



Summary of Job

Introduction

The Book of Job concerns itself with the question of faith in a sovereign God. Can God be trusted? Is he good and just in his rule of the world? Job will declare outright that God has wronged him (19:6-7). At the same time, Job is certain that his 'enemy' is actually his advocate and will vindicate him.

The book sets out from the beginning to show that the reasons for human suffering often remain a secret to human beings. Indeed, Job's sufferings come upon him because Satan accused him in the heavenly courts, and the reader never learns whether these reasons were explained to Job. Probably they were not. There is irony in the Book of Job, due to the fact that God seems both too close and too far away. On the one hand, Job complains that God is watching him every moment so that he cannot even swallow his spit (7:19). On the other hand, Job finds God elusive, feeling that he cannot be found (9:11). Although God is intensely concerned about humans, he does not always answer their most agonising questions.

At the same time, Job's friends offer no real help. They come to 'comfort' him (2:11), but Job ends up declaring them 'miserable comforters' who would 'comfort' him 'with empty nothings' (21:34). These friends represent an oversimplified orthodoxy, based on a misreading of the wisdom tradition to the effect that all troubles are punishments for wrongdoing. Their 'comfort' consists largely of applying this message to Job, urging him to identify his sin and repent of it. In so doing, these friends serve as a mirror for all readers who might be inclined to say similar things to people in distress.

Astonishingly, the Lord does not take Job to task over his words; instead calling them 'right' (42:7). The book as a whole illustrates that a full understanding of God's reasons for events is not a prerequisite for faithfulness amid terrible

suffering. Further, Job's deep perplexity and questioning are not a provocation to God.

Chapter One

Job is introduced as a well respected, honest and wealthy man in his community. He has been blessed with a healthy family, a vast quantity of land and livestock and many servants to care for his property. He is also clearly a man who worships God and makes regular offerings to him, particularly on behalf of his family.

Satan presents himself before the Lord and God says to him that Job is a blameless and upright man. Satan counters by saying that it is only because of his wealth that he is blameless; without it he would curse God. So God gives Satan permission to strike against Job's wealth and family. Satan achieved this by having all the livestock either taken or destroyed and all Job's children killed as a violent storm destroyed their house. Job went into mourning at this news but did not waiver in his belief in God.

Chapter Two

Satan again appears before the Lord and this times he claims that Job has not cursed God because he has only lost possessions and family, but not been personally touched. Therefore, God gives Satan permission to harm Job but not to kill him. Satan returns to the earth and inflicts painful sores over Job's entire body. Job scrapes the sores with a piece of pottery and continues to lament before the Lord but without blaming or cursing him, despite his wife's bidding to do so.

Three friends of Job hear of his plight and come to comfort him. When they see what a desperate state he is in, the too join in with the mourning but speak no word to Job.

Chapter Three

After the prose introduction (vv.1-2), Job curses the day of his birth (vv.3-10), expanding on this theme with two sequences of 'why' questions: the first expresses longing for rest (vv.11-19); the second laments his anxious suffering (vv.20-26).

Job's opening lament plays off the vocabulary of light and darkness in relation to both questions of the section: <<*Why did I not die at birth?*>> (v.11a), and <<*Why is light given to one who cannot see the way, whom God has fenced in?*>> (v.23). Job is mystified by his current circumstances and here he wonders whether he would have been better off in the darkness of never being born at all rather than having the light of life result in such suffering and grief. The vocabulary of Job's lament is the beginning of a theme throughout the dialogue

with his friends in which darkness and light will be used to refer to both death and life as well as to what is hidden and what is revealed.

Chapter Four

Eliphaz starts this phase of the dialogue by reminding Job that he has often counselled others in their times of trouble but now he seems to have forgotten his fear of God and the humility he should show before him. He poses the first really important questions to Job in his dilemma: <<*Can mortals be righteous before God? Can human beings be pure before their Maker?*>> (v.17).

Chapter Five

Eliphaz continues with his first dialogue stating that it is in all humans to come to trouble through their own devices and that the only solution is to turn to God, for it is he alone that can save them from the folly of their ways. Those who are disciplined by God because of the error of their ways should not be downhearted but content to know that the Lord does so for their own benefit and that through submission to him they will be brought out of their woes.

Chapter Six

Job answers Eliphaz and vindicates himself by showing that the great affliction which he has suffered was the cause of his complaining by which life was rendered so difficult for him to bear. He complains that, whereas he expected consolation and support from his friends, he had received nothing but the bitterest reproaches, on the assumed ground that he must be the cause of his affliction through sin, otherwise God would not be punishing him in this way.

