

The Book of Job: A “Good” Man Suffers / January 9, 2025 / 2 of 5

I’m happy to see that our first hour introducing the *Book of Job* last week didn’t scare you all away. Taking a deep dive into the questions surrounding human suffering, and God’s purposes in allowing that suffering, is a courageous endeavor.

I’ll warn you all right up front that today we are going to fly through eleven short chapters of the forty-two that make up the *Book of Job*.

I’m reminded of the theme song to the 1977 movie *Smokey and the Bandit* with Burt Reynolds.

We gonna do what they say can't be done
We've got a long way to go and a short time
to get there



We don’t take this trip without the Holy Spirit to guide and teach us.

Let’s pray.

Our gracious Father God,

You put great trust in the faithfulness of your servant Job and sustained his faith in You through trials and testing we hope never to face. As Your Psalmist wrote, Ps 34:17-20

17 The righteous cry out, and You hear them;

You deliver them from all their troubles.

18 You are close to the brokenhearted and save those who are crushed in spirit.

19 A righteous person may have many troubles, but You, O LORD, deliver from them all;

Teach us what that means through the life of righteous Job. Amen.



Today, we’ll meet each of Job’s three friends — Eliphaz, presumably the eldest as the first to speak and who had the most to say. Bildad spoke after Job’s reply — and Zophar followed him.

Despite the bad rap these three get — they are true friends of Job and came to comfort him as good friends should. For a week, they’ve waited silently with suffering Job, keeping quiet while Job, for his part, has been bemoaning his loss of family, wealth, and health.

As I’ve studied these early chapters in the *Book of Job*, I’ve been taken with an important truth that is not obvious in the text. Friends are important! God certainly used these three friends to save Job’s life. They got him talking. They made him angry. Without meaning to, they got his mind off his torment for a time — and back onto God.



I’ve taken their example to heart. My friend Steve here is an Elder at Bellevue Presbyterian Church. He’s been my dear friend for over thirty years. But as I’ve gotten older — I turn 70 next month — nearly all of my other close friends have graduated to Glory. So, I’ve sought out these another men at Hope Presbyterian Church in Bellevue — men who I expect in time to call my good friends too. They are already my brothers in Christ. I think that’s the best foundation for lasting friendships.



We took an hour to creep through three chapters last Thursday. Here’s the instant recap.



In chapter one, we met prosperous Job, described as “**the greatest of all the men of the east.**” Three times he was said to be “**blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil,**” twice by God Himself.

But the Accuser, for that is the meaning of the word Satan, incited God to test Job’s supposedly unshakable faith, by destroying his many herds along with many servants, and to add to Job’s financial ruin, God allowed for the sudden death of Job’s seven sons and three daughters. Despite all this, how did Job respond? **Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.**

● But Satan was not satisfied, and coming back into God’s presence, he claimed, “Skin for skin!” — implying that Job himself was safe only because of the sacrifice of his thousands of sheep, oxen, camels, and donkeys — and that of all his children. This idea of “skin for skin” has found its way into cultures around the world and across the centuries in the form of human and animal sacrifice — especially child sacrifice.

In response, God allowed Satan to afflict Job with an awful skin disease of boils from head to toe. But despite his misery, Job responded to his wife, “**Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?**” And, in all this personal tragedy, Job did not sin with his lips.

● In chapter three, after the arrival of his three close friends, do we hear Job accepting his loss with humility and patience. No chance! His friends sat silently while Job cursed the day of his birth, then wished he’d died in childbirth — or that God would end his

suffering with a quick death now. But despite his pitiful misery — one thing didn’t change — he didn’t deny his faith in God.

● But after a week of listening to Job rant about his wretched state, the first of Job’s friends could keep silent no longer.

Eliphaz the Temanite began by reminding Job of his many good works.

● From verses three and four . . .
³ **Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands.**
⁴ **Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees.**

But when you, Job, are in dire need — you’ve become discouraged and have forgotten your piety and your blameless ways that should give you hope!

As Shakespeare would say,
"ay, there's the rub."

Here at the very first words of Eliphaz, we discover the biggest error of Job’s friends. They all have an inadequate understanding of God. If good works could save Job, he would have no problems. But good works — righteous deeds — while commendable — cannot save anyone. Only faith in a Redeemer — a Savior — could rescue Job.

It was Martin Luther who said, “God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does.”

