Job

and the justice of God



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Version 2026-11-26

RIVERVIEW CHURCH

Prepared by Allen Browne for Riverview Church, 2026.

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1 Introducing the drama of Job (Job 1–2)

If God is the heavenly sovereign in charge of life on earth, why is there so much injustice? Why do bad people get away with evil? And why do good people suffer?

What is the meaning of suffering? Is God trying to teach us a lesson? Does it mean we've got off track somewhere? Do we suffer for no reason sometimes? Where is God when everything goes wrong?



The Book of Job presents us with two truths that seem incompatible: a) God is just, and b) Job is suffering in ways that make no sense, that feel unjust. Job's friends all tell him that the problem cannot be with God so it must be with him. Job refuses to roll over and play guilty. He wants to know why God is picking on him.

What do you do when tough experiences challenge your faith?
What do you say to the suffering person?

Before we open the Book of Job and listen to his experiences, can you relate to these questions? Have you experienced suffering that didn't make sense? Relational breakdown? Health issues? Financial pain? Have you been abused or had people taking advantage of you? If you're comfortable to share it, what's is your experience?

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The questions raised in this ancient Hebrew book of wisdom are as relevant today as the day they were penned.

1.1 What's in the Book of Job?

Dramatic monologues are the core of the Book, as Job and his conversation partners try to find meaning in Job's suffering (Job 3–42). Before their discussions begins, a narrator introduces us to Job and gives us the background to understand his pain (Job 1–2). At the end of the book, the narrator returns to wrap it up (Job 42:7-17).

In the monologues, Job speaks, and his friends respond. That cycle is repeated three times (Job 3–31). Then a new player (Elihu) makes three further attempts to answer Job's questions (Job 32–37). Ultimately, the LORD explains that Job has no way to comprehend what God is doing (Job 38–42). Job does not receive an answer as to why he was suffering. God's presence is what satisfied him.

To see how the story fits together, check out this 11-minute video from Tim Mackie and the team at The Bible Project: https://bibleproject.com/videos/job/

Here's an **outline** of the Book of Job:

Lifting the curtain: the narrator sets the scene (chapters 1–2)

First cycle of speeches (chapters 3–11):

Job (chapter 3) and Eliphaz (chapters 4–5)
Job (chapters 6–7) and Bildad (chapter 8)
Job (chapters 9–10) and Zophar (chapter 11)

Second cycle of speeches (chapters 12–20)

Job (chapters 12–14) and Eliphaz (chapter 15)
Job (chapters 16–17) and Bildad (chapter 18)
Job (chapters 19) and Zophar (chapter 20)

Third cycle of speeches (chapters 21–31)

Job (chapter 21) and Eliphaz (chapter 22)
Job (chapters 23–24) and Bildad (chapter 25)
Job (chapter 26), Job (chapters 27–28) and Job again (chapters 29–31)

Elihu's speeches (chapters 32–37)

Elihu (chapters 32–33)
Elihu (chapter 34)
Elihu again (chapters 35–37)

The LORD and Job (chapters 38–42)

The LORD (chapters 38–40:2) and Job (chapter 40:3-5)
The LORD (chapters 40:6–41) and Job (chapter 42:1-6)

Closing the curtain: the narrator wraps it up (chapter 42:7-17)

Tonight we cover the introductory chapters where the narrator provides the background for the dramatic poetic speeches of the main drama. Over the next three weeks, we'll hear three cycles of speeches where Job and friends try to make sense of his sufferings. In our fifth week we'll listen to Elihu's views, and hear how the LORD responds to Job. In our final week, we'll consider how the Messiah's sufferings provide fresh insight into how divine justice operates.

Our schedule:

Week	Topic	Chapters
1	Introducing the drama of Job	Job 1–2
2	First round of speeches	Job 3–11
3	Second round of speeches	Job 12–20
4	Third round of speeches	Job 21–31
5	Elihu, and the LORD	Job 32–41
6	Restorative justice	Job 42

1.2 Who was Job? (1:1-5)

The book opens with the narrator introducing us to the main character:

> **Job 1:1-3 (NIV)**
> 1 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man
> was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. 2 He had
> seven sons and three daughters, 3 and he owned seven thousand sheep,
> three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred
> donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man
> among all the people of the East.

Hold on, narrator, you haven't told us what we expect to hear in a Hebrew story!

Who was Job? What tribe is he from? Who was his father? Is he not even Jewish?
Where was Job? *The land of Uz* is an "uncertain location."[1] Somewhere to the *east*?
When was Job? Is this before Abraham, or after the exile? Why no background?

No family. An uncertain location. No historical setting. This is not how the Hebrews wrote about historical people. For example:

- In the Torah, **Abraham** is introduced through his ancestors, positioning him precisely within his family (Genesis 11:10-32).
- In the Prophets, **Isaiah** is introduced as the son of Amoz, in a geographical setting (Judah and Jerusalem) and a historical period (Isaiah 1:1).
  Likewise, **Jeremiah** is introduced by his father (Hilkiah) and tribe (Levi), in a geographical setting, and a historical period (Jeremiah 1:1-3).
- In the Writings, even a short book like **Ruth** begins by identifying Naomi's deceased husband, their tribe, where they came from, and where they went (Ruth 1:1-5), closing with the historical connection to King David (4:18-22).

By contrast, Job as no ancestors. He's godly, but not Jewish. He's *the greatest man among all the people of the East*—like, the greatest person you never heard of.

Job is not introduced to us as a historical person. He's a character in a play, a drama where the characters wrestle with the problem of undeserved suffering. This is not history (like the preceding books). This is **wisdom literature**.

The Bible refers to literary figures as well as literal people. We've *heard of the patience of Job*, James says (5:11). Not even a blameless and upright person like Job could save Jerusalem from Babylon's invasion, says Ezekiel (14:13, 20). Figures from other literature appear in the Bible too, such as when Job speaks of God *cutting Rahab to pieces* (25:12). In the legends of Ugarit and Mesopotamia, Rahab was the chaos monster from the sea whose role was to overwhelm the world with disorder. [2]

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[1] David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Word, Inc., 1989), 9.
"Uz" could refer to several places, including Edom (Lamentations 4:21).

[2] The United Bible Societies suggests translating Job 26:12b as "because he is intelligent he destroyed the sea animal called Rahab" or "he is wise, and because of this he was able to kill the sea monster Rahab." — William David Reyburn, *A Handbook on the Book of Job* (United Bible Societies, 1992), 478.

Hebrew wisdom literature called God's people to live by the wisdom of the Torah. Examples:

- A healthy fear of their heavenly sovereign is foundational for knowing what's good. Not respecting the LORD'S instruction is folly (**Proverbs 1:7**).
- The Torah of YHWH anchors and sustains the wise person, while the wicked are as dry and unstable as tumbleweeds (**Psalm 1**).

The Torah promised blessing for those who obeyed, and cursing for those who did not (Deuteronomy 28). The wisdom literature applies those promises to daily life, e.g.:

> **Proverbs 3:33** *The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked,*
> *but he blesses the home of the righteous.*
>
> **Proverbs 28:14** *Blessed is the one who always trembles before God,*
> *but whoever hardens their heart falls into trouble.*

At a general level, this principle of retribution seems to hold true. You reap what you sow, whether that's good seed, rubbish seed, or no seed. Cheat on your friends and you undermine your friendships.

But at the individual level, retribution is less certain. Sometimes the righteous suffer (Psalm 42:10). Sometimes the wicked prosper (Psalm 73:3). Hebrew wisdom literature recognizes unjust suffering as part of what's wrong with life under the sun:

> **Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 (NIV)**
>
> [1] Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under
> the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed— and they have no comforter;
> power was on the side of their oppressors— and they have no comforter.
>
> [2] And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than
> the living, who are still alive. [3] But better than both is the one who has
> never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.

What is God up to in a world of such tragedy and pain? An author from our own time calls this *the question that never goes away*.[3]

Since Job was not Jewish, you might wonder whether others in the ancient world also wrote about the injustice of life. Indeed, they did. Many of their writings have survived. Examples:[4]

a) *Man and His God*: A young man remains faithful to his god even though he became sick for no obvious reason. (Sumerian, early second millennium BC.)
b) *The Sufferer's Salvation*: A Job-like figure keeps praising Marduk even though his friends accuse him of wrong-doing (Akkadian, 14th century BC.).

[3] Philip Yancey, *The Question that Never Goes Away: What is God up to in a world of such tragedy and pain?* (Hodder & Stoughton,2013).

[4] J. E. Hartley, "Job 2: Ancient Near Eastern Background," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, (Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 346–361.

c) *Dialogue Between a Man and his God*: A man concludes he must have done wrong because of the suffering he's experiencing. (Akkadian, 17th century BC.)
d) *The Babylonian Theodicy*: A sufferer and his friend explore whether unjust suffering undermines justice and honour in society. (Around 1000 BC.)
e) *The Admonitions of Ipuwer*. Explores the social instability that occurs when people don't get what they deserve. (Egyptian.)
f) *A Dispute over Suicide*. Egyptian text discussing whether death is an option.
g) *The Complaints of Khakheperrē-sonb*. An Egyptian lament says, "Right is cast outside. Wrong is in the council hall. The plans of the gods are violated. Their ordinances neglected. The land is in turmoil. Mourning is in everyplace."

People across the Ancient Near East expected the gods to give people what they deserved. And they all observed that this is not how life always works.

Remember, Job is non-Jewish. This book was not challenging whether the LORD was doing right in his implementation of the Sinai covenant. It's a broader question about how God is running the world when our experience is that life is not always fair.

While Job was not Jewish, he was religious:

> **Job 1:4-5 (NIV)**
>
> 4 His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

Some commentators situate Job in the time of Genesis when Abraham offered his own sacrifices. In later centuries, only priests were permitted to offer sacrifices, and only at the temple. The problem with that assumption is that Job wasn't Jewish.

Trying to keep the gods happy is how people in most places treat religion. In some countries today, you still see people setting out offerings so the gods will bless them and not be angry with them. Job was fearful that God may take away his wealth if his family offended God. That's what he says in 3:25. Religion is often based on fear.

Because Job is not Jewish, this book is relevant for suffering people in all cultures, all eras, and all religions. People expect the gods to give them what they deserve. This **retribution principle** is foundational to most faiths. Hinduism says if you don't receive what you deserve in this life, you'll get it in the next one (reincarnation). Buddhism helps the sufferer to disassociate from the pain of the world by finding solace through meditation (enlightenment). Christianity teaches the way of the cross: Jesus embraced the suffering to bear away the sin of the world, and calls us to follow him by taking up our crosses also. We'll talk more about that in our final week.

The brilliance of the Book of Job is that it wrestles with theodicy (whether God is just) without ever sinking to mere armchair theology. The suffering person is right there in your face, every moment, in every conversation. Job's presence forces us to care about how our beliefs affect the suffering person.

1.3 What happened to Job? (1:6-12)

The narrator gives us some background information that Job himself does not know. Job's sufferings are part of something more than what happens on earth. A council that meets in the heavenly realm makes decisions that affect life on earth.[5]

> **Job 1:6-7 (ESV)**
>
> 6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present
> themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.
> 7 The LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?"
> Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth,
> and from walking up and down on it."

Remember Job is not Jewish, though the author of the story is. The people of the ancient world believed that each nation had its own god(s), and these gods met in a *great assembly* from time to time to sort out the affairs of the earth. The chief god chaired the assembly. The lesser gods were sometimes called *the sons of the gods*.

The great assembly was essentially a cosmic parliament. In Hebrew thought, the LORD is in charge of all nations: *The LORD is the great king above all gods* (Psalm 95:3). *God presides over the great assembly; he renders judgement among the "gods"* (Psalm 82:1). The LORD chairs the great assembly when the sons of God (the other spiritual beings) present themselves before the heavenly throne to account for what they've been doing.

In this group is a figure called *ha śaṭan*. *Ha* means "the," and *śaṭan* means "adversary," so the Hebrew phrase translates to "the adversary." In later times (second century BC), *śaṭan* became a proper name for the spiritual power that opposed God's people: Satan. But Hebrew did not use "the" with a proper noun. They did not say "the David" or "the Job," so it's very unlikely that they would say "the Satan." *Ha śaṭan* should be translated "the adversary" or "the opponent."

In the framework of the heavenly council, the adversary was something like the opposition in our parliamentary system today.[6] The role is to present a contrary point of view. Since the royal court also served as a court of justice, the role of *ha-satan* was something like a prosecutor, the one who brings the case against God's people.

[5] I'm using the English Standard Version here because it's closer to the Hebrew than the NIV.

[6] John Goldingay, *Job for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone (SPCK, 2013), 12.

For example, in Zechariah 3:1, *ha-satan* was prosecuting the case that the Jews were unfit to be God's people after the exile, since the person who should have been maintaining the covenant relationship was himself dressed in filthy rags (since no cleansing rituals had been performed since the temple fell 70 years earlier). *Ha-satan* is "the accuser" (as in Revelation 12:10).

So here, in the heavenly court, when the LORD comments on the faithfulness of Job, the accuser responds with an accusation:

> **Job 1:8-12 (ESV)**
>
> 8 And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job,
> that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man,
> who fears God and turns away from evil?" 9 Then Satan answered the
> LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a
> hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You
> have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased
> in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he
> will curse you to your face." 12 And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all
> that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your
> hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

The accusation is that Job only serves God for the benefits he receives. God has blessed Job for his obedience, but what if Job was suffering? Would he still serve God? Or would he turn away from God if the benefits dried up?

"Okay, let's find out," the heavenly court says. The adversary receives permission to strip Job of all his benefits, but not to harm him.

Bible commentator Gerald Wilson puts it like this:

> The fact that God affirms Job's righteousness directly to *the* Satan, *the Accuser*, the very one responsible for testing the validity of human protestations of faith, has the effect of issuing a challenge that almost cannot go unaccepted. What is an Accuser expected to do, but to *accuse* and propose the most strenuous test of faith possible. That is exactly what *the* Satan does.
>
> **1:9** / *The satan* responds to God's strong affirmation of Job's outstanding character by proposing a test of Job's apparently impeccable faith. Job's piety is suspect, says *the* Satan, because God has always given him protection and abundant blessing. Job does not fear God **for nothing** but because he "gets the goods."[7]

[7] Gerald H. Wilson, *Job*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Baker Books, 2012), 23.

1.4 Job's tragic day (1:13-22)

In the drama, Job loses everything of value in a single day:

> **Job 1:13-19 (NIV)**
>
> 13 One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking
> wine at the oldest brother's house, 14 a messenger came to Job and said,
> "The **oxen** were ploughing and the **donkeys** were grazing nearby, 15 and
> the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to
> the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"
>
> 16 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said,
> "The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up **the sheep** and the
> servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"
>
> 17 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The
> Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your **camels**
> and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am
> the only one who has escaped to tell you!"
>
> 18 While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said,
> "Your **sons and daughters** were feasting and drinking wine at the
> oldest brother's house, 19 when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from
> the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them
> and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

Everything Job has worked for is taken from him: his assets and his offspring. He is no longer *the greatest man among all the people of the East* (verse 5). He was reduced to being a no one with nothing. How does he respond?