Job's response claims that his friends knew nothing of his case and that they had no real compassion for his situation. He then challenges them to show clearly what his fault is so that he may rectify it.

Chapter Seven

Job continues to deplore his helpless and afflicted state. He argues with God concerning his afflictions, describes the disturbed state of his mind by visions in the night, abhors life, and, showing that he is unworthy of the notice of God, begs forgiveness and respite.

Chapter Eight

Bildad immediately begins with a stern rebuke: Job's words are a tempestuous wind, and whatever has come upon his children or upon Job himself has to be right, because God does not pervert justice. If Job will simply listen to the wisdom to which Bildad is pointing him, he will remember that the wicked do not endure, and that God will surely restore Job if he is truly blameless.

Chapter Nine

Job acknowledges God's justice and man's sinfulness, celebrates his Almighty power as manifested on the earth and in the heavens, maintains that God afflicts the innocent as well as the wicked, without any respect to their works, and has delivered the earth into the hands of the wicked. Finally, Job complains of his lot and maintains his innocence.

Chapter Ten

Job concludes his response to the words of Bildad. Job is weary of life and expostulates with God. He appeals to God for his innocence; and pleads on the weakness of his body and the manner of his formation. Job complains of his sufferings and prays for respite. Finally, he describes the state of the dead.

Chapter Eleven

Like Bildad in Chapter 8, Zophar responds with a sharp challenge to what he sees as empty words and presumption in Job. He then calls Job to prayer and repentance, promising that God will transform Job's circumstances if he will simply step back from his pride.

Zophar's indignant speech makes an implicit connection between moral standing and knowledge of God: since Job's situation marks him out as morally corrupt, he cannot know God rightly.

Chapter Twelve

Job reproves the boasting of his friends and demonstrates their uncharitableness towards him. He asserts that even the tabernacles of robbers prosper; and that, notwithstanding, God is the ruler of the world, a truth which is proclaimed by all parts of the creation whether animate or inanimate and by the wars and revolutions which take place in the nations.

Chapter Thirteen

Job defends himself against the accusations of his friends, and accuses them of endeavouring to pervert truth, threatens them with God's judgements, and then begs some respite and expresses strong confidence in God. Finally, Job pleads with God, and deplores his severe trials and sufferings.

Chapter Fourteen

As part of an ongoing general response to Zophar's claims against him, Job reflects on the shortness, misery, and sinfulness of man's life. He follows this with comments on the unavoidable necessity of death and the hope of a general resurrection, then Job deplores his own state and the general wretchedness of man.

Chapter Fifteen

In his second response, which initiates the second round of dialogues, Eliphaz dispenses with his earlier commendation of Job's character; refer back to Job 4:3-6. Eliphaz opens by accusing Job of speaking out of iniquity rather than wisdom. The second half of the response is a more aggressive assertion of the content of Eliphaz's first speech: the consequence of wickedness is suffering, and thus suffering indicates that a person is wicked and should not protest innocence.

Chapter Sixteen

Job replies to Eliphaz and through him to all three friends, who, instead of comforting him, had added to his misfortunes; and shows that, had they been in his circumstances, he would have treated them in a different manner. Job then enters into an affecting detail of his suffering, consoles himself with the consciousness of his own innocence, of which he takes God to witness, and patiently expects a termination of all his sufferings by death.

Chapter Seventeen

Job complains of the injustice of his friends and compares his present state of want and woe with his former honour and affluence. God's dealings with him will forever astonish upright people; yet the righteous shall not be discouraged but hold on to his way. Job finally asserts that there is not a single wise man among his friends and that he has no expectation except for a speedy death.

Chapter Eighteen

Like Eliphaz, Bildad omits any of the appeals to Job in his first response in Job 8:5-7 and opens by venting his frustration: Who is Job to maintain his position and criticise the words of his friends? The remainder of Bildad's response is an unyielding description of the end of the wicked that appears to be motivated as much by his reactive irritation as by any further desire to correct Job.

Chapter Nineteen

Job begins by asking his friends how long they will persist in accusing him and why they feel no shame for the manner in which they have done so. Even if he has done wrong, Job maintains that it is God who has brought about his circumstances. Job laments that although he cries out for justice, his continued suffering has brought only isolation and indifference from his family and friends. Job concludes with the wish that his belief in God's vindication of him would be inscribed in rock as a permanent witness and with a warning to his friends against continuing to pursue him with such anger and certainty that they are right, lest they fall under the very sort of judgement they assume has fallen upon Job.