Eliphaz stated his wrong understanding clearly in verses 7 through 9.

7 "Consider now:

**Who, being innocent, has ever perished?
Where were the upright ever destroyed?**

**8 As I have observed, those who plow evil
and those who sow trouble reap it.**

9 At the breath of God they are destroyed;

In his theology, good folks prosper, while sinners suffer God's wrath.

Jesus addressed this commonly held heresy in two ways. First, He said bluntly in both Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19 **"No one is good-except God alone."**

And in perhaps His strongest expression of tough love, Jesus had this to say in Luke 13. **13:1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.**

2 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

You can't buy your way into Heaven with good works — you can only hope to enter by grace — by the unmerited favor of a loving God.



In the second half of chapter four, Eliphaz recounts a vision or dream he had one night — and, frankly, it scared the heck out of him.

It appeared that God was trying to correct his theology.

Job 4:17-19

17 Can a mortal be more righteous than God?

Can a man be more pure than his Maker?

18 If God places no trust in his servants,

if he charges his angels with error,

19 how much more those who live in houses of clay, whose foundations are in the dust, who are crushed more readily than a moth!

As the Apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 3:23. **23 ...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,** Even the most righteous among us cannot stand before God on the basis of any good in us.



Eliphaz goes on in Chapter 5, reminding Job that his troubles didn't appear out of thin air — as we would say — or as he said —

**6 "For affliction does not come from the dust,
Nor does trouble sprout from the ground,**

Job must have done something to earn for himself God's wrath.

I remind you that these chapters, after the two-chapter prologue, are all Hebrew poetry. For example, this first line, **6 "For affliction does not come from the dust,** is reinforced by the similar line that follows. **Nor does trouble sprout from the ground,**

And I love the poetic turn-of-phrase in verse seven.

**7 For man is born for trouble,
As sparks fly upward.**

The advice from this first friend of Job is that he take his plight to God.

In the eyes of Eliphaz, Job must have mightily offended God to have fallen to such a bitter state. The God who punishes, is also the one who can forgive and restore.

●
**17 "Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves,
So do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.**

**18 "For He inflicts pain, and gives relief;
He wounds, and His hands also heal.**

Book of Hebrews, in chapter 12, quotes the same truth found in Proverbs 3:11 and 12.

**11 My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke,
12 because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.**

But at the end of chapter five, Eliphaz oversells God's promises of protection and blessing in this life — for those who repent — just as some modern-day preachers promise health, wealth, and happiness in the here and now to their congregations. If God always rescues His most ardent saint in this life — why do we have martyrs?

●
**24 "You will know that your tent is secure,
For you will visit your abode and fear no loss.**

**25 "You will know also that your descendants will be many,
And your offspring as the grass of the earth.**

**26 "You will come to the grave in full vigor,
Like the stacking of grain in its season.**

●
For now, it sounds like the words of Eliphaz have fallen on deaf ears. In Chapter Six, Job still sounds like he's asking God for a quick death to end his misery.

**8 "Oh that my request might come to pass,
And that God would grant my longing!
9 "Would that God were willing to crush me,
That He would loose His hand and cut me off!**

Job believes, despite his outward circumstances, that he is innocent before God.

●
**10 "But it is still my consolation,
And I rejoice in unsparing pain,
That I have not denied the words of the Holy One.**

As for his friends, he compares their counsel to a wadi, a stream in the desert that flows with turbid silty water in winter but disappears in the summer and cannot be depended upon by travelers.

**14 "For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend;
So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty.**

**15 "My brothers have acted deceitfully like a wadi,
Like the torrents of wadis which vanish,**

●
Despite this, Job encourages the debate with his friends to continue.

**24 "Teach me, and I will be silent;
And show me how I have erred.**

Having answered Eliphaz, Job turns to address God in Chapter Seven. He starts by speaking of the vanity and apparent futility of mankind's time on Earth.

**¹ "Is not man forced to labor on earth,
And are not his days like the days of a
hired man?"**

...

**⁶ "My days are swifter than a weaver's
shuttle,
And come to an end without hope.**

Job has no reason to believe that his disease is not a terminal one.

Again, he is oblivious to the back story — to the contest in Heaven between God and Satan. Job doesn't know that he's the subject of a God-ordained ordeal — a test of the strength of genuine faith in God.