> **Job 1:20-22 (NIV)**
>
> 20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head.
> Then he fell to the ground in worship 21 and said:
>
> "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart.
> The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
> may the name of the LORD be praised."
>
> 22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Remember, Job himself does not know about the meeting of the heavenly court and the test he is enduring. For him, there is no logic in what just happened. His booming business was taken from him for no reason.

Something in our hearts reacts when life isn't fair. We expect those who do good to be rewarded and those who do wrong to suffer. But this retribution principle raises the question of whether people do good only for the benefits. John Walton says:

> The Challenger's question, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (1:9)
> centres on Job's motivation for serving God and suggests that God's
> treatment of the righteous is the incentive for righteous conduct. The

> policy under scrutiny is known today as the **Retribution Principle** (RP): **the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer**. …
>
> The Challenger's claim is therefore that God's policy of rewarding the righteous actually undermines, if not subverts, the very righteousness that he seeks to foster. … The RP has the potential of turning would-be righteous people into "benefit mercenaries" as it trains them to ask, "What's in it for me?" [8]

Job does not know why everything went bust, but he *did not charge God with wrongdoing* (verse 22). God is not doing wrong, Job says, even when the justice of retribution is not functioning. That's astounding, an important insight for this book.

1.5 The test continues (Job 2)

If we're to cover another 41 chapters, we'll need to speed up now.

Has God's case been proven? Is God's confidence in Job been justified? The accuser is not satisfied. If Job suffered physically, would he give up on God? The court gives the adversary permission to afflict Job with painful sores all over his body (2:7).

Job is a terrible sight as he sits in the dust, scratching his itching sores with a piece of broken pottery. He's completely shamed. His wife believes God has it in for him. Choosing her words very carefully, she encourages Job to disassociate himself from the unjust heavenly tyrant who causes good people to suffer (2:9).

But not everyone has given up on Job. Three friends come to care for him:

> **Job 2:11-13 (NIV)**
>
> 11 When Job's three friends, **Eliphaz** the Temanite, **Bildad** the Shuhite and **Zophar** the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. 12 When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. 13 Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

There are no words for the loss Job was feeling. Nothing they could say would make a difference to Job's suffering. Have you ever waited in silence with someone for a whole week? They waited until Job was ready to talk. Don't be quick to speak.

The greatest gift you can give a suffering person is your presence.
As we'll see later (Job 38–42), presence trumps retribution.

[8] John H. Walton and Kelly Lemon Vizcaino, *NIV Application Commentary: Job* (Zondervan, 2012), 21.

1.6 Conclusion

What are your experiences with suffering? Are you okay with the narrator lifting the curtain on the nature of suffering, especially undeserved suffering?

Next week, the drama begins. In Job 3–11 we hear the first round of discussion as Job and his friends struggle to understand why Job is being treated like this.

Further reading

John Walton summarizes the purpose of the Book of Job:

> In summary, then, the purpose of this book is to explore God's policies with regard to suffering in the world, especially by the righteous or the innocent. In the process it seeks to revolutionize our thinking about God and the way that he runs the world. Most importantly, the book shifts our attention from the idea that God's justice (represented in the "retribution principle") is foundational to the operation of the world to the alternative that God's wisdom is the more appropriate foundation. It does not offer a reason for suffering and does not try to defend God's justice. It does not answer the "why" question that we are so prone to ask when things go wrong. Instead, we are to trust God's wisdom and, in the process, to conclude by faith that he is also just.[9]

John Goldingay explains Satan's accusation, "Does Job serve God for nothing?":

> The adversary's suggestion is that the relationship between God and Job may be more like a contract than a covenant. Okay, Job is a man of unequalled integrity, straightness, respect for God, and discipline in avoiding evil. But he is also a man of unequalled prosperity. Are these two facts linked in an unhealthy way? Is Job committed to God only because of what he gets out of it? [10]

Gerald Wilson explains the phrases "the sons of God" and "ha satan":

> The NIV's translation of *bene haʾelohim* as **angels** (generally Heb. *malʾak*) is unusual. These are better understood as the "children of God," or divine beings who carry out the will and purposes of Yahweh, the God of Israel.
>
> **1:7** … The NIV has chosen (probably for theological reasons) to translate the Hebrew *hassatan* as the name Satan rather than as the title that the presence of the definite article (*ha*) suggests—"*the* Accuser." [11]

[9] John H. Walton and Kelly Lemon Vizcaino, *NIV Application Commentary: Job*, (Zondervan, 2012), 22.

[10] John Goldingay, *Job for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone (SPCK, 2013), 13–14.

[11] Gerald H. Wilson, *Job*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Baker Books, 2012), 22.

2 The first round (Job 3–11)

The narrator introduced us to Job as an upright person who was being tested by the heavenly court. The question was: would Job remain faithful to God even if there were no advantages to doing so? Everything was taken from him: his business, his children, and finally his health.

The main drama now begins as we listen to Job's expressions of grief and loss. Life makes no sense anymore. He doesn't give up on God, but he can't understand what God is doing to him.

Three friends come to support him in his loss, but they're disturbed by Job's insistence that he doesn't deserve what God has given him. They try to defend the justice of God, saying that God cannot be wrong so the fault must be with Job.

Any questions before we being listening to their wisdom discussions?

2.1 Job: I'm in anguish (chapter 3)

Before we look at the content of the dramatic exchanges between Job and friends, note how their words are presented in **poetic** form. Today's translations divide the words into lines, like the Psalms. The lines don't rhyme like English poetry. In Hebrew poetry, it's the meaning of the lines that rhyme. What's expressed in one line is expressed in a parallel way in the next line.

For example, Job says:

> **Job 3:11 (NIV)**
>
> 11 "Why did I not perish at birth,
> and die as I came from the womb?"

The two lines express the same truth in parallel ways. What's the point of life if everything Job has worked for is gone? Wouldn't it be better if he'd never been born rather than all these years that ended up nowhere.

Parallelism helps us to get the message by expressing the same truth another way:

> *Hebrew parallelism really helps us understand the text;*
> *expressing the meaning another way clarifies what's being said.*

(Did you see what we did there?)

Job 3:3-10 is very similar to Jeremiah 20:14-18. Then Job continues his lament:

> **Job 3:20-26 (NIV)**
>
> 20 "Why is light given to those in misery,
> and life to the bitter of soul,
> 21 to those who long for death that does not come,
> who search for it more than for hidden treasure,

22 who are filled with gladness
and rejoice when they reach the grave?
23 Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?
24 For sighing has become my daily food;
my groans pour out like water.
25 What I feared has come upon me;
what I dreaded has happened to me.
26 I have no peace, no quietness;
I have no rest, but only turmoil."

Can you understand Job's grief? Are you okay with listening to someone who feels their life is meaningless? In some of the Babylonian tales, the friends rejected the person who had lost everything. Sitting with them and hearing their sorrow with empathy is so valuable for the grieving person.

Job asks, ***"Why?"*** (verses 11, 12, 16, 20, 23). When suffering seems senseless, we ask why. Why was my child taken from me? Why did that fraudster ruin my business? What did I do to deserve this?

Don't answer that question. Just be present and listen.

Some interpreters use verse 25 to answer Job. When Job said, *"What I feared has come upon me,"* they say, "Ah, there's the negative confession! Job's fear opened the door for the devil to take everything from him." They just made it Job's fault!

That's bad counselling: imposing your opinion on a suffering person instead of hearing them. It's also bad theology. It's what Job's friends did: blaming Job for his sufferings. Make it Job's fault and you'll have God opposing your theology, declaring, *"You have not spoken the truth about me"* (42:7).

2.2 Eliphaz: God can't be wrong (chapters 4–5)

First to respond to Job is Eliphaz (pronounced *El'i-faz*). He's from Teman, an Edomite town legendary for its wisdom (Jeremiah 49:7). Eliphaz is convinced the world is just, that God ensures people get what they deserve:

Job 4:7-9 (NIV)

7 "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished?
Where were the upright ever destroyed?
8 As I have observed, those who plough evil
and those who sow trouble reap it.
9 At the breath of God they perish;
at the blast of his anger they are no more."

Eliphaz claims to have prophetic insight to confirm his belief that God is always right, so the problem must be with us when things go wrong:

Job 4:12-17 (NIV)

12 "A word was secretly brought to me, my ears caught a whisper of it.
13 Amid disquieting dreams in the night, when deep sleep falls on people,
14 fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shake.
15 A spirit glided past my face, and the hair on my body stood on end.
16 It stopped, but I could not tell what it was.
A form stood before my eyes, and I heard a hushed voice:
17 *'Can a mortal be more righteous than God?*
Can even a strong man be more pure than his Maker?'"

This spirit affirmed the retribution principle for Eliphaz. Anyone who claims to be more righteous than God is fooling themselves. Since God cannot be wrong, Job's sufferings must be the result of wrongdoing on his part. Job must accept that God is correcting him, even if he doesn't know what he's done wrong, Eliphaz says:

Job 5:17-27 (NIV)

17 "Blessed is the one whom God corrects;
so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.
18 For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures,
but his hands also heal.
19 From six calamities he will rescue you;
in seven no harm will touch you.
20 In famine he will deliver you from death,
and in battle from the stroke of the sword.
21 You will be protected from the lash of the tongue,
and need not fear when destruction comes.
22 You will laugh at destruction and famine,
and need not fear the wild animals.
23 For you will have a covenant with the stones of the field,
and the wild animals will be at peace with you.
24 You will know that your tent is secure;
you will take stock of your property and find nothing missing.
25 You will know that your children will be many,
and your descendants like the grass of the earth.
26 You will come to the grave in full vigour,
like sheaves gathered in season.
27 "We have examined this, and it is true.
So hear it and apply it to yourself."

What do you make of those outstanding promises? Ask an AI chatbot to give you some Bible verses on divine protection and it may direct you to this passage. But is Eliphaz speaking the truth?

This is not Job's experience. Job did not *take stock of his property and find nothing missing* (verse 24). Job's *children* are no longer *many* (verse 25).

Eliphaz took a truth (God is more righteous than mortals), and twisted it into an accusation against Job. Eliphaz has joined the accuser in saying Job is not *blameless and upright* as God declared him to be (Job 1:8). At the end of the book, the LORD says to Eliphaz, *"I am angry with you and your two friends because you have not spoken the truth about me as my servant Job has"* (Job 42:7).

It's all too easy to twist a prophetic message into an accusation that's contrary to God's heart. *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world* (1 John 4:1).

Can you think of examples of pious people condemning those around them? Did Jesus face that from Pharisees? Did the church of the Middle Ages focus on people's guilt? Have Reformation churches continued that tradition? Do evangelists manipulate people's feelings of guilt to get decisions? Eliphaz is still among us.[12]

2.3 Job: Why is God opposing me? (chapters 6–7)

Condemnation by Eliphaz only adds to Job's suffering. He feels like God has destroyed his life, so it would be better if God took his life too:

Job 6:4, 8-9 (NIV)

4 "The arrows of the Almighty are in me,
my spirit drinks in their poison;
God's terrors are marshalled against me. …

8 "Oh, that I might have my request,
that God would grant what I hope for,
9 that God would be willing to crush me,
to let loose his hand and cut off my life!"

Job so desperately needs friends to demonstrate God's heart for him. But his friends are so bent on defending God that they condemn Job:

Job 6:14-29 (NIV)

14 "Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend
forsakes the fear of the Almighty.
15 But my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams …
17 that stop flowing in the dry season …
21 You too have proved to be of no help;
you see something dreadful and are afraid. …
28 "But now be so kind as to look at me. Would I lie to your face?
29 Relent, do not be unjust; reconsider, for my integrity is at stake."

They're no longer looking at Job. He's a difficult sight: "My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering" (7:5).

[12] This does not mean that everything Job's friends said was wrong, e.g. 1 Corinthians 3:19 quotes Job 3:13.

Job refuses to sit in silence. Words are all he has to process his grief:

Job 7:11, 15-16 (NIV)

11 "Therefore I will not keep silent;
I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit,
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. …
15 I prefer strangling and death,
rather than this body of mine.
16 I despise my life; I would not live forever.
Let me alone; my days have no meaning."

But Job has not given up on God. His expressions of anguish are prayers to God:

Job 7:17-21 (NIV)

17 "What is mankind that you make so much of them,
that you give them so much attention,
18 that you examine them every morning
and test them every moment?
19 Will you never look away from me,
or let me alone even for an instant?
20 If I have sinned, what have I done to you,
you who sees everything we do?
Why have you made me your target?
Have I become a burden to you?
21 Why do you not pardon my offenses
and forgive my sins?
For I will soon lie down in the dust;
you will search for me, but I will be no more."

2.4 Bildad: retribution theology (chapter 8)

Bildad is also non-Jewish. We have no idea where a *Shuhite* is from. Presumably it's somewhere to the east, since that's where Job was.

Job 8:1-3 (NIV)

1 Then Bildad the Shuhite replied:

2 "How long will you say such things?
Your words are a blustering wind.
3 Does God pervert justice?
Does the Almighty pervert what is right?

Bildad says God would never *pervert justice* (verse 3). By "justice" he means retribution (giving people what they deserve). Bildad believes it is Job who is perverting justice by claiming his sufferings are undeserved. If God is punishing him, Job must be guilty. If the house collapsed and killed his children (1:19), they deserved to die:

Job 8:4-6 (NIV)

4 When your children sinned against him,
he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.
5 But if you will seek God earnestly
and plead with the Almighty,
6 if you are pure and upright,
even now he will rouse himself on your behalf
and restore you to your prosperous state.

Bildad says Job must repent, for it must be sin that's causing his suffering. For Bildad, sticks and carrots (punishment and reward) are the tools God uses to enforce justice:

Job 8:20-22 (NIV)

20 "Surely God does not reject one who is blameless
or strengthen the hands of evildoers."
21 He will yet fill your mouth with laughter
and your lips with shouts of joy.
22 Your enemies will be clothed in shame,
and the tents of the wicked will be no more."

2.5 Job: How can I prove I'm not guilty? (chapters 9–10)

Job 9:1-3 (NIV)

1 Then Job replied:

2 "Indeed, I know that this is true.
But how can mere mortals prove their innocence before God?
3 Though they wished to dispute with him,
they could not answer him one time out of a thousand."

Job has no argument with the concept that bad behaviour generally leads to bad outcomes, but he does not believe that's an inviolable law. Job wants to know how an innocent sufferer could prove their innocence to God.

If you were wronged in the ancient world, you could bring your case to the ruling monarch. Solomon's wisdom to resolve injustice was legendary. In one famous case, two mothers claimed the same baby, and Solomon's judgement identified the true mother (1 Kings 3:16-28).