Chapter Twenty

In his second response, Zophar opens with a brief expression of frustration, presumably in response to Job's insistence that God has brought about his circumstances and Job's belief that God will yet vindicate him. The remainder of the response is one long description of the short and insufferable life of the wicked, by which Zophar intends to implicate and rebuke Job.

Chapter Twenty One

Job's response closes the second cycle of the dialogue with his friends by focusing directly on the assertion that the wicked suffer immediate and lasting grief, which is at the heart of the argument of each of his friends and is the thrust of Zophar's most recent response in Chapter 20. Job argues that the wicked do not self-destruct in their greed but rather live in grand style and are respected and honoured in death. In the midst of his response, Job questions whether his friends truly understand life on earth; he does this in a manner that makes it seem as if God needs to be instructed.

Chapter Twenty Two

In his final speech, launching the uniquely shaped third cycle, Eliphaz revisits earlier themes with renewed fervour and finality: he questions whether Job has any basis to lament before God, asserts again that Job's circumstances reveal his abundant evil, compares Job's words to those of the wicked, and calls him once more to repent so that he might find his ways established by God.

Chapter Twenty Three

Job apologises for his complaining; he wishes to plead his cause in the presence of his maker from whom he knows he should receive justice. However, he regrets that he cannot find God in all his trials. Still, he gives himself and his cause up to God with the conviction of his own innocence and God's justice and goodness. Job is, nevertheless, afraid when he considers the majesty of his maker.

Chapter Twenty Four

Job has persisted in arguing against his friends' assertion that the wicked are judged transparently and immediately on earth, but he also clings to his belief in the justice of God as the ground for his lament and hope for vindication.

In this part of his speech, Job wishes that God's governing of the world would be more apparent. He offers a further description of the acts of the wicked, the consequences on their victims, the seeming blindness of his friends to this reality, and the lack of any apparent judgement. Job does not address God in

this response nor does he seem necessarily to be responding directly to his friends as much as he is speaking exhaustedly in their presence.

Chapter Twenty Five

Bildad's words represent the final speech of the three friends. By returning to the central question from Eliphaz's initial response, as recorded in Job 4:17-19, Bildad reveals the dilemma within which the friends have constrained themselves and the posture they have embodied toward God and Job as a result. Since the friends have argued their theological understanding and application as representing God's perspective, they have consistently thought of the choice before them as being that either God or Job must be in the wrong. On account of Job's suffering and their own confidence about being able to interpret it, the friends have never really brought their own viewpoint under scrutiny or given thought to the possibility that they may be wrong in both their defence of God and their pursuit of Job.

Chapter Twenty Six

Job criticises his friends for what is likely an unintentional but still unacceptable consequence of their approach. He questions their absolute conviction by alluding to how much is hidden from human perspective simply in the existence and divine government of the created world.

Chapter Twenty Seven

Job refuses to agree that his friends are right and he maintains that his circumstances are not an indication of undisclosed sin. In images similar to those his friends have used against him, Job wishes that his adversaries would be considered as the wicked are before God.

Chapter Twenty Eight

In a magnificent poem that plays on the theme of the dialogues regarding what is hidden and what is revealed, Job reflects on the value, mystery and place of wisdom. The poem is structured around a question that is repeated with slight variation: <<*But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?*>> (v.12 and v.20).

Although man has shown great skill in mining the earth for its hidden and valuable resources, where is he to look for wisdom, which is beyond measure in its value and outside of the sphere of mere discovery? God is the one who knows its place and by whom wisdom is both given and governed. Interpreters have questioned whether Chapter 28 is actually Job's speech, since it might appear to dampen the weight of God's response in Chapters 38-41. However, even though the poem appears to be self-contained, the description of wisdom in the chapter is consistent with the grounds for Job's lament. It represents

what will be shown to be true of him in the end: Job is not reproved because he has promoted folly (unlike his friends) but rather because the inferences he has drawn from wisdom have not properly reflected what he is able to know in light of what he believes to be true.

Chapter Twenty Nine

Job laments the loss of the past when he felt that he had the presence and protection of God as well as the respect of all those among whom he lived, which matched the way he lived his life in pursuit of righteousness and justice.

Chapter Thirty

Job contrasts the honour of his past, as recorded in the previous chapter, with his present circumstances by describing the men who taunt him, their actions against him, and his own internal affliction, before a concluding section that references both his past acts of compassion and his present lack of hope or help.

Chapter Thirty One

After contrasting the honour of his past (Chapter 29) with the disdain he receives because of his circumstances in the present (Chapter 30), Job confesses one last time that he has lived his life in the pursuit of righteousness because he believes that is how it should be lived before God, that turning from God's way is without benefit, and that further curses should come on him if these things are not true.