All Job has left to cling to is his trust in God. But he does know one thing — his miserable circumstances are no mystery to the Deity he continues to worship.

**¹⁷ "What is man that You magnify him,
And that You are concerned about him,
¹⁸ That You examine him every morning
And try him every moment?"**

**¹⁹ "Will You never turn Your gaze away
from me,
Nor let me alone until I swallow my
spittle?"**

**²⁰ "Have I sinned? What have I done to
You,
O watcher of men?"**

**Why have You set me as Your target,
So that I am a burden to myself?"**

**²¹ "Why then do You not pardon my
transgression
And take away my iniquity?"**

God is not going to answer Job's questions. But, in time, He will respond powerfully to Job's circumstances. In the end, Job will understand all he needs to know. But for the time being, he's like Noah, tossing on an endless sea, or Jonah still trapped inside a big fish, or Daniel surrounded by lions and waiting for the morning to come.



Moving on to Chapter Eight, it's the first chance for Bildad the Shuhite to chime in. He has a black and white view of God. Do right and enjoy God's blessings, slip up and face His wrath. He's frustrated that Job has refused to accept the counsel of Eliphaz to repent.

He even implies that the sudden death of Job's children was probably justified by their sins.

He says, **⁴ "If your sons sinned against Him,
Then He delivered them into the power of their transgression."**

'Job, the fact that you are still suffering is clearly a billboard proclaiming that there remains some unconfessed sin in your life,' thinks Bildad. 'If you would just repent, have that change of heart that God demands, then He would come to your aid and restore you to your former circumstances.'

²⁰ "Lo, God will not reject a man of integrity,

Nor will He support the evildoers.

²¹ "He will yet fill your mouth with laughter

And your lips with shouting.

²² "Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,

And the tent of the wicked will be no longer."

This may be true when Jesus returns in glory — but at the Last Supper, Jesus guaranteed that His saints would face tribulation. Paul wrote in Romans 8, ^{Rom 8:35-37}

**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?**

³⁶ **As it is written:**

**"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."**

³⁷ **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**

For the faithful saints of God, we are never promised our 'best life now' in this fallen and corrupt world. We are promised the best God ever and eternal life and joy with Him.

● Since Yahweh Himself has twice said of Job, **"there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil** — it's completely believable that Job himself couldn't come up with his own personal list of sins from which he could hope to repent.

Bildad was sure that Job harbored some unconfessed secret sins for which he was now being punished. Job, on the other hand, thought that if he could just get a hearing before the Judge of all the Earth, God would set things right. But where was the court where Job could argue his case — and how could he possibly win his case when facing an all-knowing Judge?

... how can a man be in the right before God?

³ **"If one wished to dispute with Him, He could not answer Him once in a thousand times.**

Job followed this with a litany of examples of God's greatness. He moves mountains, commands the sun, designs the constellations, and countless more incredible things. The one I like best in the list is, He **"tramples down the waves of the sea."**

When did you ever hear of that happening?
(*Matt. 14, Mark 6, John 6*)

Faced with the Heavenly Judge who is both all-knowing and all-powerful, what was Job to do?

● ¹⁵ **"For though I were right, I could not answer;
I would have to implore the mercy of my judge.**

To face God as Judge — Job could only plead *nolo contendere* (no contest). Such a plea has the same weight as "guilty as charged" (except in California for some odd reason). His only option would be to throw himself on the mercy of the court.

Job had a holy fear of God, as well he should. But he was an Old Testament saint — unaware of the God-Man to one day be revealed — the perfect Mediator between God and man.

Here was Job's understanding,

● ³² **"For He is not a man as I am that I may answer Him,**

That we may go to court together.

³³ **"There is no umpire between us,
Who may lay his hand upon us both.**

●

**7 'According to Your knowledge I am indeed not guilty,
Yet there is no deliverance from Your hand.
8 'Your hands fashioned and made me altogether,
And would You destroy me?
9 'Remember now, that You have made me as clay;
And would You turn me into dust again?**

In chapter ten, Job makes a pretty good argument for himself. 'God, you know I'm innocent — so when will you relent towards me?'

Why did you bother to create me — if only to destroy me? That's a backhanded way of saying to Job's Maker — this one's on You — Your reputation is at stake if you fail to uphold one who has put his complete trust in You.

Moses used a similar argument when interceding on behalf of the Children of Israel who had incited Aaron to fashion the golden calf idol.