Job wants to present his case before the God who reigns in the heavenly court. If Job could prove he was suffering unjustly, God might bring an end to his suffering and allow Job to get on with his life again. This is the seed of an idea that grows as the Book of Job unfolds.

Job says:

Job 9:4-19 (NIV)

4 "His wisdom is profound, his power is vast.
Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? …
6 He shakes the earth from its place
and makes its pillars tremble. …
8 He alone stretches out the heavens
and treads on the waves of the sea.
9 He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the constellations of the south. …
11 When he passes me, I cannot see him;
when he goes by, I cannot perceive him.
12 If he snatches away, who can stop him?
Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?' …
14 "**How then can I dispute with him?**
How can I find words to argue with him?
15 Though I were innocent, I could not answer him;
I could only plead with my Judge for mercy. …
19 If it is a matter of strength, he is mighty!
And if it is a matter of justice, who can challenge him?"

Job acknowledges God's cosmic authority and power, in heaven and on earth. But that only makes it more difficult to prove the case that Job's suffering is undeserved.

Job yearns for an advocate to plead his case before God:

Job 9:32-35 (NIV)

32 "He is not a mere mortal like me that I might answer him,
that we might confront each other in court.
33 If only there were someone to **mediate** between us,
someone to bring us together,
34 someone to remove God's rod from me,
so that his terror would frighten me no more.
35 Then I would speak up without fear of him,
but as it now stands with me, I cannot.

As long as God does not release him from his suffering, Job feels his life is not worth living:

Job 10:1-2 (NIV)

1 "I loathe my very life;
therefore I will give free rein to my complaint
and speak out in the bitterness of my soul.
2 I say to God: Do not declare me guilty,
but tell me what charges you have against me."

Stage irony is when the audience knows something the player does not. Job does not know it, but the heavenly court has already ruled him to be *blameless and upright* (1:8).

Facing accusation from friends who believe God operates by the retribution principle, the innocent sufferer spends his life trying to prove his innocence:

Job 10:14-16 (NIV)

14 "If I sinned, you would be watching me
and would not let my offense go unpunished.
15 If I am guilty—woe to me!
Even if I am innocent, I cannot lift my head,
for I am full of shame and drowned in my affliction.
16 If I hold my head high, you stalk me like a lion
and again display your awesome power against me."

If this is the only life God has for him, Job doesn't want it:

Job 10:18 (NIV)

18 "Why then did you bring me out of the womb?
I wish I had died before any eye saw me."

2.6 Zophar: Just submit! (chapter 11)

Job's third friend steps up. We don't know where the town of Naamath is. Like Eliphaz and Bildad, Zophar believes that Job must be guilty if God is making him suffer:

Job 11:1-10 (NIV)

1 Then Zophar the Naamathite replied:

2 "Are all these words to go unanswered? Is this talker to be vindicated?
3 Will your idle talk reduce others to silence?
Will no one rebuke you when you mock?
4 You say to God, 'My beliefs are flawless and I am pure in your sight.'
5 Oh, how I wish that God would speak,
that he would open his lips against you
6 and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom,
for true wisdom has two sides.
Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin.
7 "Can you fathom the mysteries of God?
Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?
8 They are higher than the heavens above—what can you do?
They are deeper than the depths below—what can you know?
9 Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.
10 "If he comes along and confines you in prison
and convenes a court, who can oppose him?"

To Zophar, Job's words sound proud, as if he knows better than God. Job needs to stop struggling against God, and submit to God. God cannot be wrong.

Many religions call their adherents to **submit** to God. Christians sing, "All to Jesus I surrender." Rabbis call Israel to submit to "the yoke of the Torah."[13] Islam means "submission," submitting to the will of Allah.[14] For Buddhists, the way to peace is to stop struggling against the universe.

Zophar promises:

> **Job 11:13-15 (NIV)**
> 13 "Yet if you devote your heart to him
> and stretch out your hands to him,
> 14 if you put away the sin that is in your hand
> and allow no evil to dwell in your tent,
> 15 then, free of fault, you will lift up your face;
> you will stand firm and without fear."

I've heard sermons declaring Zophar's promise. There are books promoting his view. Is he right? Should Job follow Zophar's wisdom, submit to whatever God is doing, and give up on his attempt to present his case before God? What do you think?

2.7 Conclusion

We've listened to Job expressing anguish of soul and body. It's meaningless to live like this. Clearing his name before the heavenly throne is the only thing Job can think of that will change his fortunes.

On the other hand, Job's friends advise him to accept what God has given him. They all say Job must be wrong, because God cannot be:

- **Eliphaz**: Divine justice cannot be wrong; it must be you who is at fault.
- **Bildad**: God always gives people what they deserve (retribution theology).
- **Zophar**: Stop resisting God. Just submit.

Should Job give in, or should he keep fighting God? A less experienced person would probably give in at this point. That's what happens in one of the Babylonian wisdom stories where a younger man admits his guilt to end his misery, even though he does not know what he has done wrong. It says:

> He recounts the burdens he suffered to his lord,
> The young man expounds the misery he is suffering:
> "My Lord, I have debated with myself, and in my feelings
> […] of heart: **the wrong I did I do not know!** [15]

[13] "b. Sanh. 11:1, I.61.B" in *The Babylonian Talmud* translated by Jacob Neusner (Hendrickson, 2011), 16:505.

[14] "Islam" in *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

[15] "Dialogue Between a Man and his God" in William W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture* (Brill, 1997), 1:485.

Is that what Job should do? To hear what he actually does, come back next week for the second round of wisdom speeches between Job and his three friends (Job 12–20).

Further reading

John Hartley comments on what Job's three friends believe:

> Unfortunately, and obviously without realizing it, **Eliphaz** sides with the Satan against God in offering this counsel, for he seeks to motivate Job to serve God for the benefits that piety brings. … But should Job follow his advice he would fall into the trap the Satan has set. If Job is to find God, he will have to chart a new course, a route different from the one Eliphaz has laid out.[16]
>
> After renouncing Job's complaint that God is treating him unjustly, **Bildad** instructs Job about the certainty of double retribution. There are no exceptions to retribution. The blameless are always blessed by God and the wicked always punished. Any circumstances to the contrary are either illusory or momentary. This can be proved by the teaching of the fathers and by the patterns of nature. In Bildad's opinion it is unequivocally true that God does not pervert justice. He thus equates justice with double retribution.[17]
>
> **Zophar** has taken the final step in the logic of the doctrine of retribution, concluding that Job is suffering for some hidden sin. For him it means that Job's suffering is justly deserved. … There remains only one way for Job to escape his plight—the way of repentance. … If Job remains obstinate, he will experience the futile end that all the wicked experience.[18]

[16] John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the O.T. (Eerdmans, 1988), 129.

[17] John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the O.T. (Eerdmans, 1988), 164.

[18] John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the O.T. (Eerdmans, 1988), 204.

3 The second round (Job 12–20)

In the first round of discussion (Job 3–11), we heard Job wishing he was dead rather than suffering the humiliating shame of losing everything. What's the point of going on if everything you've achieved falls apart? Job wants his name cleared and his life restored.

His friends argue that Job must be at fault, for God gives everyone what they deserve (retribution theology). They promise that God will restore him if he admits his guilt.

Any questions before we explore their second round of attempts to make sense of Job's pain?

3.1 Job: You're making my suffering worse (chapters 12–14)

Job says their accusations only make his suffering worse:

Job 12:1-5 (NIV)

1 Then Job replied:

2 "Doubtless you are the only people who matter,
and wisdom will die with you!
3 But I have a mind as well as you; I am not inferior to you.
Who does not know all these things?
4 "I have become a laughingstock to my friends,
though I called on God and he answered—
a mere laughingstock, though righteous and blameless!
5 Those who are at ease have contempt for misfortune
as the fate of those whose feet are slipping."

All who care for people need to hear Job's words. When we come across as condescending, we make the suffering person feel inferior.

What do we mean when we sing, "God is good"? Is it, "God is good to me"? As we sing those songs, I wonder about the Jobs in our congregation, the people who would say, "Yes, I believe God is good, but I'm not experiencing God's goodness right now." The suffering is real when a partner has been unfaithful, when an employee defrauded you, or when you received a bad health diagnosis. Lament is the most common genre in the Psalms, though not in our songs today.

Job declares God's sovereignty:

Job 12:13-14 (NIV)

13 "To God belong wisdom and power;
counsel and understanding are his.
14 What he tears down cannot be rebuilt;
those he imprisons cannot be released."

Job also declares how harmful it is when his comforters set themselves up as judges instead of supporters:

Job 13:1-4 (NIV)

1 "My eyes have seen all this, my ears have heard and understood it.
2 What you know, I also know; I am not inferior to you.
3 But I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God.
4 You, however, smear me with lies;
you are worthless physicians, all of you!"

To defend God, they condemn Job:

Job 13:5-8 (NIV)

5 "If only you would be altogether silent! For you, that would be wisdom.
6 Hear now my argument; listen to the pleas of my lips.
7 Will you speak wickedly on God's behalf?
Will you speak deceitfully for him?
8 Will you show him partiality? Will you argue the case for God?"

When we set ourselves up as judges, we're usurping God's authority, trying to be a god by claiming the knowledge of good and evil in our own hands (Genesis 3:5). To pass judgement on another is to rebel against the true Judge (Romans 2:1-3).

That's the problem. In their attempt to defend God's honour, they condemn Job:

Job 13:9-15 (NIV)

9 "Would it turn out well if he examined you?
Could you deceive him as you might deceive a mortal?
10 He would surely call you to account if you secretly showed partiality.
11 Would not his splendour terrify you?
Would not the dread of him fall on you?
12 Your maxims are proverbs of ashes;
your defences are defences of clay.
13 "Keep silent and let me speak; then let come to me what may.
14 Why do I put myself in jeopardy and take my life in my hands?
15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him;
I will surely defend my ways to his face."

Job doesn't want them to judge his case. He wants to hear from God why he is being treated as he is:

Job 13:17-22 (NIV)

17 "Listen carefully to what I say; let my words ring in your ears.
18 Now that I have prepared my case, I know I will be vindicated.
19 Can anyone bring charges against me? If so, I will be silent and die.
20 "Only grant me these two things, God,
and then I will not hide from you:

21 "Withdraw your hand far from me,
and stop frightening me with your terrors.
22 Then summon me and I will answer,
or let me speak, and you reply to me."

But how can Job present his case in the heavenly court?

As the days and months of Job's miserable life tick by, Job laments that mortal life will be too short to clear his name (Job 14).

3.2 Eliphaz: You're promoting ungodliness, Job (chapter 15)

Job 15:1-6 (NIV)

1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied:

2 "Would a wise person answer with empty notions
or fill their belly with the hot east wind?
3 Would they argue with useless words,
with speeches that have no value?
4 But **you even undermine piety** and hinder devotion to God.
5 Your sin prompts your mouth; you adopt the tongue of the crafty.
6 Your own mouth condemns you,
not mine; your own lips testify against you."

For Eliphaz, retribution theology is the foundation of wisdom. He views anyone who denies it as a hot-headed windbag (verse 2). He says Job's speeches contribute nothing of value (verse 3). For Eliphaz, denying retribution theology is *hindering devotion to God*—as if people won't serve God unless they benefit by doing so (verse 4).

Ironically, that's the very accusation that triggered the test Job is enduring. Eliphaz believes what Satan said (1:9-11). Eliphaz has joined Satan in condemning Job. Questioning divine retribution is sin, Eliphaz says (verses 5-6).

Job 15:12-13 (NIV)

12 "Why has your heart carried you away, and why do your eyes flash,
13 so that you vent your rage against God
and pour out such words from your mouth?"

Having labelled Job as a sinner who dared to question divine retribution, Eliphaz spends the rest of his speech telling Job he deserves what he got:

Job 15:20-26 (NIV)

20 "All his days the wicked man suffers torment,
the ruthless man through all the years stored up for him."
21 Terrifying sounds fill his ears;
when all seems well, marauders attack him.
22 He despairs of escaping the realm of darkness;
he is marked for the sword.

23 He wanders about for food like a vulture;
he knows the day of darkness is at hand.
24 Distress and anguish fill him with terror;
troubles overwhelm him, like a king poised to attack,
25 **because he shakes his fist at God**
and vaunts himself against the Almighty,
26 defiantly charging against him with a thick, strong shield."

3.3 Job: Can someone help present my case? (chapters 16–17)

His friends have judged Job, instead of supporting him in his pain. They think they're defending God's justice, but they've sided with the Accuser. It's easier to accuse than to empathize.

Job 16:1-5 (NIV)

1 Then Job replied:
2 "I have heard many things like these;
you are miserable comforters, all of you!
3 Will your long-winded speeches never end?
What ails you that you keep on arguing?
4 I also could speak like you, if you were in my place;
I could make fine speeches against you and shake my head at you.
5 But my mouth would encourage you;
comfort from my lips would bring you relief."

Job returns to the question of how he can present his case before the heavenly court to prove he does not deserve what he's experiencing:

Job 16:16-21 (NIV)

16 "My face is red with weeping, dark shadows ring my eyes;
17 yet my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure.
18 "**Earth, do not cover my blood**; may my cry never be laid to rest!
19 Even now my **witness** is in heaven; my **advocate** is on high.
20 My **intercessor** is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God;
21 on behalf of a man he pleads with God as one pleads for a friend."

Job suffered violence as raiders stole his flocks and killed his servants (1:13-17), but there's no blood on Job's hands, nothing that would interfere with his plea of innocence before God's throne (verse 17). Job has nothing left to lose but his life. He fears he will soon lose that too. Then no one will remember his unjust sufferings.

But how do you get the heavenly court to investigate matters on earth? Abel's blood on the earth brought God to investigate Cain: *"The LORD said 'What have you done? Listen! 'Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground'"* (Genesis 4:10).

Job does not know how the heavenly court works. He does not know God has been watching his case carefully, even before his troubles began. He does not know an Accuser is prosecuting a case against him (1:8-11). But there must be someone in the heavenly court who could argue his case and bring his suffering to an end.

Job calls this person his:

- ***witness***: someone who sees his sufferings and recounts them to the court
- ***advocate***: a defence lawyer to present his case before the throne (v. 19)
- ***intercessor***: a mediator to negotiate between God and people (v. 20)
- ***representative***: someone to defend him *as one pleads for a friend* (v. 21).

That's what Job needs. He's not finding that among his friends:

Job 17:10-15 (NIV)

10 "But come on, all of you, try again!
I will not find a wise man among you.
11 My days have passed, my plans are shattered. …
13 If the only home I **hope** for is the grave …
15 where then is my **hope**— who can see any **hope** for me?"

Hope is crucial to life. Everything Job hoped for is gone. He doesn't dare to hope for anything again. By accusing Job of deserving his loss, his friends undermine any hope he may have had: *"You destroy a person's hope"* (14:19).