Job begins by affirming his commitment to fidelity and questions how he could break it. Sections that follow each open with a conditional statement implying that his life has not been patterned by what is described: stealing or coveting, neglecting the needs of those both within his household and without, trust in or worship of anything other than God, concealing hatred or sin, or improper oversight of his land. Embedded in the end of this section is a final wish that the charges would be presented to him so that he could give an account.

Chapter Thirty Two

This chapter is the first of six in which a new, much younger character called Elihu strongly rebukes his elders. He has listened to the arguments of Job and finds fault in his claims to self-righteousness rather than in the righteousness of God. He also rebukes the three friends for claiming to have knowledge and wisdom which they falsely apply to Job's situation. Elihu has respectfully waited for his opportunity and has let the elders speak. Now his words pour out like champagne released from a shaken bottle.

Chapter Thirty Three

Elihu opens and closes this section with a call for Job to listen to his words and answer if he is able. He then presents a summary of Job's contentions regarding himself, his circumstances, and God's apparent silence before suggesting ways that God speaks in order to turn a person from the way that leads to death.

Chapter Thirty Four

Elihu sets out to dispute Job in a speech structured by its general statements of address. He is calling 'wise men' to hear Job's contention that he is in the right and 'sensible men of understanding' to hear Elihu's disputation of this claim, with both groups bracketed together as those who will agree with Elihu against Job.

Chapter Thirty Five

Elihu argues against what he sees as Job's presumption before God. Where Job said that the wicked and the righteous appear to suffer indiscriminately, Elihu argues that Job is acting as if his righteousness grants him some expectation of favour before God, when neither faithfulness nor wickedness accomplishes anything with or against God. Furthermore, where Job had maintained that the oppressed cry out and the wicked are not punished, Elihu argues that they often cry out in pride rather than in prayer to God, and thus God does not regard their cries, much less Job's vain request and foolish words.

Chapter Thirty Six

Elihu vindicates God's justice and his providential and gracious dealings with men. To the obedient belong the promises of God and to the disobedient there will be righteous judgement; also there are promises to the poor and afflicted. Elihu concludes the chapter with proof of God's mercy, with suitable exhortations and cautions.

Chapter Thirty Seven

Elihu continues to set forth the wisdom and omnipotence of God, as manifested in the thunder and lightning; in the snows and frosts; in various meteorological wonders; and shows the purpose for which they are sent. Job is exhorted to consider the wondrous works of God in the light, in the clouds, in the winds, in heat and cold, in the formation of the heavens, and in the changes of the atmosphere. He concludes his speech with the perfections of God and how he should be revered by all of creation.

Chapter Thirty Eight

The Lord now appears and answers Job out of a whirlwind, challenging him to answer. God convinces Job of ignorance and weakness by an enumeration of some of his mighty works; particularly of the creation of the earth. God makes references to his creation including the sea and the deeps, the light, snow, hail, thunder, lightning, rain, dew, ice and hoar-frost. He refers to different constellations and the ordinances of heaven influencing the earth. The chapter concludes as the Lord demonstrates his own power and wisdom in the atmosphere, particularly in the thunder, lightning and rain, and his providence in reference to all his creation.

Chapter Thirty Nine

God's response to Job continues to consider some of the animals and birds that God created, along with their key attributes. Does Job know all these things? Is it he that gives them such attributes? Can he control nature in any way?

Chapter Forty

Job, in his earlier defence before his friends, had pleaded for an opportunity to state his case before the Lord. At the end of his first questioning of Job, God provides Job with the opportunity to defend his case but his response shows that he has no case to put before the Lord.

God then starts his second questioning of Job, asking whether Job should take the place of God. Could he possibly do so? Does he have the power and authority to take on the role? God uses one particular beast that he had created, the Behemoth, as an example of the wonders of creation.

Chapter Forty One

God continues his argument that Job has now power over the mighty creatures of creation, this time using Leviathan, the giant of the seas, as his example. Therefore, Job has no right to contend with the God who created it.

Chapter Forty Two

This final chapter is in three parts: Job's humility, the rebuke and restoration of the three friends, and the re-establishment of Job's family and his place in the community.

Following the questioning by the Lord, Job humbles himself before God. God accepts his humble submission, censures the three friends for their treatment of Job and commands Job to offer sacrifices for them, that the Lord might pardon and accept them also, as they had not spoken what was right concerning their maker.

The Lord turns Job's situation from spiritual captivity to freedom. His friends visit him, bringing him gifts. Job's affluence and wealth are not just restored but become double to what they were before. His family is also increased. Having lived one hundred and forty years after his trial, Job dies in peace.