

May 15 : Scriptures Job 1-3

SUMMARY

Who has the final word about human suffering – the one who suffers or the One who allows it? The book of Job is one of the most challenging books in the Bible. It examines the problem of suffering, and its main characters try to explain and answer the questions about suffering. One of the best summaries of the book of Job is from The Bible Project (bibleproject.com/explore/video/job/). I *highly recommend* that you watch the video.

The Bible Project summarizes Job thus, “The book of Job questions suffering and God’s justice. God’s response is surprising, pointing to His control over chaos and ultimate goodness.”

I can’t top their analysis and explanation, so I’ll just read through the book with you and make observations to make it perhaps more understandable. Let’s go on a little literary trip through Job.

Chapter 1 opens the Prologue (covering chapters 1-2). We’re introduced to Job, who was “the greatest man among all the people of the east” (1:3). Since the Bible is Israel-centric, this could be anywhere from the Jordan River east to the far side of the Fertile Crescent. More specifically, we’re told that Job lived in the country of Uz. We don’t know where that is within that area. However, some suspect it could be close to Israel, in the vicinity of Midian, on the west side of the Saudi Arabian Peninsula along the east fork of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aqaba. Once again, this is an excellent time to pull out your Bible map. An exciting clue could be that one of Job’s friends was Eliphaz, the Temanite. Teman is just northeast of the area, a little farther into the Saudi Arabian Desert. Unless Eliphaz traveled across the Fertile Crescent to live near Babylon and the Euphrates, somewhere near Midian is a good guess as to where Job lived.

We know Job has character – his integrity was “perfect,” as my Bible says. I don’t think many people can (or would) claim that today. He “feared God and turned away from evil.” Great so far! The number of his sons, daughters, livestock and countless servants indicates he was richly blessed. Besides, the text tells us he was the greatest (most influential) man among all the people of the east.

He served as the priest of his family as ancient fathers often did. They were the kings (the rulers) of their families and the priest, the mediator between their households and God. We see him in his priestly role sacrificing and praying for his children lest they got a bit drunk, sinned, and “blessed” God after a night of feasting. Yes, it really is the Hebrew

word for “bless,” but when used with “sin,” it turns into a euphemism for “cursed.” So far, we have a picture of a guy who’s an extraordinary man of God.

And now the camera tilts up from earth to the heavenly realms, specifically God’s throne room. The “sons of God” (*benei elohim*) come to present themselves to their King. Who are these entities? The term “sons of God” is used in Genesis 6 and refers to spiritual beings, “watchers” as they were called, who came to earth to enjoy the pleasures of earthly life, specifically having intercourse with the daughters of men. These spiritual beings produced monstrous offspring, human-Watcher hybrids, which God had to take out via the flood. In Job, the sons of God are spiritual beings who populate heaven and can walk on earth according to Satan (aka *the satan*, the Adversary, 1:7). When the spiritual beings call the roll before God, the Adversary shows up with them.

God takes the opportunity to point out Job is a remarkable human being among all humanity. “Sure,” the Adversary counters. “Of course, Job will fear You! You protect him and bless him richly. But if You take it all from him, I bet Job would turn his back on You!” And the bet is on.

God allows the Adversary to take everything from Job except his health. He can’t touch Job physically. Everything else, however, is fair game. So Satan does just that. All at once, Job loses everything except his wife. What does Job do? The same thing you would do. Sit down and grieve over his children’s deaths more than anything else. But Job’s trust in God shines through. “The only thing I have is what I brought into the world when I was born. Everything I had was from the Lord and it’s his right to take it back. I bless Him regardless.” He didn’t sin or blame God (1:22).

In chapter 2, the Prologue continues. Once again, the sons of Gods show up for roll call, and the Adversary is among them. Referencing the Adversary’s contention, Yehovah says that Job had absolutely nothing and maintained his integrity. He still feared God and didn’t sin even though the Adversary had “incited Me against him,” and here’s the kicker, “to destroy him *without just cause*.” Yes! There’s the theme the Bible Project points out in their video (have you watched it yet?).

According to the video, there are three big questions and one big assumption the book of Job debates: “Is God just in character? Does God run the universe on the strict principle of justice? How is Job’s suffering to be explained?” The big assumption (which many of us can relate to) is “Everything single thing that happens in the universe should operate according to the strict principle of justice.” If so, the good are blessed, and the wicked are

punished. But what if that's reversed? How are y'all going to explain that? That's what happens to Job.

The Adversary's counterargument is simple. "Oh sure, Job does well, but he only lost stuff and family members. But if you *really* made him suffer from unending bodily infirmity, he'd deny You." The stakes just went up! God allows the Adversary to afflict Job with painful, horrible boils all over his body to prove His servant, Job. Now Job has to endure deep inward pain coupled with excruciating outward pain.