3.4 Bildad: You must be wicked to suffer like this (chapter 18)

Bildad rejects Job's claim to innocence. Only a wicked person could have earned the sufferings Job has brought on himself:

Job 18:1-21 (NIV)

1 Then Bildad the Shuhite replied:
2 "When will you end these speeches?
Be sensible, and then we can talk. …
5 "The lamp of a wicked man is snuffed out;
the flame of his fire stops burning. …
17 The memory of him perishes from the earth;
he has no name in the land.
18 He is driven from light into the realm of darkness
and is banished from the world.
19 He has no offspring or descendants among his people,
no survivor where once he lived.
20 People of the west are appalled at his fate;
those of the east are seized with horror.
21 Surely such is the dwelling of an evil man;
such is the place of one who does not know God."

With the sensitivity of a freight train, Bildad smashes into the wreck of Job's life, the loss of his children (verse 19), his honour (verse 20), and his innocence (verse 21). Jobs's response is hardly surprising.

3.5 Job: Surely there is a redeemer (chapter 19)

Job 19:1-6 (NIV)

1 Then Job replied:

2 "How long will you torment me and crush me with words?
3 Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me.
4 If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone.
5 If indeed you would exalt yourselves above me
and use my humiliation against me,
6 then know that God has **wronged** me and drawn his net around me.

Verse 6 is disturbing. Previously, the narrator said that *Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing* (1:22). That was a different Hebrew word, saying that Job did not impugn God's character. The word used here in verse 6 has to do with suppressing evidence in a legal context. Job is concerned that God does not seem to be following his case and sorting out the injustice.

What's bothering Job is that he's getting no help from his earthly friends and no help from God, no matter what he says:

Job 19:7-9 (NIV)

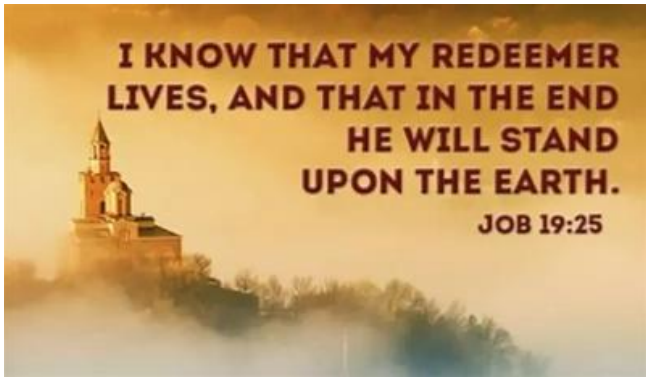
7 "Though I cry, 'Violence!' I get no response;
though I call for help, there is no justice.
8 He has blocked my way so I cannot pass;
he has shrouded my paths in darkness.
9 He has stripped me of my honour
and removed the crown from my head."

Job calls for mercy instead of condemnation, from his friends and from God:

Job 19:21-27 (NIV)

21 "Have pity on me, my friends, have pity,
for the hand of God has struck me.
22 Why do you pursue me as God does?
Will you never get enough of my flesh?
23 "Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll,
24 that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead,
or engraved in rock forever!

25 I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand
on the earth.
26 And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
27 I myself will see him with my own
eyes— I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!



Verse 25 might be the most popular verse in Job for many Christians. We think of Jesus as our *Redeemer*, so we think of the incarnation, God standing on the earth. Some Christians have heard it that way since the fourth century.[19]

As we'll see in our final week, the Christ is the redeemer who sorts out the injustice we experience on earth. However, Job did not understand the incarnation or the cross:

> The New Testament unequivocally affirms that Christ is our mediator (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), but we are not free to read even a true doctrine into any text we wish. We desire for our interpretation to reflect the authoritative teaching of the text, and the text cannot mean to us what it never meant to the author or audience.[20]

The *redeemer* (*g'l*) in Old Testament times, was the family member responsible for avenging blood (Numbers 35:19-27) or redeeming property (Leviticus 25:25). For example, Boaz redeemed Naomi's farm and family (Ruth 4:1-14).

Job yearns for such a person to stand up for him and restore all he has lost. He wants to see this in his lifetime. Although his *skin has been destroyed* (verse 26) as his body was *covered in painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head* (2:4-8), Job yearns to be restored before he dies. He wants to see God putting things right while he's physically alive, not after his life is over (verses 26-27).

Job concludes by warning his friends that the judgement they measure out against Job will be measured out against them:

Job 19:28-29 (NIV)

28 "If you say, 'How we will hound him,
since the root of the trouble lies in him,'
29 you should fear the sword yourselves;
for wrath will bring punishment by the sword,
and then you will know that there is judgment."

Job is right of course (see 42:7-9). But having their wisdom called into question upsets Zophar. He becomes even more judgemental against Job.

[19] Ephrem the Syrian, quoted in *Job*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (InterVarsity Press, 2006), 105.
[20] John H. Walton and Kelly Lemon Vizcaino, *NIV Application Commentary: Job*, (Zondervan, 2012), 225–226.

3.6 Zophar: Admit your guilt or you'll never be free (chapter 20)

Job 20:1-3 (NIV)

[1] Then Zophar the Naamathite replied:

[2] "My troubled thoughts prompt me to answer
because I am greatly disturbed.
[3] I hear a rebuke that dishonours me,
and my understanding inspires me to reply."

Zophar affirms retribution theology, fully aware that in doing so he is condemning Job:

Job 20:4-7, 22-23 (NIV)

[4] "Surely you know how it has been from of old,
ever since mankind was placed on the earth,
[5] that the mirth of the wicked is brief,
the joy of the godless lasts but a moment.
[6] Though the pride of the godless person reaches to the heavens
and his head touches the clouds,
[7] he will perish forever, like his own dung;
those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?'" …

[22] "In the midst of his plenty, distress will overtake him;
the full force of misery will come upon him.
[23] When he has filled his belly,
God will vent his burning anger against him
and rain down his blows on him."

Zophar justifies his judgement of Job by interpreting Job's sufferings as evidence that God is exposing Job's guilt:

Job 20:27-29 (NIV)

[27] "The heavens will expose his guilt;
the earth will rise up against him.
[28] A flood will carry off his house,
rushing waters on the day of God's wrath.
[29] Such is the fate God allots the wicked,
the heritage appointed for them by God."

3.7 Conclusion

Do you see what's happened in this second round of speeches?

Job's anguish is driving him towards God, as he desperately seeks help to argue the case that he does not deserve the suffering and loss he has experienced. But his friends reject Job's pleas of innocence. On the basis of their retribution theology, they pressure Job to admit his guilt, for he must be guilty if God is punishing him:

- **Eliphaz** says Job's claim that the world is unfair promotes ungodliness.
- **Bildad** says Job's sufferings are evidence of how wicked he is.
- **Zophar** tells him he will never be restored until he admits his guilt.

The narrator made it clear that interpreting suffering as punishment by God is wrong-headed. Job is *blameless and upright* (1:8). An accuser is testing whether people will keep trusting God when there are no benefits for doing so (1:9). In his pain, Job is pursuing God even harder, while his friends are making his life even harder by siding with the accuser.

With neither side giving in to the other, the debate between Job and his friends remains deadlocked, proving neither his innocence nor his guilt. Come back next week as we watch the third round of speeches fall into disarray (chapters 21–31).

Further reading

John Walton summarizes the second round of the dialogue:

> … the reasoning of this second sequence centres on the RP [Retribution Principle]. Each of the friends spends a major proportion of his speech affirming that the wicked demonstrably and inevitably suffer the judgment of God. The first series broached this topic, but turned it to a consideration of what Job could do to regain his benefits and favoured status. In this second series it is the very validity of the RP that is under discussion. After Job's friends have each elaborated on it at length, Job denies that the suffering of the wicked is either demonstrable or inevitable. The friends have argued for the integrity of a system; Job, convinced of his own integrity, rejects the system as spurious. This stands as the philosophical resolution to the second series and leads into the third, where accusation will replace insinuation.[21]

John Goldingay comments on "my redeemer" in 19:25:

> Job is not talking about the Messiah, though there is nothing odd about someone using Job's words to make a different point from the one Job made. …
>
> In the Old Testament, a "redeemer" is someone who belongs to your family but who has more resources or power than you have and is therefore in a position to help you when you are in need. One classic situation where the matter arises is where people are in trouble and are in danger of losing their land or their freedom. So God can use a person with resources as a redeemer, though it is possible for this person to forget and use the resources for self-aggrandizement. Thus Boaz is Ruth's redeemer, and God is Israel's redeemer, as God treats Israel as

[21] John H. Walton and Kelly Lemon Vizcaino, *NIV Application Commentary: Job*, (Zondervan, 2012), 225.

members of his family to whom he has family obligations. A redeemer's task is thus to take your side and take action in order to restore your situation to what it ought to be—hence I use the word "restorer." In this context Job is talking about someone who will restore the situation between him and God. God's hand has touched him in a heavy and negative sense. God pursues or persecutes him (and his friends do the same). And he doesn't know why. So he longs to see God in order that the two of them can sort things out in a meeting of God's assembly of the kind that opened the story. He has to allow for the possibility that in this meeting God will show him where he is in the wrong, but he is really convinced that he will be able to establish there that he is in the right. The role of his restorer will then be to facilitate that meeting and support Job when it happens. The kind of person Job is talking about is the kind of person he described in chapter 16 as his witness or advocate, a person to arbitrate for him with God.[22]

[22] John Goldingay, *Job for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone (SPCK, 2013), 98–99.

4 The third round (Job 21–31)

Job's sufferings are driving him to pursue God. If he could present his case before the heavenly court, he's convinced God would acquit him and overturn his misfortunes.

Job's friends, on the other hand, are convinced that Job is guilty. Otherwise God would be at fault, since they believe God always rewards the godly and punishes the wicked (retribution theology). To protect God's honour, they condemn Job.

Any questions on the previous chapters before we proceed?

4.1 Job: Does everyone get what they deserve? (chapter 21)

Job directly confronts the view that people always get what they deserve. He shows how retribution theology is not an accurate picture of life on earth:

Job 21:7-17 (NIV)

7 "Why do **the wicked** live on,
growing old and increasing in power?
8 They see their children established around them,
their offspring before their eyes.
9 Their homes are safe and free from fear;
the rod of God is not on them. …

14 "Yet they say to God, 'Leave us alone!
We have no desire to know your ways.
15 Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him?
What would we gain by praying to him?' …
17 "Yet how often is the lamp of the wicked snuffed out?
How often does calamity come upon them,
the fate God allots in his anger?"

Statistically, it's true that those who relate well and care for others end up with better relationships, while violent people are more likely to be distrusted by the community. But on a global scale, it's the powerful people who start the wars and force themselves on others. That was visible in all the kingdoms of the ancient world. Yet the Pharaohs and kings were worshipped by the throngs of people in awe of their power.

Job 21:27-34 (NIV)

27 "I know full well what you are thinking,
the schemes by which you would wrong me.
28 You say, 'Where now is the house of the great,
the tents where the wicked lived?'
29 Have you never questioned those who travel?
Have you paid no regard to their accounts—
30 that the wicked are spared from the day of calamity,
that they are delivered from the day of wrath?

31 Who denounces their conduct to their face?
Who repays them for what they have done?
32 They are carried to the grave, and watch is kept over their tombs.
33 The soil in the valley is sweet to them; everyone follows after them,
and a countless throng goes before them.
34 "So how can you console me with your nonsense?
Nothing is left of your answers but falsehood!"

In effect, Job is saying, "Don't tell me God gives everyone what they deserve."

4.2 Eliphaz: You're a wicked person, Job (chapter 22)

Eliphaz is frustrated that Job still claims his sufferings are undeserved. As John Goldingay puts it, "Eliphaz rewrites job's life rather than revise his own theology." [23]

Job 22:5-11 (NIV)

5 "**Is not your wickedness great?** Are not your sins endless?
6 You demanded security from your relatives for no reason;
you stripped people of their clothing, leaving them naked.
7 You gave no water to the weary
and you withheld food from the hungry,
8 though you were a powerful man, owning land—
an honoured man, living on it.
9 And you sent widows away empty-handed
and broke the strength of the fatherless.
10 That is why snares are all around you,
why sudden peril terrifies you,
11 why it is so dark you cannot see,
and why a flood of water covers you."

Eliphaz tells Job to admit his guilt so God will restore him:

Job 22:23-26 (NIV)

23 "If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored:
If you remove wickedness far from your tent …
24 and assign your nuggets to the dust,
your gold of Ophir to the rocks in the ravines,
25 then the Almighty will be your gold, the choicest silver for you.
26 Surely then you will find delight in the Almighty
and will lift up your face to God."

We still hear Eliphaz's lies today. People place the blame on the suffering person with comments such as, "If God seems far away, guess who moved?"

[23] John Goldingay, *Job for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone (SPCK, 2013), 109.

4.3 Job: I don't see justice in many places (chapters 23–24)

Job wants to present his case before the heavenly throne to prove his innocence and have God reverse his fortunes. But where do you go to find God and get justice?

Job 23:1-7 (NIV)

1 Then Job replied:
2 "Even today my complaint is bitter;
his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning.
3 If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling!
4 I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments.
5 I would find out what he would answer me,
and consider what he would say to me.
6 Would he vigorously oppose me?
No, he would not press charges against me.
7 There the upright can establish their innocence before him,
and there I would be delivered forever from my judge."

Many people—both good and evil—do not get what they deserve, Job says:

Job 24:1-25 (NIV)

1 "Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment?
Why must those who know him look in vain for such days?
2 There are those who move boundary stones;
they pasture flocks they have stolen.
3 They drive away the orphan's donkey
and take the widow's ox in pledge.
4 They thrust the needy from the path
and force all the poor of the land into hiding. …
13 "There are those who rebel against the light,
who do not know its ways or stay in its paths.
14 When daylight is gone, the murderer rises up,
kills the poor and needy,
and in the night steals forth like a thief. …
25 "If this is not so, who can prove me false
and reduce my words to nothing?"

Can you see where Job is going with this? In his pain, he's firming his resolve to pursue God rather than run from God. As John Hartley says:

> His own sufferings have made him more sensitive to widespread human suffering. He longs for God to rectify matters on earth. … Job's concern for injustice leads him to challenge the theology of his day, but at the same time, because of his profound faith in God, his lamenting drives him to God for an answer.[24]

[24] John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the O.T. (Eerdmans, 1988), 354.

4.4 Bildad: Are you more righteous than God? (chapter 25)

The next presenter in the cycle is Bildad, but his speech is just six verses! Bildad is running out of patience with Job. Retribution is right, so Job is wrong, he says.

