters 38-41– Discourse #3: God [The Divine Discourse]**

-First, God ignores Job’s complaint, and likewise avoids responding to the oath of innocence. Second, while God does not identify any actual offense committed by Job, neither does he indicate the cause of Job’s suffering. The whole discussion is turned from consideration of God’s justice to consideration of his wisdom.

-God implies that the natural order was not established with the retribution principle as an operational foundation (38:26). But when the retribution principle operates, it gives evidence of God’s sovereign intention. God even challenges Job to devise a system with the retribution principle built into it (40:10-14).

-The resolution is that God’s justice must be deduced from his wisdom. Causes of suffering cannot be consistently or accurately deduced, and no one has sufficient wisdom to call God’s justice into question.

-God will continue his policy of intervening to bless the righteous. Though Job is vindicated, he is never given an explanation of his suffering.

-The real question was really not why Job was suffering, but the more general concern of the propriety of God’s action and conduct. God’s justice is vindicated, not by identifying a “legitimate” cause for suffering, but by demonstrating his great wisdom.

### **Chapter 42– Job’s Reply & The Epilogue**

-In the end, the book affirms God’s intention of operating by the retribution principle, but implies that we cannot predict how or when it is going to operate.

-God delights in prospering the righteous and guarantees that the wicked will be punished. We often cannot know what causes our suffering, but we can take comfort that all is in the hand of an infinitely wise and sovereign God.

-C.S. Lewis wrote, “*The Christian views judgment as a criminal case with himself as defendant; he seeks mercy, not justice. The Israelite views judgment as a civil case with himself as plaintiff; he seeks justice in place of injustice.*”

-God works out his justice sometimes by his wrath, but sometimes God works out his justice through his mercy. God’s justice and mercy meet together most fantastically on the cross of Christ. The sin and rebellion of God’s elect people had to be punished. The fullness of God’s wrath had to be displayed against the wickedness of fallen man. And so God poured out his wrath, but he poured it out upon His own Son – Jesus Christ – who endured the punishment in our place; so that God’s mercy might then be poured out upon those whom God had determined to save. This is redemption.

-Whenever we see injustice, it is man's natural inclination to overpower injustice with some greater force. "*Men are eager to use force to combat evil and in their impatience they wish God would do the same more often*" (Francis I. Anderson).