Ex 32:12 **Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'?**

God, even if we deserve it, if You wipe us out after leading us out of slavery in Egypt — how is that going to look on Your heavenly résumé?

In Job's case, what does it say about Job's God if He chooses not to rescue his most faithful follower?

With no response from God, Job ends this latest round of arguments right back where he was in Chapter Three' 'I should have died at birth.'

**18 'Why then have You brought me out of the womb?
Would that I had died and no eye had seen me!
19 'I should have been as though I had not been,
Carried from womb to tomb.'**

Finally, in chapter eleven, we hear from Job's third friend, Zophar the Nā'ā•mā•thite. Less talkative, but more inventive in his insults of Job, Zophar believes that if God were to speak, Job would be put in his place.

**2 "Shall a multitude of words go unanswered,
And a talkative man be acquitted?
3 "Shall your boasts silence men?
And shall you scoff and none rebuke?
4 "For you have said, "My teaching is pure,
And I am innocent in your eyes.'
5 "But would that God might speak,
And open His lips against you,
6 And show you the secrets of wisdom!
For sound wisdom has two sides.**

Like Eliphaz and Bildad before him, Zophar assumes that Job harbors secret sins that have invited God's punishment. Their God is too small. They don't recognize God's longsuffering or His lovingkindness — and like Job, they all are blind to the test of Job's faith being orchestrated before their very eyes from the Heavenlies.

Like the other friends of Job, Zophar is partly wrong and partly right. All four of these arguing acquaintances lack the wisdom of God. Dependent on human wisdom, they can't hope to grasp the full importance of the drama playing out in their midst. Zophar continues...

**7 "Can you fathom the mysteries of God?
Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?**

**8 They are higher than the heavens —
what can you do?**

**They are deeper than the depths of the
grave — what can you know?**

**9 Their measure is longer than the earth
and wider than the sea.**

When God answers Job's prayers and breaks His long silence way off in chapters 38 through 41, He will get the last word in this long debate.

Like Eliphaz and Bildad — Zophar assumes that Job's sincere repentance will lead to the health and wealth Job longs for. But until then, he taunts Job with this insult.

●
**11 "For He knows false men,
And He sees iniquity without
investigating.**

**12 "An idiot will become intelligent
When the foal of a wild donkey is born a
man.**

In chapters 12, 13, and 14 Job has the last word in this the first round of the debate between the three increasingly agitated visitors and their destitute friend they had hoped to comfort.

●
A common element in most of these chapters is for the new speaker to mock the one who has just finished speaking.

**2 "Truly then you are the people,
And with you wisdom will die!**

**3 I have intelligence as well as you;
I am not inferior to you. . . .**

4 "I am a joke to my friends?" Job asks.

In chapter 12, Job stands his ground against the mistaken claims of his friends. Do the righteous always have the benefit of God's blessings, and do the corrupt of this world always experience God's justice? No way, in this life anyway, Job insists.

He illustrates, first from nature and then from observing society — that in the sovereignty of God, we can see that bad things do happen to good people and often the wicked do seem to prosper.

But who will suffer loss in this life verses the next? That knowledge is reserved to God. The Apostle Paul wrote something to that effect to his protégé Timothy.

**1 Tim 5 24 "The sins of some men are quite
evident, going before them to judgment;
for others, their sins follow after.**

**11 "Does not the ear test words, As the
palate tastes its food?**

If you are anything like the news junkie that I am, you can plainly see that seemingly secure and prosperous men and women sometimes, indeed like Job, suffer catastrophic turnabouts in their fortunes, their families, and their health.

**16 "With Him are strength and sound
wisdom,
The misled and the misleader belong to
Him.**

Job names the mighty whose fate is dependent on the decisions of the Sovereign God. Counselors, judges, elders, nobles, kings — the chiefs of the earth's people — their rise or their ruin is in God's hands.



**23 "He makes the nations great, then destroys them;
He enlarges the nations, then leads them away.**

**24 "He deprives of intelligence the chiefs of the earth's people,
And makes them wander in a pathless waste.**

**25 "They grope in darkness with no light,
And He makes them stagger like a drunken man.**

Nearly 250 years ago, I believe God gave our infant nation some of the wisest and most honorable leaders one can find in human history. Yet in recent years God has allowed us some of the most corrupt and inept national leaders to beguile and bankrupt us. God has his purposes to be sure — so we should not be surprised when our own country suffers great setbacks despite all of our natural advantages and God's protecting hand on us for so long.