May God "bless" Job's wife. Her solution is to put Job out of her, I mean, his misery. "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" she says (2:9). Wait, woman! Whose side is she on? Well, that's the world's way of dealing with suffering. Just take things into your own hands and end it. Commit suicide by cursing God to provoke Him into killing you. Wow, there's a lot of inciting and provoking God going on in these two chapters, isn't there?

But Job remains faithful to God. "Should we accept only good from God and not adversity?" (2:10). Yes, we should accept both when they come our way. But we don't have to enjoy the adversity either. I know a bit of what Job was experiencing. I've had long-lasting gout attacks where my toe or foot feels like someone just clamped it down in a red-hot vice. You can't even take a sheet resting on your foot if you have an acute attack. Yes, it's that sensitive and painful. But that's *nothing* compared with what some people endure today. I can't imagine the pain others have gone through when unrelenting arthritis racks their bodies for years, a back injury that can't be corrected, or constant migraines that are so intense that the person has to lie down in a room with the lights off, heavily medicated. And the more chronic the pain, the worse the situation is. It's easy to see how simple it would be to give up. But Job didn't (2:10). Amazing!

We're not told how long Job endured his pain before his friends showed up, but as bad as it was, he must've been in deep depression and near despair by the time they arrive just before chapter 3. The friends find Job unrecognizable from his affliction and in profound pain. The three friends' response is probably the most helpful thing they do in the entire book. They just sit and sympathize with him, ready to listen as one would with a mourner.

Job's words are the beginning of Cycle 1 (chapters 3-14), where, after his opening speech, Job's friends speak, and Job answers each one in turn. Eliphaz, Job's reply, Bildad, Job's reply, Zophar, and Job's reply. The next cycle starts in chapter 15.

Chapter 3 is Job's opening speech. His theme is, "I wish I had never been born." As I mentioned before in *Cruisin' Through The Bible*, learning the style of Hebrew poetry is beneficial. In Hebrew poetry, the same idea is often repeated in other terms. For example, in the first few verses, Job wishes his day had never happened, and it's described as "May the day I was born to perish," and "If only that day had turned to darkness," and "May darkness and gloom reclaim it." Get the idea? The beauty is when you find the theme and let the variations fill out the picture.

In 3:1-10, Job curses the day he was born, and in 3:11-19, Job laments that he was born alive. Why? Then he would have never known the suffering he is now enduring. Instead, he would have skipped to the afterlife, where he would be at rest (3:13), and there would be no trouble or difficulties (3:17). In 3:20-26, Job raises questions multitudes have raised over millennia. "Why, Lord? Why do you give life to those who will suffer? Why do you sustain the lives of those who suffer? Why do you give life to me 'whose path is hidden,' whose outcome is unknown, and I don't see any options because You've stuck me in this place, and I see no way out?" Job is suffering so much that he can't eat. All he can do is groan.

I find what Job says in 10:25 curious. "For the thing I feared has overtaken me, and what I dreaded has happened to me." Did Job fear losing part or all of his blessings? Or is it the same fear we all have that at any moment, the worst thing we fear – the loss of a loved one, financial deprivation, a life-threatening disease – would intrude on our expectations of a happy, healthy, pleasant life and smash those expectations without remedy? But now, Job finds himself in that place of suffering, and it's so bad that he can't find any solace.

INSIGHT

Are our assumptions correct? What do we assume our lives will be like? What happens when the winds of life blow past us like a hurricane and nothing is left? How will you react, especially regarding your relationship with the Lord, who you *know* is in charge of everything? Can you relate to what Job is lamenting? Perhaps you're in such a terrible situation. If so, then let Job's words sit with you. Let them speak for you. Use them to get your feelings to the surface as you cry out to the Lord. It's okay.

May 16 : Scriptures Job 4-6

SUMMARY

So, what does Eliphaz have to say in his opening thoughts as he tries to comfort his friend? Now that Job has broken the silence, Eliphaz can speak. "Job, you were able to help so many people in challenging circumstances. But now that this has happened to you, why do you buckle? What happened to your confidence in your faith and your hope via your integrity?" I must admit, Eliphaz's initial words almost sound accusatory, don't they?

And here it comes in 4:7 – Eliphaz's premise is that such things don't happen to innocent or honest people. "God is just and wouldn't harm an innocent person. Therefore, the fact that it's happening to you shows me that the problem is on you." Then Eliphaz presents his argument as if it came from a "spirit," a spiritual revelation. What he suggests is not wrong, just how he applies it to Job. No one is more righteous than God. Nor can any person be purer than their Maker (4:17). What is Eliphaz's point? Since people aren't sinless, they should expect difficulties that bring suffering, even the worst kind of calamity. Therefore, they need the wisdom to live their imperfect life right before God. By the way, did you notice the magnificent pictures describing human beings and even death? Humans "dwell in clay houses, whose foundation is in the dust" (4:19). Death is like being "crushed like a moth... smashed to pieces from dawn to dusk... their tent cords... pulled up?" Wow. Such vivid language!

