

The Book of Job: A “Good” Man Suffers / January 23, 2025 / 4 of 5

Welcome back to this fourth of five weeks that we are in a survey of the Book of Job, the first book in what is called the Bible’s “Wisdom Literature.”

● On January 2nd, we learned about the contest in Heaven between God and His prosecuting attorney Satan. In the two-chapter prologue, God had twice described Job as, “**a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.**”

Satan countered that if God were to remove His hand of protection and blessing from Job’s livelihood and his family, and finally from his health, that he would curse God to His face.

Chapter 3 described a destitute and diseased Job, longing for death, feeling wronged by the God he worshiped — and yet — **In all this Job did not sin with his lips.**

Three of Job’s friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar arrived to console him, but after a week of listening to Job’s grievances against God, they launched into an extended debate with Job — each taking turns in three cycles of back-and-forth theological arguments with Job.

In lessons two and three we covered chapters 4 through 26 — exhausting the arguments of Job’s three friends.

In a nutshell — Job’s friends held a more primitive understanding of Elohim. Recall that none of these men were Jewish and it would be hundreds of years before God would introduce Himself to Moses as Yahweh – The great “I Am.”

Job’s friends, although originally praising Job’s good works, became increasingly convinced that Job harbored some horrible sins for which God was justly punishing him.

But throughout the debate, and as we’ll see again today, Job stood his ground and defended his righteousness.

● Today, we hear from two men. Chapters 26 through 31 can be seen as Job resting his case against his friends, and especially against God, by whom Job believes he’s been unjustly punished.

Then in chapters 32 through 37, a new voice is heard. We’ll meet an enigmatic new speaker — a young man named Elihu. And I’ll admit up front that Elihu has been one of my favorite Old Testament personalities for most of my Christian life.

Next week, we reach the finale of Job’s story. After hearing from God in the two-chapter prologue, we had 36 chapters of speculations about God. In chapters 38 through 41, we final hear from God Himself — and what we hear is more like a final exam — with question after question directed at Job — none of which he can answer.

And finally, in chapter 42, the debate judge, God himself, will tell us who was right about Him. And we’ll learn what finally became of our protagonist Job.

● Much of the error of Job’s friends we’ve read about these past two weeks, is what I call the Sound of Music heresy.

“So, somewhere in my youth or childhood I must have done something good.”

God rewards our faith in Him with the righteousness of His perfect Son — the righteousness necessary for our salvation — perfection we could never achieve on our own.

Jesus' Parable of the Talents teaches us that our faithful service, our good works done in His name, are rewarded when He returns, not before.

And for those who hope their meager good works will tip some imaginary balance in their favor — like Fräulein Maria and Captain Von Trap here — their hope is absolutely misplaced.

In the apostle Paul's chapter on love in 1st Corinthians — no amount of good works can buy an ounce of God's blessings. But faith in Him, hope for His return, and enduring love for others and the God who loved us first is what counts.



With that introduction, let's get into our study today.

Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father God,

Job could say, "how faint a word we hear of [from You]." But Your Spirit speaks to us loud and clear through Your word.

It's miracle enough that You preserved the story of your servant Job over thousands of years. You answered his prayer,

**"Oh that my words were written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!**

Give us ears to hear Your wisdom in the passages of that book.

Because of Jesus we pray. Amen.

We ended last week at chapter 27. Job had just given a final brief rebuke to Bildad — in a sarcastic, backhanded way,
"What a help you are to the weak!"

Then Job launched into a speech about God's greatness, concluding, "...**His mighty thunder, who can understand?"**



Despite all the attacks against Job's integrity in three cycles of arguments and rebukes from his ill-informed friends, Job says in chapter 27, ⁶ **"I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go. My heart does not reproach any of my days.**

Then Job begins wrapping up his case by describing the state and fate of the godless person.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar assumed that God always punished godless men in this life. But Job reminded them that their just punishment often came only when this life was through. Whether they were called wicked — evil — tyrants, or just the uncaring wealthy — the common denominator was that they were godless — they lacked faith in the God who made them and who sustained their every breath.