Nearly half of chapter 13 has Job deriding his confused friends.

12 "Your memorable sayings are proverbs of ashes,

Your defenses are defenses of clay.

13 "Be silent before me so that I may speak;

Then let come on me what may.

But the other half of the chapter is directed straight at God. Job compares himself to “a wind blow leaf” and a speck of dried chaff — infinitely insignificant in God's sight — and yet God has clearly chosen to take a special interest in Job.

Job asks, “23 "How many are my iniquities and sins?” and he wonders if he is being punished for the “iniquities of my youth.”

But Job exhibits one trait we should all want to emulate. He is bold to approach God.



14 "Why should I take my flesh in my teeth,

And put my life in my hands?

15 "Though He slay me,

I will hope in Him.

Nevertheless, I will argue my ways before Him.

16 "This also will be my salvation,

For a godless man may not come before His presence.

The *Book of Hebrews* encourages us to act with this same kind of holy boldness.

Heb 4:16 NKJV

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

So many folks refuse to put their faith in God because of some personal tragedy in their lives or the recognition that this God who claims to love us rules over a still damaged world.

But Job exhibits the faith found in God's prophets and apostles, and in his disciples and martyrs across the centuries.

15 "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.

The improbable series of calamities that befell him — losing his vast herds, his servants, his sons and daughters, and soon after, his own health, has God's fingerprints of judgement all over them. Job longs to argue his case before God — starting with just learning the charges against him.

Chapter 14 ends the first round of the debate between Job and his three friends. Job would rather be debating God — but until He shows up — which He will in chapters 38 through 41 — the back and fourth arguments between Job and Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar will continue through two more rounds over the next 13 chapters. We'll cover these next week.

As this first round comes to its close — an appropriate place for our one-week intermission — our protagonist Job grows philosophical.

**¹ "Man, who is born of woman,
Is short-lived and full of turmoil.**

**² "Like a flower he comes forth and
withers.**

**He also flees like a shadow and does not
remain.**

That's surely not news to this group. In our hearts and minds we often think and feel like the teenagers and twenty-somethings we once were. But the reality is that God has us all on a schedule.

**⁵ "Since his days are determined,
The number of his months is with Thee,
And his limits Thou hast set so that he
cannot pass.**

Job makes an interesting observation that some trees can grow back after being cut down, but not so with mankind. There must have been Cottonwood trees or something like them back in Job's land of Uz.

If I don't recycle or burn every Cottonwood branch that falls into my yard, I'm likely to find more saplings in the seasons to come.

In Jesus's day the two major religious factions were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Perhaps their greatest theological difference was the belief (or in the case of the Sadducees) their disbelief in the reality of our life after death. The Sadducees didn't have eyes to see God's clear teaching about the afterlife. But certainly Job here did.

**¹³ "Oh that Thou wouldst hide me in
Sheol,
That Thou wouldst conceal me until Thy
wrath returns to Thee,
That Thou wouldst set a limit for me and
remember me!**

**¹⁴ "If a man dies, will he live again?
All the days of my struggle I will wait,
Until my change comes.**

**¹⁵ "Thou wilt call, and I will answer Thee;
Thou wilt long for the work of Thy hands.**

Sheol is the Hebrew word for what the Greeks called Hades (although the two do have their differences) — and neither of these are to be confused with Hell — a place of eternal torment — and they are certainly not to be confused with the wholly fictional place called Purgatory — a man-made invention found nowhere in God's Word.

Job's wish for death is not a wish for his eternal end. Sheol is a place of waiting and rest. Job asks and answers the eternal question.

¹⁴ "If a man dies, will he live again?

Job hopes to wait, as he says here,
“Until my change comes.”

15 "Thou wilt call, and I will answer Thee;

Job understands the sincere love God has for mankind — his greatest creation and the apple of His eye.

Thou wilt long for the work of Thy hands.

Our Father in Heaven —

You have preserved for us in the story of
Your servant Job — wisdom and truths that
You hide from those without eyes to see and
ears to hear.

Whether we suffer — or live at ease in this
life — we look forward to the magnificent,
eternal, and blessed life to follow in Your
presence.

Guide us to a closer walk with You this
coming week.

For we ask this in the name of Jesus, the Son
You Love.

— Amen.