Eliphaz continues his talk in chapter 5. "So, being in that sinful state, Job, who will you call to for help? Just sitting and being angry won't help. That's what a fool does, and nothing comes of it. Why be angry? Suffering is part of life" (5:1-7). That phrase, "But humans are born for trouble as surely as sparks fly upward," is an oft-quoted verse worth memorizing. There may be a lot of new material for you in Job, but you'll be surprised by the gems from this book that you already know because they're worked their way as proverbs and idioms into our language. You'll even find one that the playwright Thornton Wilder used.

So, what should Job do, Eliphaz? "Appeal to God. Ask Him about your situation, Job. He knows, and He's wise. He's the source of help for the needy." And here comes Eliphaz's point, "See how happy is the person whom God corrects; so do not reject the discipline of the Almighty" (5:17). According to the Holman Christian Standard Bible commentary, Eliphaz says, "Job is in need of divine discipline, so he should bear his condition happily." Then God would restore *all* that Job lost. Eliphaz argues that one's devotion to God is proved by how God blesses them physically in this life. (If so, Eliphaz, then God must

have a lot against those in poverty.) Eliphaz ends his speech with a simple, “Hey, Job. I know I’m right because I’ve checked it out in life. If you just admit God is disciplining you for (whatever), you’ll understand what’s going on.”

Job’s reply in chapter 6 drips with pain. My pain and grief outweigh all the sand of the seas. Dang! He’s in some deep distress. Which, Job says, is why his words erupt from his mouth (6:3). He describes his condition – God has done this to him (6:4). Like animals, “why would I cry out if nothing wrong has been done to me” (6:5)? Job then asks rhetorical questions regarding Eliphaz’s “counsel.” His words are as worthless as tasteless and loathsome food. Whoa, that was brutal.

Job longs for death rather than rely on his devotion to God or his integrity. This cry resonates with me because I’ve experienced that type of pain and disability, making death seem appealing and the best solution. At least, thinks Job, I would die knowing I haven’t “denied the words of the Holy One” (6:10). Job continues to assert his innocence which has been called into question. Job continues by asking, “Why should I go on? What do I have to live for?” (6:11-13). A truism says, “hurt people, hurt people.” In his suffering, Job now turns on his friends and their help so far. In a sense, Job accuses them (at least Eliphaz) of “throwing him under the bus” (6:14). He can’t depend on them as one can’t rely on a *wadi*, a desert stream that only flows when the rains come. When the rain doesn’t fall, the wadi gives out and dries up. “So this is what you have now become to me – nothing!” “Job had never asked his friends for special favors. Surely, they could at least be loyal” (HCSB commentary).

Job appeals to his friends. “Show me what I did wrong to deserve this suffering. Your honest words hurt, but what do they prove? Nothing. I’m not lying about my faithfulness and integrity.” Job’s friends, at least with Eliphaz’s opening speech, haven’t disproven his claim of being innocent. They’ve just sidestepped it with “since you’re suffering, there must be something wrong with you in God’s eyes.” Job: “Well, help me understand what I did wrong (the Hebrew word, *shagah*, where I *unintentionally strayed*) because I don’t see anything sinful I did on purpose.

INSIGHT

We often want to help people in their suffering, but sometimes we cause more harm when trying to “fix” their situation without knowing the whole picture. In truth, we can’t know the whole picture because of so many variables we can’t understand, like, thoughts, attitudes, the circumstances that led up to the suffering, etc. Rather than help, our counsel can sometimes only add to the burden the person is already carrying. This potential harm

is why it's beneficial to sit and commiserate with someone as they work their situation out with a better Counselor, the Holy Spirit.

May 17 : Scriptures Job 7-9

SUMMARY

Job continues his complaint in chapter 7. He paints a dismal picture of human life on earth, one of “forced labor...while waiting for pay (death).” As a slave must endure the heat of the day because there is no relief until sundown, and the hired man must wait for his pay at the end of the day, so Job longs for death because of his suffering. For the sun-burned slave and the day worker, the day stretches out with their pain and labor, longing for it to end. That’s how Job feels (7:3). But there’s no relief at night either. Because his open sores are filled with maggots (eating dead flesh and pus – *yuck!*), Job can’t even sleep. The nighttime drags out as much as the daytime.

But despite that, his life passes quickly. The HCSB points out the Hebrew wordplay in 7:6. “The Hebrew *tiqvah* can mean both “hope” and “cord/thread.” Like a weaver running out of thread, Job’s life is coming to an end, running out of hope (HCSB). FYI, the Israeli official national anthem is *Ha Tikvah*, The Hope. But Job sees no hope. Life is but a breath, and it’s gone. The person goes to the place of the dead and is soon forgotten.