Bildad writes Job off as worthless:

Job 25 (NIV)

1 Then Bildad the Shuhite replied:

2 "Dominion and awe belong to God;
he establishes order in the heights of heaven.
3 Can his forces be numbered? On whom does his light not rise?
4 How then **can a mortal be righteous before God?**
How can one born of woman be pure?
5 If even the moon is not bright and the stars are not pure in his eyes,
6 how much less a mortal, who is but a maggot—
a human being, who is only a worm!"

Bildad wants to:

a) defend God's glory: *dominion and awe belong to God* (verse 2).
b) contrast God's righteousness with the inherent sinfulness of humanity: *can a mortal be righteous before God?* (verse 4).
c) condemn a person who claims to be righteous as merely *a maggot* feeding on decay (verse 6).

Bildad is still among us. Hymn writers ask us to sing that Christ died "for such as worm as I."[25] Theologians proclaim "total depravity," the belief that humans are so inherently evil that we cannot even ask God to save us. As early as AD 400, Augustine affirmed that, as Bildad put it, *no one born of woman is pure* (verse 4). He taught that every child is a sinner at birth (original sin), already condemned to hell unless baptized (since baptism washes away original sin for Augustine.)

That's at the root of the message of guilt and condemnation the church has delivered since then. Confessing your sins to a priest, performing your penance, and then receiving the freshly sacrificed Christ in the Mass was the message of the church in the Middle Ages. The Reformers realized we're not saved by works such as penance, but they still proclaimed Bildad's message of guilt. And today, Evangelicals still ask people to make a confession of personal guilt in order to be saved ("I am a sinner") instead of the gospel declaration of the Messiah's authority ("Jesus is Lord," compare Romans 10:9).

Whose message are we speaking? The Accuser? Or the Sovereign Saviour?

[25] Isaac Watts, *Alas! and Did My Saviour Bleed!* (1707).

4.5 Job: Who can understand God? (chapter 26)

Job 26:1-4 (NIV)

1 Then Job replied:
2 "How you have helped the powerless!
How you have saved the arm that is feeble!
3 What advice you have offered to one without wisdom!
And what great insight you have displayed!
4 Who has helped you utter these words?
And **whose spirit spoke from your mouth?**"

Job, you did hear the prologue? You did not hear the Satan accusing you of serving God for selfish reasons (Job 1:9-11), but you have discerned that Bildad is aligned with the spirit of the Satan, speaking the words of the accuser (verse 4).

If someone like Job turned up at church today, what message would you give them? Would you reject their claims to being a righteous person, insisting that no mortal can be righteous before God, that no one born of woman is pure? (25:4) If so, God may be saying, "You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7).

The gospel does not call us to condemn people so they'll want a Saviour. The gospel is the good news that God raised up the ruler whom the world rejected and killed. The good news is that in the Messiah's leadership earth is restored as a kingdom of heaven.

As Job asked, *"Whose spirit speaks from your mouth?"* Do we proclaim a message of condemnation and guilt, like *the accuser of our brothers and sisters who accuses them before our God day and night*? Or do we proclaim *the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah* (Revelation 12:10).

Job turns away from the accusations of the Satan that he's hearing through Bildad. He affirms God's sovereign authority over creation, even when we don't understand it:

Job 26:10-14 (NIV)

10 "He marks out the horizon on the face of the waters
for a boundary between light and darkness.
11 The pillars of the heavens quake, aghast at his rebuke.
12 By his power he churned up the sea;
by his wisdom he cut Rahab to pieces.
13 By his breath the skies became fair;
his hand pierced the gliding serpent.
14 And these are but the outer fringe of his works;
how faint the whisper we hear of him!
Who then can understand the thunder of his power?"

Some commentators regard 26:5-14 as the words of the narrator, with 27:1 marking the moment Job resumes his discourse.[26] Whether the speaker is Job or the narrator,

[26] For example, John Goldingay, *Job for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone (SPCK, 2013), 125.

our attention is being drawn to our heavenly sovereign. Earth is established by God's decrees (verse 10), with heaven as the authority over us (verse 11). God rules over what we cannot control: the forces of the sea (verse 12) and the air (verse 13). Truly, what we perceive is merely a whisper of God's thunderous authority (verse 14).

4.6 Job: Retribution has a place (chapter 27)

In the previous rounds, Zophar followed Eliphaz and Bildad as they all tried to convince Job he was wrong to reject retribution theology. In this third round, Zophar makes no appearance. Does his silence mean he's given up on Job?

Job fills the silence. He's still insisting that God has not given him what he deserves:

Job 27:1-6 (NIV)

1 And Job continued his discourse:
2 "As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice,
the Almighty, who has made my life bitter,
3 as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils,
4 my lips will not say anything wicked, and my tongue will not utter lies.
5 I will never admit you are in the right; till I die,
I will not deny my integrity.
6 I will maintain my innocence and never let go of it;
my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live."

The rest of Chapter 27 almost sounds like Job agreeing to retribution theology:

Job 27:11-15 (NIV)

11 "I will teach you about the power of God;
the ways of the Almighty I will not conceal.
12 You have all seen this yourselves. Why then this meaningless talk?
13 "Here is the fate God allots to the wicked,
the heritage a ruthless man receives from the Almighty:
14 However many his children, their fate is the sword;
his offspring will never have enough to eat.
15 The plague will bury those who survive him,
and their widows will not weep for them."

Some scholars wonder if this is Zophar speaking unannounced, asking Job, *"Why then all this meaningless talk?"* (verse 12).[27] It's probably better to hear Job admitting that the wicked in general do suffer, even though that's not the way it works in every individual case. As John Walton says:

> Job now returns to a discussion of God's interaction with the wicked (27:13–23). Unlike his previous treatment of this topic (24:18–24), Job here specifically mentions God's retributive action (though God is only named in v. 13). Still, in this context, Job only speaks of a general fate

[27] David J. A. Clines, *Job 21–37*, Word Biblical Commentary (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 908.

allotted by God, not a specific act of judgment; thus, he does not contradict his statement in 24:12. [28]

4.7 Hymn to wisdom (chapter 28)

Western Australia's economy is driven by mining. It's big business, but ordinary people spend their lives fossicking for nuggets too. Finding precious metals begins with learning where to look. But where do you look for wisdom?

Job 28:1-3 (NIV)

[1] There is a mine for silver and a place where gold is refined.
[2] Iron is taken from the earth, and copper is smelted from ore.
[3] Mortals put an end to the darkness; they search out the farthest recesses for ore in the blackest darkness. …

The right question is, "**Who** is the source of wisdom?"

Job 28:20-28 (NIV)

[20] Where then does wisdom come from?
Where does understanding dwell? …
[23] God understands the way to it
and he alone knows where it dwells,
[24] for he views the ends of the earth
and sees everything under the heavens. …
[28] And he said to the human race,
"The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom,
and to shun evil is understanding."

Like tracing a seam of gold back to its source, the search for wisdom leads us to the one whose wisdom established the heavens and the earth, the heights and the depths, the people and the creatures who live because he gave us life. The knowledge of good and evil belongs to him; it's not whatever I think is good for me.

The NIV calls this chapter an "interlude." This hymn is nestled between the dialogues we've heard so far (Job 3–27) and the monologues we hear in the rest of the book (Job 29–41). It reminds us that the source of wisdom is not in our own understanding but the heart of God. Job's words begin again in the next chapter where the text says, *Job continued his discourse* (29:1).

John Hartley understands Job 28 like this:

> This hymn comes at the end of the disturbed third cycle. Since its abstract, reflective tone does not match well any of the speakers, it is taken to be a piece that stands outside the dialogue. It functions as a bridge between the dialogue and the groups of speeches that are coming.[29]

[28] John H. Walton and Kelly Lemon Vizcaino, *NIV Application Commentary: Job*, (Zondervan, 2012), 261–262.
[29] John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the O.T. (Eerdmans, 1988), 373.

4.8 Job: how can I get justice? (chapters 29–31)

Job 29:1-5 (NIV)

1 Job continued his discourse:
2 "How I long for the months gone by,
for the days when God watched over me,
3 when his lamp shone on my head
and by his light I walked through darkness!
4 Oh, for the days when I was in my prime,
when God's intimate friendship blessed my house,
5 when the Almighty was still with me
and my children were around me …"

Job remembers the honour he had when people regarded him as *the greatest man among all the people of the East* (1:3):

Job 29:21-25 (NIV)

21 "People listened to me expectantly,
waiting in silence for my counsel.
22 After I had spoken, they spoke no more;
my words fell gently on their ears.
23 They waited for me as for showers
and drank in my words as the spring rain.
24 When I smiled at them, they scarcely believed it;
the light of my face was precious to them.
25 I chose the way for them and sat as their chief;
I dwelt as a king among his troops;
I was like one who comforts mourners."

Now Job is the mourner who needs comforting. Loss of honour is Job's greatest grief:

Job 30 (NIV)

1 "But now they mock me, men younger than I …
16 "And now my life ebbs away; days of suffering grip me.
17 Night pierces my bones; my gnawing pains never rest. …
20 "I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer;
I stand up, but you merely look at me.
21 You turn on me ruthlessly;
with the might of your hand you attack me."

Job's friends say God has it in for him because he's evil. His sins are endless (21:5). He'd take the shirt off your back (21:6). He'd withhold food from the hungry (22:7), send widows away empty-handed (21:9), and break the strength of orphans (21:9). According to Eliphaz, Job deserves everything God has given him because he treads the path of the wicked (21:15).

Job responds by calling down curses if he's not telling the truth:

Job 31 (NIV)

5 "If I have walked with falsehood or my foot has hurried after deceit …
9 "If my heart has been enticed by a woman …
13 "If I have denied justice to any of my servants …
16 "If I have denied the desires of the poor
or let the eyes of the widow grow weary …
24 "If I have put my trust in gold …
29 "If I have rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune …
36 "Surely I would wear it on my shoulder,
I would put it on like a crown.
37 I would give him an account of my every step;
I would present it to him as to a ruler.
38 "If my land cries out against me and all its furrows are wet with tears,
39 if I have devoured its yield without payment
or broken the spirit of its tenants,
40 then let briers come up instead of wheat
and stinkweed instead of barley."
The words of Job are ended.

This is the end of Job's dialogue with his friends to find the reason for his sufferings. There is no reason, he asserts. He deserves none of the grief and loss he has endured. If justice means getting what we deserve, then justice has not been done.

His friends have not restored his honour. Job's only hope is to have his case heard in the heavenly court:

Job 31:35 (NIV)

"Oh, that I had someone to hear me!
I sign now my defence—let the Almighty answer me;
let my accuser put his indictment in writing."

Would the Almighty who reigns over heaven and earth be interested in hearing Job's case? Would the prosecutor who is pressing the case against Job be willing to submit a written accusation of Job's crimes that could be tested in court?

That's Job's challenge. Of course, we already know the heavenly court is very aware of Job's innocence (1:8). His persistent faith in the face of such loss is the answer to the false accusation that Job serves God only for the benefits (1:9).

4.9 Conclusion

In this third round of speeches, Eliphaz accused Job of being a wicked person. Bildad treated Job as a maggot. Zophar gave up on him. Wisdom is not found in the human heart where justice is understood as retribution. Wisdom is found in God, the source

of everything in heaven and on earth, the God whose majestic heart extends beyond what we value. And God's wisdom delivers a justice that's not what we expect.

Will Job get the opportunity to present his case before the Almighty? We'll learn the answer to that question next week as we hear the concluding chapters of this astounding wisdom drama (Job 32–42).

Further reading

John Hartley explains how Job kept his faith in the face of tragedy:

> Job's last speech is a masterpiece. He recounts his former honour (ch. 29), mourns his humiliation (ch. 30), and then swears an oath of innocence (ch. 31). His confidence has grown so strong that he enumerates specific sins that he has not done, under threat of a terrible curse should he be lying. He has lived by the highest moral standard, concerned not only with his acts but more importantly with his attitudes and motives. Job has had regard for the dignity of all people, be they nobles, servants, or foreigners, and his affection for God survives underneath his complaints.
>
> The clarity of Job's conviction reveals that he has risen above his deep despair as expressed in his curse-lament (ch. 3). Even though his pain has not lessened, he has been able to give form to his thoughts. By verbally lamenting his bitterest feelings, he has not let the bitterness and anger of his sorrow drive him to utter despair. He gives focus to his frustration by addressing God as his opponent. Complaining to God about his wretched condition keeps him from falling into subjective disorientation. Although frustrated at God's apparent hostility, Job has, throughout the dialogue, kept a high view of God in his thinking by reciting hymnic lines in praise of God. Now he rests his case with God, believing that in the end God will do justice by him.
>
> In these chapters Job is a model of how the human spirit can struggle against all aspects of suffering—physical, emotional, social, spiritual—and sustain a search for God while God remains hidden. The ability to express genuine faith under extreme duress enables the human spirit to bear the severest tragedy and prevail. Job disciplines his thoughts and his emotions as he demands an answer from God. Since God is the supreme ruler, Job has nowhere to turn but to God, with the hope that God will answer him. If God does answer him, his experience will prove that every misfortune can have a redemptive outcome. To cope with a hard, trying experience, the afflicted must keep his focus on God in order not to compromise his confidence in God. Such persistent faith will strengthen the bond between God and the afflicted. Evil will never triumph over a person who trusts in God.[30]

[30] John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the O.T. (Eerdmans, 1988), 426.

5 Elihu and the LORD (Job 32–41)

The third round of speeches disintegrated. Eliphaz accused Job of being a wicked person (chapter 22), Bildad treated Job as a worthless worm (chapter 25), and Zophar gave up on Job. It felt like they were stabbing an open wound. Job's only hope was to have a heavenly court overturn the accusations against him.

Tonight we'll hear the LORD'S response to Job (chapters 38–41). But first, we must hear one more accusing voice. An angry young man named Elihu reacts to the failure of his elders to silence Job's claims that his suffering was undeserved.

5.1 Elihu: retribution can be pre-emptive (chapters 32–33)

Elihu gets the biggest introduction of all the players in this drama:

> **Job 32:1-5 (NIV)**
> 1 So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in
> his own eyes. 2 But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram,
> became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. 3 He
> was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to
> refute Job, and yet had condemned him. 4 Now Elihu had waited before
> speaking to Job because they were older than he. 5 But when he saw that
> the three men had nothing more to say, his anger was aroused.

Some Israelites had the name Elihu (e.g. 1 Samuel 1:1), but this guy is from elsewhere—a place named Buz.[31]

Repeatedly, we're told Elihu speaks out of **anger**:

- He's *angry* at Job for trying to clear his own name, thereby shifting the guilt onto God for running the world unjustly (verse 2).
- He's *angry* at the three friends for their failure to prove the case that Job deserved what got (verse 3).
- He's *angry* that the three friends gave up trying to prove Job's guilt (verse 5).

It's already clear that Elihu believes in retribution theology. Elihu is about to fill the silence of his failed elders by unloading multiple speeches while they sit in silence:

> **Job 32:6-13 (NIV)**
> 6 So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said:
> "I am young in years, and you are old;
> that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know.
> 7 I thought, 'Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.'
> 8 But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty,
> that gives them understanding.