¹³ **"This is the portion of a wicked man from God, And the inheritance which tyrants receive from the Almighty.**

¹⁴ **"Though his sons are many, they are destined for the sword; And his descendants will not be satisfied with bread.**

¹⁵ **"His survivors will be buried because of the plague, And their widows will not be able to weep. ¹⁶ "Though he piles up silver like dust And prepares garments as plentiful as the clay, ¹⁷ He may prepare it, but the just will wear it And the innocent will divide the silver.**

In today's Christian church there is a rampant heresy being promoted by unscrupulous or at least misguided pastors and teachers. It's referred to as the "Prosperity Gospel" — the supposed good news that God chooses to bless His most ardent believers IN THIS LIFE with wealth, health, and happiness while punishing evil doers.

But both Job and Jesus put the lie to that line of teaching.

Unlike his friends, Job admits that the corrupt man often amasses great fortunes in this life — only to have it cause ruin to his heirs.

Jesus cautions the uncaring wealthy in His parable of Lazarus and the Rich man, and in his warning about the great difficulty of the rich in attaining Heaven — there's something about a camel and the eye of a needle.

Job moves on to a new theme in chapter 28. In verses 1 through 11 it's initially not clear what he's driving at. He starts by describing men mining underground — "**in gloom and deep shadow**" he says — for precious metals and jewels.

But then, in the rest of the chapter, Job makes his point clear. Consider the arduous toil in mining for buried treasures — that's nothing compared with the difficult quest for godly wisdom — the value of which is so far above gold, sapphires, or pearls.

**12 "But where can wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?"**

**13 "Man does not know its value,
Nor is it found in the land of the living.**

But Job does not leave us with a vain hide-and-seek for wisdom. He tells us both what it is and where it can be found.

**23 "God understands its way,
And He knows its place.**

**24 "For He looks to the ends of the earth
And sees everything under the heavens.**

**25 "When He imparted weight to the wind
And meted out the waters by measure,**

**26 When He set a limit for the rain
And a course for the thunderbolt,**

**27 Then He saw it and declared it;
He established it and also searched it out.**

28 "And to man He said, —

***"Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is
wisdom;***

And to depart from evil is understanding."

Two of the other books classified as Wisdom Literature, the Psalms and Proverbs, expand on **the fear of the Lord** as the source — the beginning — the key — to wisdom and knowledge.

This one chapter, coupled with its ancient age, explains why the *Book of Job* comes first in the "wisdom" books of the Old Testament.

It is common for old men to reminisce about their earthly accomplishments, honors, and awards. My life has been an embarrassment of riches in that department. From athletics, to academics, to the Church, and my family, my successes have far outweighed the inevitable bumps in the road.

On top of all that, unlike Job, God gave me the trophy wife I'd be happy to brag about after this lesson.

Well, Job too is not against looking back on all the blessings he enjoyed before everything in his life suddenly fell apart. Chapter 29 and 30 are Job's before and after accounts of his life.

●
**2 "Oh that I were as in months gone by,
As in the days when God watched over me;
3 When His lamp shone over my head,
And by His light I walked through
darkness;
4 As I was in the prime of my days,
When the friendship of God was over my
tent;
5 When the Almighty was yet with me,
And my children were around me;
6 When my steps were bathed in butter,
And the rock poured out for me streams of
oil!**

Remember, nearly all of this book is Hebrew poetry. Maybe, "...steps... bathed in butter" is an odd metaphor but it's certainly picturesque.

Job had it all — a large loving family, wealth that had earned him the title as "**the greatest of all the men of the east,**" an esteemed standing in his community, and good health to enjoy all of these heavenly blessings. And Job did not hoard his many blessings.

●
**12 Because I delivered the poor who cried
for help,
And the orphan who had no helper.
13 "The blessing of the one ready to perish
came upon me,
And I made the widow's heart sing for joy.
14 "I put on righteousness, and it clothed
me;
My justice was like a robe and a turban.**

**15 "I was eyes to the blind
And feet to the lame.
16 "I was a father to the needy,
And I investigated the case which I did
not know.
17 "I broke the jaws of the wicked
And snatched the prey from his teeth.**

Apparently, Job was much more than a successful rancher. He served as a judge in his community and was a champion of charity and justice.