Because he has little to lose, Job won’t keep quiet, and he will let it all out (7:11). So, what’s this sea and sea monster thing to which Job refers? You’ll also notice references to Behemoth and Leviathan, to great land and sea creatures. Some scholars see this as a reference to ancient mythologies. Just to help, here’s what the HCSB says, “In Canaanite mythology the sea god (Yam) and the sea monster (Tannin) were defeated by Baal. The allusion in verse 12 compares Job to some primordial adversary on which God is keeping watch. Such mythological allusions appear in the OT about God’s victory over and control of forces of nature in creation, at the Red Sea, and the forces of evil at the end of history.” In other words, Job complains to God, “Am I some sort of adversary you have to keep after?” (7:12). Job complains that even when he goes to bed, his mind is tormented so much that he prefers death by strangling to life.

To be blunt, Job wants God to leave him alone. He asks why God is focusing on him and why God can’t forget him for a moment (7:19). He asks God to show him his sin or what he’s done to warrant such scrutiny and oppression from the Almighty. “Just forgive me and let me die,” Job bemoans.

And now, Job’s friend, Bildad, gets his turn to “comfort” Job. Did I write “comfort?” Hardly. Bildad steps up to defend the Lord (as if He needs defending) against Job’s complaints and demands that God justifies Job’s suffering. Bildad claims that God doesn’t pervert justice or what is right. So, if something goes wrong for a person, it’s on

them, never God. Case in point, Job's children. "Your children died because of their sin." What an accusation, as if Bildad knows everything involved in Job's case. "If your children died because of their sin, then because you're suffering, it must be that you've done something terribly wrong. Therefore, Job, just seek God and ask for mercy. If you're on the up and up, God will turn everything around, and life will be good again" (8:5-7, paraphrased).

How does Bildad back up his argument? With traditional wisdom, the "everyone knows" evidence. He uses plants as his illustration. Plants don't grow where there's no water. People don't survive if they don't have God. Therefore, if you're languishing, you must have turned your back on God (8:13), and the godless won't survive. They may seem to prosper (Job's original condition), but in the end, their faith in their prosperity fails, and the godless will quickly pass away because they have no root in God.

8:20-22 Bildad's point is, "Look, Job, God doesn't reject people of integrity and righteousness, and He rejects evildoers." Based on his situation, Bildad implies that Job must not have the integrity or righteousness he claims to have. Otherwise, God would be supporting him, i.e., not letting him go through suffering.

Job starts his reply to Bildad in chapter 9. "You tell me to justify myself before God, but how can anyone possibly do that?" (9:2). Job goes on to explain why. God is so outside any person's league that it's impossible! God completely controls nature (which people can't do), and Who God is and what He does are unfathomable to people. "If I were to go to court against Him, I wouldn't have a chance. All that's left for me to do right now is beg for mercy" (9:15).

Job concedes God's overwhelming power and justice. Even if Job were allowed to present his case to God, he would fail to verbally present his case for a successful defense (9:20).

Job maintains his blameless state, "but who cares?" he says. God hammers the blameless and the wicked all the same. I see him accusing God of treating the blameless unjustly because the innocent and wicked experience the same suffering as if suffering came from God's judicial decree. The HCSB says this, "Job displayed his hopelessness. He was certain of his innocence, but in his despair, he imagined God to be capricious and an overbearing tyrant. Job felt Eliphaz and Bildad were wrong: God did not distinguish between the blameless and the wicked (as they claimed). Since there is only one sovereign God, everything must ultimately trace back to Him." Job's argument? "If it isn't He, then who is it?" (9:24). Therefore, God's responsible for this.

Job returns to his rapidly fading life and laments that God has already judged his case (9:27-29). He could do everything he could, but God would still find something wrong with him and convict him (9:30-31). "Cleansing with lye" means extreme efforts to cleanse something, which is useless because God would still see dirt. Job knows he needs someone to stand between him and God, but there's no one. He's on his own before his Judge – and that's hopeless (9:35).

INSIGHT

What are your assumptions about life? Is it conventional wisdom (Well, everybody knows that), or is it "I'll wait and see what God has to say about this"? Sadly, this whole interchange between Job and his "comforters" is reminiscent of conversations I've had with other Christians who use verses and everyday theology in simple ways to explain away situations, defend God, or, yes, indict a person for their suffering. One of my takeaways from the book of Job is learning not to jump to conclusions or assume I know what God knows. There are some things in life I'll just have to hold onto lightly and wait until I ask Jesus in person.

May 18 : Scriptures Job 10-12

SUMMARY

And Job keeps going with his replay in chapter 10. Since he hates his life as it is, he pours his soul out before the Lord. I have to admire Job's honesty with the Almighty. His suffering has removed any posturing before the Lord, and he just throws it at God's feet.