[31] Buz mentioned as a person in Genesis 22:21, and as a place in Jeremiah 25:23. It may have been in Edom.,

9 It is not only the old who are wise,
not only the aged who understand what is right. …

12 "I gave you my full attention.
But not one of you has proved Job wrong;
none of you has answered his arguments.
13 Do not say, 'We have found wisdom;
let God, not a man, refute him.'"

Just like his elders, Elihu sets himself up as judge and rejects Job's plea of innocence. It must be Job, not God, who is at fault:

Job 33:8-12 (NIV)

8 "But you [Job] have said in my hearing—I heard the very words—
9 'I am pure, I have done no wrong; I am clean and free from sin.
10 Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy.
11 He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths.'
12 "But I tell you, in this you are not right,
for God is greater than any mortal."

Elihu believes in retribution theology, but God does more than react. God knows ahead of time when someone is planning to behave wickedly, so Elihu says God may impose suffering on people as a warning not to sin:

Job 33:16-18 (NIV)

16 "He may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings,
17 to turn them from wrongdoing and keep them from pride,
18 to preserve them from the pit, their lives from perishing by the sword."

It is therefore possible that Job did not do anything to deserve punishment. Maybe God saw Job's heart was wicked, and sent his sufferings even before he did wrong, as a pre-emptive strike against Job's evil heart.

5.2 Elihu: you're guilty, Job (chapter 34)

Elihu rejects Job's "not guilty" plea, accusing him of guilt by association:

Job 34:5-9 (NIV)

5 "Job says,

'I am innocent, but God denies me justice.
6 Although I am right, I am considered a liar;
although I am guiltless, his arrow inflicts an incurable wound.'
7 Is there anyone like Job, who drinks scorn like water?
8 He keeps company with evildoers; he associates with the wicked.
9 For he says, 'There is no profit in trying to please God.'"

Elihu says Job is drinking with the fools who scorn wisdom (verse 7). Psalm 1 says blessing does not come to one who walks with the wicked and stands with the sinners and sits with those who mock divine wisdom. Elihu is convinced Job is a fool who lives to please himself instead of God (verse 9, compare Psalms 14:1; 53:1; 73:22).

But Job never said, *"There is no profit in trying to please God,"* as Elihu claims (verse 9). It was the Accuser who said, *"Does Job fear God for nothing?* (Job 1:9). Elihu has joined the Satan in accusing Job.

It's his attempt to defend God that leads Elihu to condemn Job:

Job 34:10-12 (NIV)

10 "So listen to me, you men of understanding.
Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong.
11 He repays everyone for what they have done;
he brings on them what their conduct deserves.
12 It is unthinkable that God would do wrong,
that the Almighty would pervert justice."

Verse 11 is a definition of retribution theology. Elihu says God *"repays everyone for what they have done,"* that is, God *"brings on them what their conduct deserves."*

Elihu dismisses Job's request for God to hear his case and clear his name. He says God is not required to explain his judgments when he inflicts retribution on people:

Job 34:23-24 (NIV)

23 God has no need to examine people further,
that they should come before him for judgment.
24 Without inquiry he shatters the mighty
and sets up others in their place."

The religions of the ancient world offered a measure of grace if people repented, but feigning repentance to manipulate God into taking away your pain won't do:

Job 34:31-33 (NIV)

31 "Suppose someone says to God,
'I am guilty but will offend no more.
32 Teach me what I cannot see;
if I have done wrong, I will not do so again.'
33 Should God then reward you on your terms,
when you refuse to repent?
You must decide, not I; so tell me what you know."

Metaphorically, Elihu now takes his seat on the judgement throne and condemns Job:

Job 34:31-37 (NIV)

34 "Men of understanding declare, wise men who hear me say to me,
35 'Job speaks without knowledge; his words lack insight.'

36 Oh, that Job might be tested to the utmost
for answering like a wicked man!
37 To his sin he adds rebellion;
scornfully he claps his hands among us
and multiplies his words against God."

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar failed to identify Job's sin, but Elihu believes he has done it. Job's sin is his attitude of rebellion against God. Job needs to submit to God and accept his suffering as deserved even if he doesn't know why. In Elihu's judgment, Job is a guilty rebel because he questions God's right to treat him however he wants.

5.3 Elihu: look beyond yourself, Job (chapters 35–37)

Job 35:1-3 (NIV)

1 Then Elihu said:

2 "Do you think this is just?
You say, 'I am in the right, not God.'
3 Yet you ask him,
'What profit is it to me, and what do I gain by not sinning?'"

Elihu insists Job is not righteous, and God is righteous. Throughout church history, we've heard Elihu's attitude repeated: the absolute justice of God and the absolute sinfulness of humans. This caricature of reality puts ourselves on the judgement throne, aligned with the Accuser (verse 2).

Elihu sets out to defend God from Job's accusations:

Job 36:22-26 (NIV)

22 "God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him?
23 Who has prescribed his ways for him,
or said to him, 'You have done wrong'?
24 Remember to extol his work, which people have praised in song.
25 All humanity has seen it; mortals gaze on it from afar.
26 How great is God—beyond our understanding!
The number of his years is past finding out."

To defend God's glory, Elihu tells Job to stop thinking about himself and look to the heavens:

Job 37:14-15 (NIV)

14 "Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God's wonders.
15 Do you know how God controls the clouds
and makes his lightning flash?"

The clouds are in the heavens, which ancient cultures viewed as the domain of the gods. The Canaanites depicted Baal as riding on the storm. They worshipped Baal

because he brought rain for their crops. They believed Baal was locked in combat with another god named Mot, the god of death. Whenever Mot won, the crops died and the land was reduced to dust. By feeding Baal with their sacrifices, they believed they would make him strong enough to defeat Mot and give them a good year. They quite literally served their god for the benefits they would receive.

But Israel said that YHWH, not Baal, controlled the weather. That's what Elijah was contesting when he said, *"As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word"* (1 Kings 17:1). The prophets of Baal could not get their god to strike their sacrifice with lightning, so when the LORD sent "fire from heaven" the people said:

"YHWH—he is God! YHWH—he is God!" (1 Kings 17:39).

Elihu wants Job to focus on God's majestic authority. His speech is preparing us for the moment when the heavenly sovereign will speak to Job.

But there is also a dark side to Elihu's message as he condemns Job for refusing to accept that God gives everyone what they deserve—Elihu's idea of justice.

Job 37:19-24 (NIV)

19 "Tell us what we should say to him;
we cannot draw up our case because of our darkness.
20 Should he be told that I want to speak?
Would anyone ask to be swallowed up?
21 Now no one can look at the sun,
bright as it is in the skies after the wind has swept them clean.
22 Out of the north he comes in golden splendour;
God comes in awesome majesty.
23 The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power;
in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress.
\24 Therefore, people revere him,
for does he not have regard for all the wise in heart?"

5.4 The LORD begins Job's trial (chapters 38–39)

Finally, the LORD shows up to talk with Job! It's what Job has been yearning for:

Job 9:14, 32

"How then can I dispute with him?
How can I find words to argue with him? …
He is not a mere mortal like me that I might answer him,
that we might confront each other in court."

Job 13:3

"I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God."

Job 19:6-7

6 "… God has wronged me …
7 though I call for help, there is no justice."

Job 23:3-5

3 "If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling!
4 I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments.
5 I would find out what he would answer me,
and consider what he would say to me."

Now the LORD is here. Job finally gets his hearing before the heavenly court:

Job 38:1 (NIV)

Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: …"

Storm (verse 1) is better than *whirlwind* (ESV). Elsewhere the ESV translates this word as *storm* (Psalm 107:29; Jeremiah 23:19; 30:23), *tempest* (Isaiah 29:6; 40:24; 31:16), or *stormy wind* (Psalm 107:25; 148:8; Ezekiel 1:4; 13:11, 13). Job has already expressed his fear that the storm would crush him (9:17; 30:22).

They don't see God, for the God of Israel is invisible (unlike the idols of the nations). The LORD speaks from the storm cloud, as he did when he led Israel from Egypt to Sinai (Exodus 13:21; 19:19-24), his voice resonating like thunder and lightning as he called Israel into covenant relationship (Exodus 19:16-18).

The trial begins

This is the trial of the millennium, but it's not God who's on trial. The LORD says:

Job 38:2-3 (NIV)

2 "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?
3 Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me."

The heavenly sovereign speaks first. Job's attempts to understand divine justice are muddled, *obscuring God's plans*. Divine justice does not work as Job imagines, his *words without knowledge* (verse 2).

The Judge asks:

Job 38:4-7 (NIV)

4 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.
5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?
6 On what were its footings set,
or who laid its cornerstone—
7 while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy?"

Don't let the ancient cosmology stop you from hearing what God is saying. We know earth does not rest on a *foundation*. It has no *footings* or *cornerstone*. There are no *pillars* to hold up the earth (Job 9:6) or the heavens (Job 26:12). The earth is a sphere, held by gravity—whatever that is (a warping of space-time if Einstein was right). The antiquated language of the ancient drama underscores the point: how little we know!

The ancients had stories about the stars too:

Job 38:31-33 (NIV)

31 "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades?
Can you loosen Orion's belt?
32 Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons
or lead out the Bear with its cubs?
33 Do you know the laws of the heavens?
Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?"

The Pleiades is a constellation also known as the Seven Sisters. *Orion* looks like a hunter with a sword hanging from this belt (or perhaps it looks like a saucepan). *The Bear* constellation (Ursa Major) is not visible to us in the southern hemisphere. The point is that Job has no idea how these stars were set in the heaven, or how they represent divine dominion as they pass over the earth.

We tend to think God created the universe for us, but much of creation is beyond our control:

Job 39:9, 26-27 (NIV)

9 "Will the wild ox consent to serve you?
Will it stay by your manger at night?" …
26 "Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom
and spread its wings toward the south?
27 Does the eagle soar at your command
and build its nest on high?"

Job withdraws his case against God (chapter 40:1-5)

The LORD asks Job for a response. How much does Job really understand about what God is doing? Is Job in any position to straighten God out on how to run the universe?

Job 40:1-2 (NIV)

1 The LORD said to Job:
2 "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?
Let him who accuses God answer him!"

God never accuses Job of being morally deficient as his friends have done. God has not changed his mind since declaring Job to be *blameless and upright* (Job 1:8). God simply says Job does not have a broad enough perspective to understand how the maker of the universe cares for his creation and all its creatures:

Job 40:3-5 (NIV)

3 Then Job answered the LORD:

4 "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you?
I put my hand over my mouth.
5 I spoke once, but I have no answer—
twice, but I will say no more."

The whole Book of Job now fits in three statements:

a) Job said, "God, I don't understand what you're doing!"
b) God said, "Job, you don't understand what I'm doing."
c) Job said, "God, I don't understand what you're doing."

God never addressed the content of Job's complaint. God merely questioned Job's claim that God must do what Job thinks is just. Job *covers his mouth* (verse 4), that is, Job withdraws his accusation that God is treating him badly. Job is still not aware of how the heavenly court has been testing whether he serves God only for the benefits, but he now understands that there's much more going on than he's aware of.

5.5 The LORD continues questioning Job (chapters 40–41)

Job has withdrawn his complaint against God, yet the heavenly court continues to press the case that we—Job, his friends, and ourselves as the audience of this drama—do not understand how our Sovereign is managing his creation:

Job 40:6-10 (NIV)

6 Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm:

7 "Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you, and you shall answer me.
8 "Would you discredit my justice?
Would you condemn me to justify yourself?
9 Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his?
10 Then adorn yourself with glory and splendour,
and clothe yourself in honour and majesty."

Again, God gives no moral argument for why he is not providing justice in the way we expect (retribution). Instead, the heavenly judge presents evidence of how little we understand.

Exhibit A: Behemoth

Behemoth is a Hebrew word that means something like "powerful animal." [32]
Since we don't know how to translate it, we just bring the Hebrew word into English.

[32] "bᵉhē·mō̱ṯ" in *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 112.

Job 40:15-24 (NIV)

15 "Look at Behemoth, which I made along with you
and which feeds on grass like an ox.
16 What strength it has in its loins,
what power in the muscles of its belly!
17 Its tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of its thighs are close-knit.
18 Its bones are tubes of bronze, its limbs like rods of iron.
19 It ranks first among the works of God,
yet its Maker can approach it with his sword.
20 The hills bring it their produce, and all the wild animals play nearby.
21 Under the lotus plants it lies, hidden among the reeds in the marsh.
22 The lotuses conceal it in their shadow;
the poplars by the stream surround it.
23 A raging river does not alarm it; it is secure,
though the Jordan should surge against its mouth.
24 Can anyone capture it by the eyes, or trap it and pierce its nose?"

What is this creature? It reminds some people of a hippopotamus.

But how does this help? The cynical Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw said:

> "If I complain that I am suffering unjustly, it is no answer to say,
> **'Can you make a hippopotamus?'**" [33]

Whatever *behemoth* is, it's not the sort of creature Job could farm. Sheep, camels, oxen and donkeys were the creatures Job managed (1:14-17; 42:12).

When God established earth under heaven's authority, he entrusted us with responsibility to *"subdue the earth, to rule over … every living creature"* (Genesis 1:28). But instead of participating in how God governs the earth, humans tried to become gods by taking *the knowledge of good and evil* into our own hands (Genesis 3:4-7). Rebellion against God's authority introduced conflict into God's good creation: conflict with the creatures and with each other as creation fights back against our control (Genesis 3:15-19).

This is the story not only of Isreal but of all people. Creation fights back. Job can manage sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys, but not wild creatures like *behemoth*. So who are we to tell God how to run the world when we can't even manage the dominion God gave us?

Exhibit B: Leviathan

Leviathan is another Hebrew word. It means something like "wreath animal." [34] Again, English Bibles just import the Hebrew word without translating it:

[33] Quoted in J. A. Baker, "The Book of Job: Unity and Meaning," in *Studia Biblica* 1978 (JSOT, 1979) 17.

[34] "liw·yā·tān" in *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 524.

Job 41:1-2 (NIV)

1 "Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook
or tie down its tongue with a rope?
2 Can you put a cord through its nose or pierce its jaw with a hook?"

Is this a crocodile? Spears do not penetrate its hide (verse 7). It has powerful limbs, a coat of armour, and ferocious teeth (verses 12-14). It *churns the deep like a boiling caldron*, and leaves *a glistening wake* as it glides through the water (verses 31-32).

Or is this a mythical creature, more like a dragon?

Job 41:19 (NIV)

Flames stream from its mouth; sparks of fire shoot out.

No one takes this literally, except some young earth creationists who believe (without evidence) that humans coexisted with dinosaurs, and also believe (without evidence) that some dinosaurs were fire-breathing dragons. Is verse 19 poetic, representing the anger of the creatures' reactions? Is there an implicit similarity in Job's angry and demanding attitude compared to these hard-to-control creatures? Or is God using a stylized representation of things on earth that are beyond our control?