Job had no expectation that his high standing and worldly success would ever have setbacks. Chapter 29 ends:

**25 "I chose a way for them and sat as chief,
And dwelt as a king among the troops,
As one who comforted the mourners.**

But as we've seen — Job's fabulous prosperity suddenly vanished. David's lament over the deaths of King Saul and his son — David's true friend Jonathan — would be appropriate here, ^{2 Sam 1:19b}
how the mighty have fallen. Chapter 30 goes on to recount Job's own downfall.

●
**1 "But now those younger than I mock me,
Whose fathers I disdained to put with the
dogs of my flock.**

**10 "They abhor me and stand aloof from
me,
And they do not refrain from spitting at
my face.**

We can see that Job is in some small way a Christ-like figure. The undeserved mocking and spitting is a reflection of the common belief in his community that Job's apparent rejection by God speaks to some awful sin in Job's life. He's fallen from life-giver to social leper.

● Along with further detailing his misery, Job accuses God of abandonment. But, while Job continues to bemoan his plight — He is still on speaking terms with God. He hasn't ceased to pray.

**20 "I cry out to You for help,
but You do not answer me;
I stand up, and You turn Your attention
against me.**

**21 "You have become cruel to me;
With the might of Your hand You
persecute me.**

The point is — Job is not wrong — God had brought him low — but Job doesn't know that his crushing circumstances are the result of Satan goading God — or rather, God wishing to teach Satan and the angels a lesson about the power of faith in Him.

Job has one final chapter to finish his appeal to God.

● In chapter 31, Job racks his brain to try and recall where he might have fallen short of God's requirements. He agrees that if he had missed the mark in his obedience to God, then God would be completely justified in punishing him — and he gives examples of what that punishment might look like — but in the end, Job just can't imagine where he'd strayed from God's will.

Here are just some of the ways Job honored God by his obedience.

5 "If I have walked with falsehood, (But Job was always truthful.)

9 "If my heart has been enticed by a woman, (But he was not lustful.)

17 Or have eaten my morsel alone, And the orphan has not shared it. (Job shared his food with the needy)

19 If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, (He clothed the naked with wool from his own sheep.)

24 "If I have put my confidence in gold, (He had plenty of it, but he was generous with it.)

25 If I have gloated because my wealth was great, (He was rich by any measure, but he did not flaunt it.)

29 "Have I rejoiced at the extinction of my enemy,

Or exulted when evil befell him? (No, that enemy was also a creation of God — no less than Job himself.)

33 "Have I covered my transgressions like Adam, (Job regularly made sacrifices to God for himself and his family — just in case someone had transgressed God in some way. Job's ways were an open book to God — there was nothing Job wished to hide from God with proverbial fig leaves.)

Next week we'll hear from God as he peppers Job with questions — but in those four chapters, God will only accuse Job of ignorance — not disobedience.

But before we hear from God — we meet a surprise commentator — a young theologian who's been waiting until his four elders have had their full say.

● Chapter 32 begins:

**Then these three men ceased answering Job,
because he was righteous in his own eyes.
2 But the anger of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite,
of the family of Ram burned; against Job his anger burned because he justified himself before God.**

³ And his anger burned against his three friends because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job.

⁴ Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were years older than he.

⁵ And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of the three men his anger burned.

⁶ So Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite spoke out and said,

^{6b} "I am young in years and you are old; Therefore I was shy and afraid to tell you what I think.

⁷ "I thought age should speak, And increased years should teach wisdom.

⁸ "But it is a spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding.

⁹ "The abundant in years may not be wise, Nor may elders understand justice.

¹⁰ "So I say, "Listen to me, I too will tell what I think.'

When I first read the story of Job, I was in my late twenties. I wasn't very theologically sophisticated, but I could relate to young Elihu — and compared to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar — he seemed to make a lot of sense. Reading his six chapters — now that I'm more in age like the Elders he criticized — I wonder if I'll still find him to be one of my favorite Old Testament characters?