"I'm not guilty, so why are you doing this to me?" (10:2). The answer to Job's rhetorical question, "Is it good for you to oppress, to reject the work of your hands, and favor the plans of the wicked?" is a resounding *NO!* "Then why, God, are you acting like a human judge bringing charges against an innocent man? You're God. You know I'm not wicked and that I'm helpless before You" (10:7). There's Job's charge against the Lord – *You are treating me unjustly. If suffering is your punishment for doing evil, why bring it to me? Just because You can?*

The imagery that follows is vivid. Job asks God if He will destroy what He formed, like clay, cheese, and fabric. "Why do that, God? Is this Your predetermined plan" (10:13)? "If I'm wicked, then I deserve what I get. And even if I'm righteous, it's no use. I can't even lift my head I'm so beaten down and aware and ashamed of what a mess I am. And yet You keep pressing in and pounding away at me" (10:17). Job returns to his starting cry, "I wish I'd never been born! But before I die, leave me alone for one second, so I can smile before I shuffle off this mortal coil" (10:20).

And now it's Zophar's turn to wade into the debate, and what a "comfort" he is – *not!* In chapter 11, he lays into Job. He dismisses Job's complaints and cries as a "stream of words" coming from a "talker" who is "babbling" in an attempt to shut everyone up with no one to rebuke Job for his ridicule humiliatingly. Wow! That's a real comfort to a man in extreme pain.

The HCSB says it best about Zophar, "(He) misrepresented Job's position like an adversary at law who attacks the implications of another's position rather than its essence. Job had not claimed that his *teaching* was flawless. Rather, he recognized that it lacked patience (6:11) and complete perspective (7:15,20)."

Job did not claim he was sinless (i.e., *pure*), only blameless (9:21; 10:17) and upright (6:29). "Blameless" here means having integrity, "steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code," and "upright," meaning "standing right with God," lined up with Him and His ways. We can stand with God (upright), and what He says is right (blameless) and still slip up (sin). This is what Job says about himself. Didn't he offer sacrifices for his children

in case they sinned? Can we assume he did the same for himself since he was his family's priest?

But Zophar continues excoriating Job. "Dude, you're only seeing part of what God sees. If you could see what He sees, you'd know He's just" (11:5-6). And then, Zophar assures Job that his suffering is only for *part* of his sin (11:6). *Really?* How does Zophar know that? Why would he say such a callous thing to a suffering man? "Hey, Job, take heart. The Lord is only punishing you for part of your sin. How merciful and just, huh?"

Zophar goes on to tell Job he's in no position to question, challenge, or accuse God because there's no way Job could do everything that's going on with him. If God throws someone into prison (i.e., punishes him), He must have a good reason. Therefore, Job sinned against God. "Just confess, Job. Admit your sin. God will restore you. But if you don't, then like the other wicked people, you'll suffer without escape until you die" (11:20).

Chapter 12 opens with one of my favorite sarcastic rebukes in scripture, "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!" (12:2). Or "I'm stunned. Surely all of the world's wisdom is in you three, and wisdom will disappear when you die." BAM! They claimed to be wise, but their simple-minded conclusions and misapplied solutions to Job's situation (Why do the righteous suffer?) or his accusations against God (Are you just? Why do you allow the righteous to suffer?) seem otherwise.

The three friends represent the conventional wisdom of their day – evil people suffer, and righteous people prosper. If Job suffers, then he's not as blameless or doesn't have the integrity he thinks he has. God would forgive him and restore his life if he would only confess (to what's not there, according to Job). *But how can Job have integrity if he admits what he believes is false? Or is he kidding himself regarding his "blamelessness and integrity?" Or maybe the conventional wisdom of the day is not entirely right? Maybe there's more to all of this than we think?*

Job reminds his friends he knows the same conventional wisdom they do (12:3). And yet, Job can't get the pieces to fit together according to that wisdom. The righteous suffer while the wicked don't. Explain that, wise guys! Even nature knows the Lord has a hand in all of life. But just knowing things isn't enough. I hear you, and I weigh what you say, but where's the wisdom you're supposed to have (12:2)?

Only God has all wisdom and strength. Therefore, He alone has perfect counsel and understanding. The implication is that God is sovereign and controls all things according

to His thoughts and will, and he's responsible for all of it – both the good and the bad. God can do whatever He wants for whatever reason (12:14-15). The Lord does what He wills with counselors, judges, kings, priests, established leaders, advisors, elders, nobles, and the strong.

It appears that Job implies that God does this arbitrarily with His mysterious ways. He reveals mysteries, raises and crushes nations, and makes leaders lose their reasoning, so they're as functional as drunks (12:22-25). God can do *all* of this. But what is Job's point? You'll have to wait until the next reading to find out because we're in the middle of Job's speech.

INSIGHT

How honest are you when you talk to God? Do you go through the Lord's prayer by rote or just talk to Him, pouring your heart out with positive and negative things? Many people (myself included) often make prayer just a shopping list as if the Almighty God and King is our errand boy, our Divine Grub Hub fetcher of stuff for us. Prayer is simple and profound. Most of all, it's honest communion with God, a time to sit with Him (or walk, bike, or whatever) and speak and listen. A conversation between two persons. We can't forget that the Lord is our Creator, King, and Master. We also can't forget that Jesus said we can come to Him any time we (or He) want. We can pour out our frustrations and suffering as Job did without worrying that Jesus will strike us down. We can also pour out our joys to Him. The point is honesty. He knows everything anyway, so go for it.