Beyond human control seems to be the point the LORD is making:

Job 41:4-9 (NIV)

4 "Will it make an agreement with you for you
to take it as your slave for life?
5 Can you make a pet of it like a bird
or put it on a leash for the young women in your house?
6 Will traders barter for it? Will they divide it up among the merchants?
7 Can you fill its hide with harpoons or its head with fishing spears?
8 If you lay a hand on it,
you will remember the struggle and never do it again!
9 Any hope of subduing it is false; the mere sight of it is overpowering."

If we cannot control the creatures of creation that God did place under our authority, why would we imagine we have the wisdom to know good and evil and judge how God is managing the world? That's what God is saying with Exhibit B:

Job 41:10-11, 33-34 (NIV)

10 "No one is fierce enough to rouse it.
Who then is able to stand against me?
11 Who has a claim against me that I must pay?
Everything under heaven belongs to me. …

33 "Nothing on earth is its equal—
a creature without fear.
34 It looks down on all that are haughty;
it is king over all that are proud."

Why did God make animals that kill people? Since 1980, crocodiles have killed 43 people in Australia.[35] In the last six years, sharks have killed 24 people in Western Australia.[36] Why did God make these creatures?

How do we get justice when animals kill people? Sometimes people call for the death of the crocodile or shark. I'm never sure if it's really about making sure it won't kill again, or if people want retribution.

There were cases in the Middle Ages when animals were put on trial.[37] The BBC Wildlife channel tells of this case:

> On a winter's day in 1386, a crowd gathered in the Norman town of Falaise to watch a convicted murderer led to the gallows. The condemned had stood trial, witnesses had testified, and sentence had been passed. Yet the prisoner waiting to die was not a man, but a pig.[38]

Was this manslaughter or premeditated murder? We have no way to prove the pig's intentions. Normally we don't hold animals ethically accountable in the way to do for humans.

In any case, we don't know why God made deadly creatures that we cannot control. We're no match for such creatures, but they are not beyond God's control.[39]

We've reached the end of God's speech to Job. Did you notice what's not there?

a) God offers no condemnation of Job.
b) God offers no apology for what Job suffered.

(a) sits in strong contrast to every speech from Job's friends. They all insisted—based on equating retribution with justice—that Job must be guilty. The LORD does not say that. Nothing in the LORD'S speeches overturns the judgement God gave earlier, that Job is *"blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil"* (Job 1:8).

(b) is just as curious. God expresses no moral responsibility for ensuring that good people always end up with good outcomes and bad people with bad ones. People expect retribution, but the LORD is not dispensing justice through retribution.

God's point is that people do not understand how divine justice works. If it's not retribution, what is it? The Book of Job does not answer that question. All we know is that our expectations of justice and God's operation of justice don't match. We'll need further revelation to understand what God is doing. More on that next week.

[35] https://crocattack.org/fatal-saltwater-crocodile-attacks-in-australia-1969-present/ accessed 2026-10-21.

[36] https://www.watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/timeline-of-shark-attacks-along-the-western-australian-coast-20170418-gvn5jm.html accessed 2026-10-21.

[37] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_trial accessed 2026-10-21.

[38] https://www.discoverwildlife.com/animal-facts/pig-murder-trial accessed 2026-10-21.

[39] "David's description of God in Psalm 18 contains a stunning parallel to God's description of leviathan in Job 41." — Layton Talbert, *Beyond Suffering: Discovering the Message of Job* (Bob Jones Uni. Press, 2007), 281.

Job's response (chapter 42:1-6)

Job affirms he has no case against God:

Job 42:1-6 (NIV)

1 Then Job replied to the LORD:
2 "I know that you can do all things;
no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
3 You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.
4 "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you shall answer me.'
5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.
6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Verse 6 is not a good translation. Job neither *despises* himself (as self-hated), and nor does he *repent* (as if he has done wrong). Anyone who thinks, "Ah, Job finally admits that he has sinned and deserves what he got," has missed the whole point of the book. That interpretation contradicts what God said at the beginning (1:8) and what God says in the next verse, that Job was right about God (42:7).

In the NIV Application Commentary on Job, John Walton explains:

> In 42:5, Job does not suggest behaviour change, but rather wishes to retract his previous statements. He employs the same verb and form used when God "changes his mind" (e.g., Ex. 32:14; Jer. 4:28; 18:10; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:10).[40]

In the New International Commentary on the Old Testament, John Hartley says:

> The term *recant* (*niḥam*) means to turn from a planned course of action and take up a new course. It implies the strongest resolve to change direction, but not an attitude of remorse.[41]

In the Word Biblical Commentary, David Clines provides this summary:

> In a nutshell, the view that will be argued here is that (1) in a legal sense, Job "submits," i.e., he withdraws his lawsuit against Yahweh, (2) since he has done no wrong, he cannot "repent," but having been in mourning, he now brings the period of mourning to an end by "accepting consolation," for his lost children as well as for the loss of his honour, a consolation that is being offered to him both from the friends and (in his own way) from Yahweh, and (3) the consolation he accepts is "for" the "dust and ashes" that have been the visible expression of his state of mourning.[42]

[40] John H. Walton and Kelly Lemon Vizcaino, *NIV Application Commentary: Job*, (Zondervan, 2012), 432.

[41] John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the O.T. (Eerdmans, 1988), 537.

[42] David J. A. Clines, *Job 38–42*, Word Biblical Commentary (Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1218.

Clines is right about the word meaning *consolation* rather than *repentance* here. Everywhere else the word is used in Job the NIV translates it as *comfort* or *console* (Job 2:11; 7:13; 16:2; 21:34; 29:25; 42:11).

Remember, the context is as a courtroom, and the point is that Job withdraws his case against God, since he now realizes his understanding of divine justice is too limited.

5.6 Conclusion

All we have left is the narrator's epilogue (42:7-17). Next week we'll see how this introduces the justice God will use to restore the world. It is not a retributive justice, based on what we do (our works). It is a restorative justice, based on our trust in the one whom God has appointed to bring the peoples of the earth back under heaven's reign. That's the wisdom of divine justice that restores the world in Christ.

Further Reading

Layton Talbert on why God presents Job with leviathan:

> God concludes His case abruptly. No homily. No moral. No final lesson or application. Job doesn't need any. Remember the divine invitation that opened this second speech? If Job has a mighty arm and a thunderous voice like God's, then let him display his majesty and splendour and righteous wrath by humbling the proud and judging the wicked (40:9–14). As it turned out, even behemoth was better equipped than Job to run the world and deal with the wicked. But leviathan is even more so.
>
> God had invited Job, "Deck thyself with *majesty* and *excellency*," (40:10). But leviathan is already decked with these qualities! His scales are his *pride* [same root as *majesty*] (41:15), and he is superior to those who are *high* [same root as *excellency*] (41:34). The final image of leviathan staring down the high and mighty—"He looks on everything that is high; He is king over all the sons of pride" (41:34, NASB)—echoes God's earlier challenge to Job: "Look on everyone who is proud, and make him low. Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him" (40:11–12, NASB). Leviathan, too, is better equipped than Job to deal with the wicked. Job can't even measure up to two of God's animals, and he wants to challenge God's management of the world?
>
> God closes with words to humble humans who are inclined to file grievances against God. Even this *animal* is stronger than Job and looks down on all those who are proud and demanding. Job cannot stand up to one of God's *beasts*. How can he even dream about standing up to God? Who is Job to critique God's ways and advise God on how He should run things? …

> Some have complained that God's reply to Job, though artistically beautiful and poetic, is so irrelevant to Job's problem as to border on absurdity. Oddly enough, it didn't strike Job that way at all. The problem is not with the Lord's answer. Job gets it. Do we?[43]

John McLaughlin gives this summary of Job:

> The book of Job challenges the traditional wisdom doctrine of retribution, that the good are blessed and the bad are punished in their lifetime. Job himself is a blameless individual who nonetheless experiences great suffering. In keeping with the doctrine of retribution, his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar as well as the interloper Elihu insist that he must have done something wrong, while Job insists just as strongly that he is innocent and therefore does not deserve what has happened to him. In the end, Yahweh appears in a whirlwind and asks Job about his ability to control various aspects of creation as well as the chaos monsters Leviathan and Behemoth. Job is comforted by his encounter with the divine, who pronounces him correct and his friends incorrect about God.[44]

[43] Layton Talbert, *Beyond Suffering: Discovering the Message of Job* (Bob Jones Uni. Press, 2007), 215–16.

[44] John L. McLaughlin, *An Introduction to Israel's Wisdom Traditions* (Eerdmans, 2018), 82.

6 Restorative justice (beyond Job 42)

The drama is over, and Job still does not understand how God's justice works. He's content that God knows, that God is in control of a world that's beyond our control.

Whatever God is doing, it's not retribution. Job's troubles were not punishment for his sin. That view of justice is far too simplistic. Sometimes we suffer for making foolish choices. Some of our suffering is the result of other people's sins, like when the Sabeans and Chaldeans raided Job's herds and killed his servants (Job 1:15, 17).

But that's not the whole story either. Natural disasters like lightning and storms take people's lives too (Job 1:16, 19). Health issues cause great suffering (Job 2:7). It's natural for us to think, "What did I do to deserve this?" but the reality is that the mess in the world is much more complex. God's justice is not about retribution for individual sin. As the LORD told Job's three friends, that is not the truth about God (42:7).

So let's be very careful about attributing disasters to God. When a bushfire or a flood or a plague like COVID-19 strikes, there'll always be an Eliphaz or a Bildad or a Zophar declaring it to be divine judgement on a sinful nation. The prophets of Old Testament sometimes did that because God's nation was living under a covenant that promised retribution. In the new covenant, Jesus rejected that approach:

- His followers asked why a man was born blind: was it his own sin or his parents' sin? Jesus said, "Neither." (John 9:1-3).
- When Pilate slaughtered some Galileans while they were worshipping, people asked if they were worse sinners than others because they suffered this way. Jesus said, "No."
- When a falling tower killed eighteen people, were they more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? Jesus said, "No" (Luke 13:1-5).[45]

In the same way, Jesus was not being punished by God when Pilate killed him. Job's friends are still among us, promoting the view that God relies on retribution for justice. The epilogue of Job suggests divine justice is more about restoration.

6.1 God's justice as the curtain falls (Job 42:7-17)

Job 42:7-9 (NIV)

7 After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite,

"I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. 8 So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a

[45] Jesus then warned that Roman soldiers and falling masonry would threaten the survival of the whole city if they didn't change their mind about him (repent), i.e. follow the way of peace the Messiah was bringing them (compare Luke 19:41-44). For more detail, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (SPCK, 1996), 253.

burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and
I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly.
You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has."

9 So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite
did what the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

Verse 7 is crucial to the meaning of the book. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar misrepresented God. God is not running the world by the justice of retribution. Divine justice is not transactional as we imagine. God is not micromanaging the world to ensure that every wrong is punished and every right is rewarded.

Because they misunderstood God, they misunderstood God's *servant* Job (verse 7). In judging Job, the friends were usurping God's throne, and their judgement was aligned with the accuser. Like Zophar in the third round of speeches, they'd given up on Job.

We haven't heard from these three friends since Chapter 25. No doubt, Job's relationship with them was in tatters. What happens next providers a clue to what God's justice looks like. God does not tell Job to get even with those who falsely accused him. God's desire is not for retribution but for restoration.

Will Job forgive them? Will he pray for God to overlook what they have done? Will Job participate with the LORD in restoring relationship with his friends rather than in treating them as they deserve? [46]

This is an object lesson in **restorative justice**. Job is called to join God in *not dealing with them according to their folly* (verse 8).

Will Job forgive them after they hurt him so much? Remember how he felt:

Job 13:3-4 (NIV)

3 "I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God.
4 You, however, smear me with lies;
you are worthless physicians, all of you!"

Job 19:2-3 (NIV)

2 "How long will you torment me and crush me with words?
3 Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me."

Job 26:4 (NIV)

4 "Who has helped you utter these words?
And whose spirit spoke from your mouth?"

Will the friends accept that they were wrong about God with their view of retribution? Will they accept prayer from someone they accused of *great wickedness* and *endless sins*? (Job 22:5) Restorative justice cannot be forced; it depends how people respond.

As Job's friends are restored, Job is restored too:

[46] David L. McKenna and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Job*, Preacher's Commentary Series (Thomas Nelson, 1986), 306–7.

Job 42:10-17 (NIV)

10 After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes
and gave him twice as much as he had before. 11 All his brothers and
sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him
in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the
LORD had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and
a gold ring.

12 The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former
part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand
yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. 13 And he also had seven sons and
three daughters. 14 The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second
Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. 15 Nowhere in all the land were
there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father
granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.

16 After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children
and their children to the fourth generation. 17 And so Job died, an old
man and full of years.

It would be a tragic mistake to view this restoration as a reward. God has not suddenly changed his mind and decided to "do right" by Job, after "doing wrong" by him all book long. God's justice is not about repaying what we deserve.

If you think the ten children of verse 13 are to make up for the ones he lost earlier, you may not know what it's like to lose a child. The last thing you want to say to a grieving parent is, "Have another child to make up for it." God is restoring Job after his pain, not compensating him for his pain.

And just as God restored relationship between Job and his friends, God restores relationship between Job and his family and community. The restored Job has even more honour than he had before, living out his life to a ripe old age.

Why do we hear the names of Job's **daughters** but not his sons? (verse 14) That's completely backwards to the social structures of the Ancient Near East. We know the names of Jacob's twelve sons because they became the twelve tribes of Isarel, but we don't know the names of his daughters. We don't even know how many he had, apart from the one who suffered a great injustice (Genesis 34).

What inspired Job to *grant them an inheritance along with their brothers*? (verse 15) Why did Job overturn the culture and tradition of his world like this? Did Job's sufferings give him an awareness that this was unjust? Did he develop an empathy for those who missed out as he had done in the time of his suffering?

The epilogue of the Book of Job hints at a different kind of justice. Divine justice is restorative, not retributive as people expect. Does this whet your appetite to know more about what God is doing, and how this unfolds as the story of Scripture develops?

6.2 In the Torah

Retribution was foundational to the Sinai Law. It was designed to ensure a punishment fitted the crime as people expect justice to be:

> **Exodus 21:23-25 (NIV)**
>
> 23 If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life,
> 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
> 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

Leviticus 24:20 repeats this law, adding, *"The one who inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury."* Deuteronomy 19:21 repeats it again, applying it to a false witness: *"Do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party"* (verse 19).

The law of retaliation (*lex talionis* in Latin) aimed to ensure the punishment matched the crime, so an avenger of blood would not kill five of your people for killing one of ours. Retribution was the basis for the laws God gave Israel in the Sinai covenant.