And I will give you one spoiler here. In the epilogue — chapter 42 — God is critical of Job's three friends and requires of them a sacrifice for their speaking falsely about Him. But of young Elihu, God had no similar criticism.

Elihu takes all of chapter 32 to explain that he'd waited long enough to tell what he thinks — so look out!

¹⁸ "For I am full of words;

The spirit within me constrains me.

¹⁹ "Behold, my belly is like unvented wine, Like new wineskins it is about to burst.

²⁰ "Let me speak that I may get relief;

Let me open my lips and answer.

²¹ "Let me now be partial to no one,

Nor flatter any man.

²² "For I do not know how to flatter,

Else my Maker would soon take me away.

If I had to compare Elihu to a figure in the New Testament, I'd have to choose John the Baptist — the Messiah's forerunner.

Elihu has a way about him as a straight shooter — a no-nonsense kind of guy. And his six chapters just precede those of God Himself — just as John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the people of Galilee and Judea.

Elihu is so bold as to claim he speaks for God. In chapter 33, he starts by showing he's been paying close attention to Job and his friends by giving a succinct recap of Job's case against God.

⁹ 'I am pure, without transgression;

I am innocent and there is no guilt in me.

¹⁰ 'Behold, He invents pretexts against me; He counts me as His enemy.

¹¹ 'He puts my feet in the stocks; He watches all my paths.'

¹² "Behold, *let me tell you*, you are not right in this, For God is greater than man.

Elihu makes the point that illness and suffering are not always a punishment for sin. He describes suffering that seems to be incurable — **²² "Then his soul draws near to the pit**, but then he mentions an angel with a message for the sufferer, **'Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom''**;

This idea of being disciplined for our own good, rather than strictly as a punishment for sin, is found throughout God's word.

Revelation 3:19 **Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.**

Hebrews 12:7 **Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?**

Psalms 118:18 **The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death.** (That certainly describes Job's experience.)

Paul writes in 1st Corinthians 11:32 **When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.**

And James concurs in James 1:12 **Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.**



Elihu continues to address Job and his three friends in chapter 34. He has an elegant way of asking them to pay attention.

³ **"For the ear tests words
As the palate tastes food.**

Whatever the issue Job has with God, it can't possibly be the fault of God.

^{10b} **Far be it from God to do wickedness,
And for the Almighty to do wrong.**

As far as God is concerned, if He thought it best to just start over again as He did in Noah's time — He would be completely justified in doing so. The Book of Revelation describes Him doing just that again — with his Church taking the place of those in the Ark.

¹⁴ **"If He should determine to do so,
If He should gather to Himself His spirit
and His breath,**

¹⁵ **All flesh would perish together,
And man would return to dust.**

● Job... — railing against God your Judge will only earn you a contempt of court citation. God has his reasons, and they are always just. And if He chooses to keep His own counsel and not share it with us — well — verse 29 says, **When He keeps quiet, who then can condemn?
And when He hides His face, who then can behold Him,**

I am reminded of the untimely deaths of my eldest brother and his wife. Their daughter, my niece, although she is a devout Christian, is distraught months later. But our times are in His hands and as the headline to chapter 34 in one of my commentaries says, "God will always do right."



In human legal systems, there is a principle that, "the punishment must fit the crime." And Job has claimed that his own outstanding righteousness should not have warranted such overwhelming punishment. (Of course, Job can't tell the difference between punishment and discipline.) But from God's perspective any and all sin makes one disqualified for eternal life in Glory.

But Job already conceded that point back in chapter 19. ^{Job 19:25 25} **I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.**

Recognizing the need to be redeemed, to be purchased out of some form of slavery, is an admission of guilt. Job may have done everything humanly possible to lead a righteous life — but a sinless human existence is an oxymoron. Why else did Job make the regular blood sacrifices we read about in the first chapter? **“Thus Job did continually.”**

Chapter 35 is a short one, and in it I believe Elihu made an error of his own.

He tries to argue that both our sinfulness and our righteousness have no effect on God.

6 "If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against Him?

And if your transgressions are many, what do you do to Him?