May 19 : Scriptures Job 13-15

SUMMARY

Chapter 13 continues with Job's speech. Job gets what Zophar has said but isn't one of the stupid men that Zophar refers to in 11:12. Job is on par with Zophar. He'd rather argue with God directly than with "worthless doctors" (his three friends) who misdiagnose a patient's symptoms and mistreat the source of their problem. Shutting up would be the wisest thing they could do at this point (13:5). Now *that's* honest talk that comes from a person in pain who has no time for what doesn't help.

Job accuses his friends of taking God's side (13:7). "You stand there on God's side, yet your testimony on His behalf is unjust because your wisdom is screwed up and applied fraudulently. Do you think *your* words would hold up under God's scrutiny (13:9, paraphrased)? Nope. He'd rebuke you all terrifyingly. Your wisdom is worth as much as ash and clay."

Job has nothing to lose and is so convinced of his integrity and blamelessness that he will speak again (13:13). But even if God kills him for doing so, he'll keep trusting Him and defending himself (13:15). The HSCB says, "Job felt he had nothing to lose by this risky move (confronting God and pleading his case – author), because God seemed determined to find some charge against him in order to destroy him." And if God allowed Job to stand before Him to plead his case, that would only prove Job's point – he's blameless with integrity – because the wicked can't stand before God (13:16).

Job pleads for relief, "Despite all this, I ask You, Lord, so I can dwell in Your presence, lift your oppression and terror from me. Then I'll be able to talk and discuss what I've done wrong. Invite me to speak or answer when I call. Either way, Lord." Job continues to argue that he's suffering for no reason, "Show me my iniquities and sins for which you 'hide Your face and consider me Your enemy'" (13:23-24). Why would God go after a fragile person? "Are you punishing me due to some record of the sins of my youth?" (13:26). Because of his condition, Job feels locked down and constrained under God's intense examination and oppression.

In chapter 14, Job goes on. It helps to ignore the chapter heading and read straight through from 13:28 into chapter 14. Job's flowing thought is this; since life is fleeting, why should God bother noticing such a temporary creature? Why would God go through all this just to judge one person (14:3)? "Yes, I'm impure, God. What do you expect from me? Purity? An impure person can't produce purity." Job never claimed to be sinless. He just wants to know God's reason for allowing him to suffer. Since God has set the limits on a

person's life, then why won't God relent from focusing on Job and let him enjoy life until it's time to "punch the timeclock."

Trees can regrow after being cut down, but not a man. Once he's gone, he stays gone (14:12). Job longs for death until God is done being angry with him (14:13). Okay, so what about death as Job understands it? Throughout the book so far, death is depicted as a time of rest and sleep. There is no afterlife, just rest. But that conflicts with the idea of death, an afterlife in heaven, and the eventual resurrection of the dead at Jesus' return. So, which is it? Both.

The Bible was written as a progressive revelation. That means some truths were revealed early on, but not in detail. As time passed and the Lord inspired and revealed more and more to his writers and prophets, the whole picture filled in like a puzzle, each piece having its place to fit. Job's understanding of death helps clue us in that this book is early in the biblical revelation process. So go with it.

However, we see an inkling of something in 14:13! Job raises the idea that *perhaps* there is something besides a person's spirit resting after physical death. If so, this could help Job endure his suffering (14:14). Maybe in the afterlife, Job would have a new relationship with the Lord where the Lord would "count his steps and not his sin" (14:16). His sin would be sealed up and never laid before him as a reason to go after him.

But Job returns to his hopeless thoughts. Regardless of what the afterlife is, for now, all Job sees is a hopeless future and a bleak death.

Chapter 15 starts the Second Cycle of the Eliphaz – Job – Bildad – Job – Zophar – Job back and forth discussion. Eliphaz confronts Job's claim that Job is wise. Eliphaz calls Job's words "empty counsel, hot east wind, and useless talk that serves no good purpose." Job's blunt and "irreverent" words show he has no fear of God, and thus Job has no wisdom. Instead, it's Job's iniquity talking (via his accusatory statements about God), and his words reveal his guilt (15:5).

Eliphaz replies that Job has no special knowledge by birth or being part of God's heavenly council (which we got a glimpse of in chapters 1-2). The only thing any of them have to argue their cases is the long-established wisdom from the ancient fathers (15:10). So, Job has no unique wisdom.

Eliphaz tells Job that he's spoken too harshly to God (15:13), and if God doesn't trust his own spiritual beings ("holy ones," the spiritual beings) and the heavenly realm isn't pure

(remember the Adversary appeared before God), then how much more should God not trust human beings who are corrupt and practice injustice freely?