God promised that he would also respond to his nation according to their deeds:

> **Deuteronomy 28:1-3, 15-16 (NIV)**
>
> 1 If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his
> commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high
> above all the nations on earth. 2 All these blessings will come on
> you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:
> 3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. …
>
> 15 However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not
> carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you
> today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you:
> 16 You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.

This message was at the heart of the Old Testament prophets too. They called people back to obedience to the LORD'S Torah. They warned of impending doom if the people disobeyed, and promised God would save them if they turned back to him.

The wisdom writings also declared God would give his people what they deserved. The longest chapter in the Bible promises blessing on those who *walk according to the Torah of YHWH* (Psalm 119:1). The Proverbs said that *through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed* (11:11).

So, if God was managing his nation like this in Old Testament times, how can the Book of Job conclude that retribution is not how divine justice operates?

6.3 In the beginning

Job was not part of the Sinai covenant nation. He was from elsewhere. To address the question of how God is running the world, we need to go back to the time before the Sinai covenant was implemented.

Before there were nations with courtrooms to apply their own justice, God executed his sovereign authority directly. What kind of justice did God provide then?

God interrogated Cain over the matter of his missing brother (Genesis 4:9). The judge explained to the criminal that it would be impossible for him to live among his people any longer, that he was now a restless wanderer on the earth that had received his brother's blood. But the LORD did not take the killer's life. Instead, *the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him* (Genesis 4:15).

The first murder reveals a huge gap between the justice God gives and the justice we expect. This is where God's justice and human justice diverge. Cain left the presence of the LORD (4:16) to build a city (4:17) that relied on retribution for justice, It was intentionally more violent than God's justice (4:23-24).

But how is this just for the family that has now lost both their sons? If the good die out while the murder lives on, how is this just?

God's solution was not taking a life, but giving a life: *"God has granted me another child in place of Abel since Cain killed him"* (4:25). The family was still under threat of retribution from Cain's descendants, but instead of responding with violence they *began to call on the name of the LORD*, trusting the heavenly sovereign who gives a different kind of justice (4:26).

Violence corrupts our humanity. As even the descendants of Seth became violent, there was almost no one left to partner with God (Genesis 6:5-11). After the flood, God met with Noah to discuss the problem of violence. For the first time, God authorized killing animals for food, and communal retribution in response to murder (Genesis 9:1-6).

Putting the power of death in human hands opened to door for people to form nations (Genesis 10), and those nations use war to build their kingdoms (Genesis 10:8-12).

Since God had authorized retribution for the nations, it is no surprise God authorized retribution for the nation he established at Sinai. Rather than walk away from a world that had walked away from him, God accommodated polygamy, slavery, war, animal sacrifices, and retribution in the nation he founded at Sinai on the journey towards rescuing the world.

6.4 In Israel

The greatest injustice Isreal suffered in Old Testament times was constant attack from nations that had no respect for the LORD'S covenant with Israel. From the time of the Judges, Israel and Judah were under attack. It's the reason they wanted a human king *"to go out before us and fight out battles"* (1 Samuel 8:20).

But a human king was not the answer. David's Psalms are mostly laments about being attacked by their enemies. Israel fell to Assyria, and Babylon captured what was left

(Judah). For longer than they had been a nation under God's rule, they were ruled by the kingdoms of the world.

How would God resolve this injustice? Jewish apocalyptic literature imagined God bringing judgement on the nations and rescuing the godly among his people. That's what retribution expects, the human perspective of justice.

But the Scriptures spoke of God doing something else. Psalm 118 calls God's people to trust God's faithful love (verses 1-4). Then a leader of the people describes his suffering. He's attacked by enemies, yet not given over to death (verse 18). Although the builders rejected his leader, the LORD raised him up as the cornerstone of the restored people of God (verse 22). As he leads them into God's presence, his people shout, *"Hosanna! ... Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD"* (verses 25-26). Israel sang this song every Passover as they waited for the LORD'S Messiah.

Isaiah also spoke of the suffering servant of the LORD who would rescue his people from oppression under the nations:

Isaiah 53:3-4 (NIV)

3 He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

Like the other prophets, Isaiah is framed within the Sinai covenant, so we still hear him use cultic imagery such as sacrifice. But Isaiah 53:4 warns us not to project our view of justice onto God. As the leader of God's people, the Messiah took the pain and afflictions of his people in his own body. But he was not being *punished by God* as some people think. Projecting retributive justice onto God would be a mistake.

So, what was God doing in the Messiah?

6.5 In Christ

In bringing us a more complete revelation of God (Hebrews 1:1-3), the Messiah directly challenged the view that retribution was the basis for divine justice:

Matthew 5:38-40 (NIV)

38 "You have heard that it was said, '**Eye for eye**, and tooth for tooth.'
39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the
right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to
sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well."

Many interpreters have tried to soften what Jesus said here, but Jesus' words are best understood through the lens of his life. When the temple leaders sent guards to arrest him, Jesus had no doubt about their evil intentions. Peter took out a sword to resist

this evil. *"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who take the sword will destroy themselves with the sword"* (Matthew 26:52).[47]

Jesus picked up the ear of the person Peter tried to decapitate, putting the ear back where it belonged. How's that for a lesson in restoration rather than retribution?

The ensuing assassination of God's Messiah was the greatest injustice in history (Matthew 23:32-36). Where others had prayed for retribution (e.g. Psalm 137:8-9), Jesus prayed for his killers to be restored: "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34).

God's heart is for restoration, not retribution. Instead of taking the lives of those who killed his son, God gave life to his Son. And we are restored in him (John 3:16-17).

Divine justice overturned his sufferings, vindicating him by raising him from the dead. God now calls the peoples of the earth to change our minds about him. God has declared an amnesty for the nations who recognize the Messiah as our heaven-appointed king. That's the gospel as the resurrected Jesus proclaimed it (Luke 24:46-47).

The gospel is the good news of restorative justice—the world restored in the Messiah. Unlike the Sinai covenant, God is no longer treating us according to our works (retribution). God is justifying us through faith in Christ, as we rely on the restorative justice of God that comes to us in him (Galatians 2:15-21).

God's restorative justice extends beyond the Sinai covenant. The old divisions no longer apply in the creation that's being restored in the Messiah. There is no longer Jew or gentile, slave or free, male or female, for in Christ we are all being restored to what God intended in the beginning.

Does that remind you of a gentile who learned through what he suffered that his daughters should inherit along with their brothers? (Job 42:15).

6.6 In the end

In the final book of the Bible, we see how God's throne has always been established in the heavens (Revelation 4), even though what God has written for us was not playing out on earth until the Lion from the tribe of Judah was revealed as the suffering Lamb who restores God's throne. He's such a contrast to other human rulers that you could say he's the only ruler worthy of the name (Revelation 5).

As the suffering Lamb is revealed, we hear about the prayers of God's suffering people too. The elders who worship the Lamb were *holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people* (5:8). John saw all these prayers piled up on the golden altar in front of the throne (8:3). What are these prayers? Why were they not yet answered?

[47] The best way to understand the Greek word (ἀπόλλυμι) is as middle. We destroy our humanity when we respond in the same kind and take a life.

We're given one example of these prayers. The martyrs—slain for their testimony about the Lamb—cried out with a loud voice, *"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"* (Revelation 6:10). They don't question the heavenly ruler's character (*holy and true*), but they do question his delay in bringing justice, by which they mean *avenging their blood*.

That's not what Jesus prayed as his blood was being shed. That's not what the first Christian martyr prayed as he was being stoned (Acts 7:60). And even though the language of retribution is ubiquitous in the Old Testament, it's not what Job asked God to do to the friends who had hurt him so deeply (Job 42:8).

Each martyr in Revelation 6:11 was given a fresh white (unbloodied) robe, and told to wait because the bloodshed is not yet over. As the prayers mount up before the throne, the martyrs must wait to see what God is doing.

So what is God doing? Although we were introduced to the one who sits on the throne in Revelation 4, we don't hear his voice until Chapter 21. It's then that we discover what God has been doing all along.

There have been battles as those who wanted control over the earth joined forces to rebel against God's authority and build kingdoms that do so much evil, but God was not about retribution. Those kingdoms fall, and the true authority of heaven lasts, delivered to the earth by the Lamb.

So what was God doing through all the centuries and millennia of history? When God finally explains what it was all about, it comes down to this:

> **Revelation 21:5 (NIV)**
> He who was seated on the throne said, **"I am making everything new!"**

Restoration, not retribution. That's the difference between divine justice and what humans expect.

This is how Behemoth and Leviathan are finally tamed. Violence is not defeated with violence, but God is working towards a restored creation where *the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them* (Isaiah 11:6).

6.7 Conclusion

In the prologue, the LORD described Job as *"**my servant**"* (Job 1:8). While Job struggled to understand how his sufferings could be considered just, he remained loyal as the suffering servant of the LORD.

In the epilogue, the LORD says, *"**My servant** Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly"* (Job 42:8). So the suffering servant of the LORD prays for his accusers, and the LORD restores them.

After all his struggles, Job stands as a testament to God's grace. The justice of our heavenly sovereign is not about retribution (treating us according to our works), but restoration. From creation to new creation, the one who sits on the throne has been making all things new.

Further reading

J. E. Hartley:

> The conclusion focuses on the reconciliation of the various parties: Job and God, the friends and God, Job and the friends, and Job and his relatives.[48]

Stephen Cook:

> The book of Job is excellent theatre, an epic courtroom drama abounding in irony, satire, parody and humour which combine, not simply to entertain, but to challenge and possibly to ridicule the prevailing religious ideology which held to a retributive worldview, a Deuteronomistic theodicy. The drama of Job appealed to an initial audience that was wrestling with exile and the prospect of extinction, and was tortured about an apparently severed covenantal relationship with their God. It analysed the prevailing philosophies about providence and concluded that in the raw honesty of confronting the Divine about the apparent injustices and unfairness of the relationship, by articulating despair, anger, disappointment and frustration, one may speak well to God. The book of Job is an example of scripture in conversation with itself as it draws on other biblical texts, challenges their veracity and relevance, and draws new conclusions.[49]

David Clines:

> In the divine speeches, Yahweh had castigated Job for obscuring the divine plan (38:2) in not recognizing that retribution is not built into the world order as designed by its creator. But now he allows that Job has been right in asserting that the principle of retribution does not operate. Job had thought it should, though it did not; Yahweh had intended that it should not, and of course it did not. So in one respect Yahweh and Job are at loggerheads, and in another they are in harmony. That is the simple resolution of the crucial issue that has so bedeviled the relations between Yahweh and Job.[50]

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[48] J. E. Hartley, "Job 2: Ancient Near Eastern Background," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 351.

[49] Stephen Cook. "A Reading of Job as a Theatrical Work: Challenging a Retributive Deuteronomistic Theodicy" in *Literature & Aesthetics* 62 24 (2) December 2014 61-62.

[50] David J. A. Clines, *Job 38–42*, Word Biblical Commentary (Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1241.

Duane Garrett:

> Job is vindicated. Contrary to the barrages of the three friends, he suffered for his righteousness and not because of any sin. If he sometimes was too quick to claim that he had a right to complain against God's justice, he was fundamentally correct that there is great evil in the world and that it cannot be explained away by the doctrine of retribution or the traditional teachings of wisdom. The book resolves the problem of evil with the bold claim that one must simply trust that God is good and knows what he is doing. He will, in his own time and from the counsels of his unique wisdom, set things right.[51]

N. T. Wright:

> The parallel between Job and YHWH's Servant in Isaiah remains striking. The Servant, after all, is innocent just as Job is. He doesn't complain, as Job does; yet he, too, suffers indignity as well as pain and despair. To look once again at the larger context of the whole canon of scripture, there may be something to be said for seeing the entire book of Job as an anticipation of the harrowing scene in Gethsemane, where the comforters again fail and creation itself goes dark as the monsters close in around the innocent figure who is asking what it's all about.[52]

Scot McKnight:

> Forgiveness is generally granted in the Old Testament *on the condition of repentance*. One doesn't walk around Israel handing out pardons or amnesty certificates to sinners *unless and until* they repent. This requirement of repentance prior to forgiveness expresses an important system of justice in Israel. It is (at some level) simply unjust to forgive because it would be giving someone something they don't deserve. …
>
> In this understanding Christianity and Judaism differ significantly. The Jewish scholar Solomon Schimmel has written the most complete study of forgiveness. While he respects the differences among Jewish thinkers on forgiveness, he represents a representative viewpoint of how Jews understood their tradition about forgiveness. And Schimmel observes a fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity when it comes to forgiveness: Judaism overall is more concerned with guaranteeing justice than with forgiving incorrigible sinners, whereas Christianity, at least in its foundational prayer and creeds, if not in its actions, talks more of forgiveness as an act of grace, given even to the undeserving and not-yet-repentant, than of justice.[53]

[51] Duane A. Garrett, *Job*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Lexham Academic, 2024), 582.

[52] N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (SPCK, 2006), 41.

[53] Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others,* (Paraclete Press, 2004), 219–220.

Greg Boyd:

> How has this world, created by an all-powerful God, become a war zone? How is it possible that this all-powerful God was crucified by his creation? And how does his godforsaken death put an end to this war? So long as we think of God's greatness in terms of sheer power, there is no adequate answer to these questions. But when we turn to the cross itself and read Scripture in the light of this cross, the answer is apparent.
>
> God's greatness is most fundamentally about love. God created the world out of love and for the purpose of love. And this requires that he created free agents. There can be no love without risk. The possibility of war, therefore, is built into the possibility of love.
>
> When we keep our eyes fixed on Christ as God's definitive self-revelation, we discover that every aspect of creation not in sync with the beauty of God revealed on the cross is the result of war, not part of a divine blueprint. Whatever does not reflect the unsurpassable love and beauty we see in Christ may be assumed to be the result of choices that are not in line with God's will. In the light of the cross we may conclude that the world looks like a war zone because it *is* a war zone. But in light of the resurrection we know that the way the world looks now is not the way it will look in the future. God's will shall be done "on earth as it is in heaven."[54]
>
> We pray as we live: in a sea of ambiguity. This is not because we are fallen but because we are finite. And we are inclined to forget we are finite. We ignore the ambiguity that accompanies our finitude, and thus we claim to know what we can't know. We reduce the unfathomable complexity of the cosmos to the capacity of our finite minds. When we do this, we invariably end up blaming God or indicting victims. We align ourselves with Job's ignorant and arrogant friends, with whom God was very angry (Job 42:7).
>
> We pray best, live best and counsel best when we keep our eyes fixed on the God we know in Jesus Christ, remembering the sea of ambiguity that surrounds every square inch of this precious knowledge.[55]

[54] Gregory Boyd, *Is God to Blame?: Beyond Pat Answers to the Problem of Suffering* (IVP, 2003), 76.

[55] Gregory Boyd, *Is God to Blame?: Beyond Pat Answers to the Problem of Suffering* (IVP, 2003), 150–51.