7 "If you are righteous, what do you give to Him,

Or what does He receive from your hand?

But the God we know — or rather — the God who intimately knows us — is the Lover of our souls. When we sin — when we disappoint our Heavenly Father, He grieves. He dearly loves His last best creation — humanity. And because He loves, He grieves when we hurt — or we hurt one another. Ephesians 4:30 reminds us that the Holy Spirit is grieved by our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds.

●
Elihu makes a better claim when he remarks on Job's constant complaining and his many prayers for vindication.

Job's case has already been heard. — God will make His ruling in His own good time.

14b The case is before Him, and you must wait for Him!

●
Here and there, Elihu makes startling claims about himself.

4 "For truly my words are not false; One who is perfect in knowledge is with you.

Elihu is different than Job's three friends because he says his knowledge comes from God. In this sense, Elihu has the character of a prophet.

The fact that he seemed to show up out of the blue, as it were — and that he is not mentioned either before or after his six chapters is odd.

His name, which means “God blesses”, is not uncommon among the later Israelites, in fact one of King David's brothers had that name.

1 Chron 27:18

Chapter 36 is probably the most confusing one in Job's story. But one important aspect of God's method with mankind is clear enough.

God uses affliction as a tool.

11 "If they hear and serve Him, They will end their days in prosperity And their years in pleasures.

12 "But if they do not hear, they shall perish by the sword And they will die without knowledge.

With some, affliction drives people to repentance and prayer — receiving in return forgiveness and life. But others facing the same affliction are hardened and turn further from God. References to sheep vs. goats, wheat vs. tares, wise virgins vs. foolish ones show the reality of the two groups.

The classic picture of this is the heart of Pharaoh in his face-off with Moses.



Elihu wraps up his contributions in chapter 37. And, certainly to me it seems anti-climactic. Or maybe just *climactic* — because he spends most of the chapter marveling at how God manipulates the weather.

First the thunderstorm in verses 1 through 5, then the snowstorm in verses 6 through 10, and then the rainstorm in verses 11 through 13 are credited to God's power and control. Then Elihu uses rhetorical questions to show how all storms are of God's making. Finally, this is applied to life's storms. Job — what would you say to God, were you to come face to face with Him? The fact is, as verse 19 says, **We cannot arrange our case because of darkness.** God's wisdom, knowledge, power, and glory would cause us to shut our mouths — if we were even able to stand.

It seems a weak argument today in one respect, because modern meteorologists can explain through their research most of what Elihu credits to God's wisdom and power. But in Job's day, devoid of the scientific knowledge we have, Elihu's examples made a strong argument. It's when God interrupts the predictable patterns of wind, rain, and snow that we recognize one aspect of His hand at work in our world.

**⁹ "Out of the south comes the storm,
And out of the north the cold.**

**¹⁰ "From the breath of God ice is made,
And the expanse of the waters is frozen.**

**¹¹ "Also with moisture He loads the thick
cloud; He disperses the cloud of His
lightning.**

**¹² "It changes direction, turning around by
His guidance,
That it may do whatever He commands it
On the face of the inhabited earth.**



Next week we'll wrap up our whirlwind tour through the *Book of Job*.

For four chapters, God will fire question after question at hapless Job. Questions which that ancient Bedouin will have no chance of answering.

And ***hic sunt dracones*** (the Latin for "Here be dragons!")

If you want to know the literary origin of thick scaled, fire breathing monsters — you'll have come to the right place.

Then we'll hear God score the debate. Who answered most correctly and who needs to offer sacrifices atoning for their many errors?

And finally, we'll learn what ultimately became of Job.

Let's pray —

Heavenly Father — Mighty God —

**That You superintend our weather is
witnessed to throughout Your dealings with
mankind — from planet-wide floods to
storms on a Galilean lake. That You number
the hairs of our heads and not a single
sparrow falls to the ground apart from Your
will is even more marvelous. You who do all
things well, we ask You to strengthen our
faith and thereby our obedience to You —
and be near us all as we know you will be.
By Jesus' prompting and permission we pray.
— Amen.**