Eliphaz then dispenses *the wisdom of the fathers*, the time-tested and timeless wisdom of the ancients, and his own experience (15:18-19). Now that's not bad, but it must rightly evaluate Job's situation and apply to him to be helpful, right? Everybody knows, according to Eliphaz, that the wicked suffer and have short lives. They never have peace and face "the sword," i.e., judgment. Why? Because he has "stretched out his hand against God and has arrogantly opposed the Almighty." With reckless abandon, the wicked throw themselves against God (15:26). Even though he prospers (fat face, bulging waist, 15:27), he'll lose everything when God's time for his death comes (15:30). So, it would be good if the wicked man of Eliphaz's illustration (15:20) did not trust in worthless things that have no lasting value, *right Job?* Eliphaz implies that Job's suffering is because of his self-indulgence as a prosperous man. So, how will Job respond to this?

INSIGHT

Speaking of progressive revelation, I have an application. God unfolded the truths of the Bible over a vast amount of time, from Job's and Moses' day to the original apostles' deaths around A.D. 90. As we read through the Bible, we can see the early flashes of spiritual truths and watch them unfold across numerous books. But isn't that also like our lives as Christians? When we first come to the Lord, we understand very little, only the basics of life with Jesus and what's to come. As we grow in our relationship with Him, we gain more and more revelation (understanding) from His word. So, in a sense, our whole lives are a progressive revelation, a gradual unfolding of God's spiritual truths as we mature as born-again children of God to more mature saints. And no matter where you're at with the Lord, no matter how long you're walked with Him, there's always more to see, understand, and learn.

May 20 : Scriptures Job 16-18

SUMMARY

In chapter 16, how will Job respond to Eliphaz's insinuation that Job's troubles were self-inflicted due to his rash words, defiance of God, proud behavior, and self-indulgence brought on by his prosperity? Not lightly or well.

Job calls them "miserable comforters." If the tables were turned, Job could also speak "words of wind" (a slam at Eliphaz, 15:2). He could pile up words and mock them. But he wouldn't. He would encourage and console them rather than blame them for his suffering. Right, blame the sufferer, guys!

Job replies that his suffering hasn't changed regardless of how he talks (16:4). Job paints God as his enemy by how the Lord treats him (16:9). God has allowed Job's enemies to sneer at and slap him. Everything was going well until the Lord smashed his world. God keeps smashing Job, and he's reduced to wearing a sackcloth (indicating sorrow) and burying his face in the dust in intense prayer even though he's blameless and his prayer is sincere (16:17). Job cries out to the earth to not cover his blood, i.e., "don't let his cry for vindication be forgotten." He cries out, wishing he had an arbitrator on his side to plead his case before God because his death is approaching.

Chapter 17 opens with Job lamenting his hopeless situation as his spirit and body are about to be extinguished, and he's surrounded by mockers (his friends). Job appeals to God to "bail him out" of his situation because his friends are useless to help him (17:4). But instead, God has made him an object of ridicule. His body is weakening, and grief has overwhelmed his eyes. However, Job invites his "miserable comforters" to take another run at him, even though there's not one truly wise person among them.

In the meantime, everything is shattered, according to Job. The NIV Study Bible helps with the problematic 17:12, "Zophar had promised that Job's repentance would turn his darkness into light (11:17). Job now makes a parody on such advice (17:12-16)." There's no light for him in the grave. Will hope follow him there? No. In the ancient world, people believed the place of the dead, Sheol, was a dark waterless place where disembodied spirits remained entombed. Not very uplifting, huh?

And now, in chapter 18, it's Bildad's turn to depress, I mean "help" Job. Bildad resents how Job has been treating their reasoning and wisdom. Bildad says its Job's anger tearing at him, not God (18:4). Why should God move mountains to meet Job's demands? In short, Bildad refutes Job's argument that the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer.

Bildad's speech is poetic and swims with pictures describing the wicked person's dangers and sufferings in life and ultimate loss with their demise. No one remembers them, there are none to survive them, and everyone is appalled and horrified at their fate. "Surely such are the dwellings of the ungodly, and such is the place of him who knows not (recognizes not and honors not) God" (18:21). Yes, Bildad suggests that Job is responsible for his state and not anyone else, much less God.

INSIGHT

I can't tell you how often my kids told me what a bully I was when they were growing up. When I said, "No," I was a meany. I WAS THE BAD GUY when I didn't let them have something or go somewhere or disciplined them for acting wrongly. But I knew what was coming eventually. And it happened.

I received a call from one of them telling me how much they appreciated what their mother and I did for them and that they apologized for making life more difficult for us. That call is often welcomed because it shows us they've reached a level of maturity that helps them understand us. The same thing is true with God. At first, we think He's a "meany" for denying us the things He knows will harm us or not help us. We don't like His discipline despite the fact it's the discipline that proves we're His children (Hebrews 12:7-8). So hang in there. As you grow with the Lord, you'll get those "A-ha!" moments when you see something about God that you didn't know before as well as something about yourself. You may find yourself praying a *mea culpa* to Jesus, like the call I received from my kid.

May 21 : Scriptures Job 19-21

SUMMARY

And now, in chapter 19, Job replies to Bildad and his accusation that Job is suffering because he is an unjust, wicked person who brought it on himself.

Job objects to the torrent of assumptions from his “friends” that his suffering is caused by personal sin. Yes, people sin, but in Job’s case, he claims if he did, it was unintentional (19:4). However, if they really want to show their superior understanding of Job’s situation, Job suggests they lay the blame at God’s feet and not his (19:5-6). He describes how God has ignored him while heaping troubles upon him (19:7-12) to the point of family and friends abandoning him (19:13-19). All that’s left for Job is his rapidly emaciating and pustule-ridden body, which he has barely survived “by the skin of my teeth” (19:20). Now that’s a close margin! (Here’s that phrase I alluded to that was used by Thornton Wilder for his award-winning play, *The Skin of our Teeth*.)

Job appeals for them to back off and show mercy because “God’s hand has struck” him. And yet, Job sounds a remarkable note of trust in the Lord. He desires his words to be recorded, even in stone and lead. Why? Because in the long run, when all is laid bare at the end, Job’s defense of his character and integrity will remain, and so will he. Though his body is gone through death, Job is confident he will see the Lord, not as a stranger, but as one who knows God (19:27). Job’s pronouncement is a great declaration of faith in the heart of intense suffering when all hope is gone.

As a final word to his friends in his reply, Job warns them that they will be punished for their ill-conceived words, misapplied wisdom, and lack of compassion.

In chapter 20, we read Zophar’s speech as the culmination of the 2nd cycle of speeches. He’s a little ticked off because of Job’s rebuke, and his “understanding makes me reply” (19:2-3). He goes on to describe the hopeless plight of the wicked person. According to time-tested wisdom (20:4), the wicked may have joy and happiness, but it’s short-lived as they will be. The wicked person enjoys their wickedness, but it poisons their lives. God will take the good things of life from them and attack them. “At the height of his success distress will come to him; the full weight of misery will crush him” (20:22) and “This is the wicked person’s lot from God, the inheritance God ordained for him” (20:29). Now, to whom do you think Zophar is referring?

Yes – Job. Job rebuts Zophar’s accusation that his condition proves he is a wicked person. He points out that Zophar blames a man (21:4), but that’s not Job’s complaint. Job tells

Zophar to look at his condition and how terrible it is (21:5-6). And counter to Zophar's argument, some of the wicked *do* live long lives (21:7). Job counters Zophar's argument by describing just the opposite. The wicked prosper, their children are established, and their homes are secure. They flourish and die in peace (unlike righteous Job), yet they arrogantly push God away, refusing to serve or talk to Him. Job agrees that prosperity comes from God (as he was prosperous), but he's in no way like the wicked (21:16).

Contrary to Zophar's "proofs" identifying a wicked person, Job argues that despite how the wicked treat God, the Lord doesn't seem to go after them. God lets them live and even escape judgment (21:17-18). I like how the HCSB puts it, "As Job saw it, the wicked person escapes judgment while he lives. Job's remarks were born of pessimism because of his suffering, and they do not accurately reflect biblical teaching (Psalm 1:4; Daniel 2:35; Zephaniah 2:1-2)." So, where does God's judgment on the wicked go? Job says it lands on the wicked person's children (21:19). He says God should go after the wicked here and now. But who can teach God anything? One person is healthy, wealthy, and at ease. Another person is poverty-stricken and "bitter in spirit." Yet both will decay in the grave. In other words, Job says his friends' argument is bogus because goodness and wickedness aren't determined by outward indicators and "life's fortunes" (HCSB). As Job reaches the end of his speech, he calls out his friends for making these sweeping statements about the wicked as obvious references to him. "You had all this, Job, and you lost it all. According to conventional wisdom, you must be a real wicked guy." Job throws it back into their faces by showing them their wrong assertions don't apply to him. The wicked have good lives, and even in death, they're at peace (21:33).

INSIGHT

This life is but a moment in the entire picture of human history. So many people run themselves ragged trying to leave some sort of legacy. My social media feed swarms with young people trying to get other people's attention. The level of apparent narcissism is overwhelming. Some of them are willing to do the most outrageous things to prove themselves to the world; yet, they will come to nothing in the grave, just like the rest of us. It only takes time; the older I get, the faster time seems to fly. But when all is stripped away, like Job's assets, friends, family, and his last remaining possession, his body, he's still confident of his standing with the Lord. It's because he worked on that relationship rather than the fleeting things of life. We may survive for now *by the skin of our teeth*, but pretty soon, we'll be face to face with the Lord. Will you look upon Him as a stranger or a friend?