



Job - Chapter Three

Summary of 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.

II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God

Between the brief narrative sections of the prologue (1:1-2:13) and epilogue (42:7-17), the large central section of the book consists of dialogue in poetic form, except for the narrative introduction of Elihu in 32:1-5, that focuses on the question of what Job's suffering reveals both about him and about God's governing of the world.

This major section progresses in five main parts: Job's opening lament (3:1-26), a lengthy section of interchanges between the three friends and Job (4:1-25:6), Job's closing monologue (26:1-31:40), Elihu's response (32:1-37:24), and the Lord's appearance to and interaction with Job (38:1-42:6).

II.a Job 3:1-26 - Job Curses the Day He Was Born

Refer to the chapter summary above.

II.a.i Job 3:1-2 - Introduction

Job cursed the day of his birth because it represented the path of his entire life, which had led to his present distress.

¹ After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. ² Job said:

Job 3:1-2

After this. This was after all the catastrophe, all the personal affliction, and all the demonstration of compassion from Job's friends. Now Job will begin to speak about his situation.

Job cursed the day of his birth. Satan was confident that he could push Job to curse God; refer to Job 1:11 and Job 2:5. As Job spoke in his deep distress, he cursed the day of his birth: <<*Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!*>> (Jeremiah 20:14) - but he did not even come close to cursing God.

Job's thinking was somewhat common among the ancients. The historian Herodotus described an ancient people who mourned new births for the suffering that the new life would endure, and rejoiced in deaths as a final release from the suffering of life.

This chapter begins the battle in Job's mind and soul. He will not lose more or suffer more than he already has although his physical pain will continue. Yet now the battle enters into an entirely different arena; the arena of Job's mind and soul. How will he choose to think about his suffering? How will he choose to think about what others think about his suffering? How will he choose to think about God in all this? These are the questions that take up the remainder of the book, and soon come to any sufferer. The catastrophic loss itself is only an entry point into the agonising battle in the mind and soul.

II.a.ii Job 3:3-10 - Job Curses his Birth

In skilfully crafted poetry, Job rues the moment of his birth – in distinction from the birth itself: he will continue to see life as a divine gift (refer to the comment made on Job 10:8-13), and he does not ever appear to be suicidal. Rather, he wishes that reality had been different and that he would not have seen the light of day.

3 'Let the day perish on which I was born,
and the night that said,
"A man-child is conceived."
4 Let that day be darkness!
May God above not seek it,
or light shine on it.
5 Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
Let clouds settle upon it;
let the blackness of the day terrify it.
6 That night – let thick darkness seize it!
let it not rejoice among the days of the year;
let it not come into the number of the months.
7 Yes, let that night be barren;
let no joyful cry be heard in it.
8 Let those curse it who curse the Sea,
those who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan.
9 Let the stars of its dawn be dark;
let it hope for light, but have none;
may it not see the eyelids of the morning –
10 because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb,
and hide trouble from my eyes.

Job 3:3-10

Let the day perish on which I was born. Here, in fine Hebrew poetic style, Job cursed the day of his birth. Yet if this was not enough, he goes even further back and curses the night of his conception. Job's complaint is that it would be better if he had never been born than to endure his present catastrophe of affliction.

This begins a section that somewhat like a dialogue between Job and his friends. Sometimes a speaker in this dialogue answers what the previous speaker said; sometimes they do not. Sometimes the speeches are emotional much more than logical. When Job speaks, he often speaks to God; his friends speak much about God but never to him. Beginning with v.3, the style of

speaking and writing is poetic. This means that the reader must allow for figures of speech and exaggeration of feeling in those who speak.

Let that day be darkness! Job here is despising the day of his birth, and wishing that this day could be wiped off the calendar of history. Job does not curse God here or anywhere else in the Book of Job; but he here makes his strongest statements against God, and especially against the wisdom and plan of God.

Let those curse it who curse the Sea or the day. Without endorsing the practices of ancient sorcerers, Job calls upon them, i.e. those who curse, to also pronounce this curse upon the day he was born. By referring here to those who set a curse upon a day by calling upon Leviathan, Job calls for their incantations as one more piece of his lament against the day of his birth.

The name Leviathan appears five times in the OT; in Canaanite myths it is the name of a dangerous, dragon-like monster. The biblical authors are confident that the Lord triumphs over all powers, including the most feared. In Psalm 74:14 this monster is used as a figure for Egypt. Elsewhere the name is used for fearsome creatures, over which God has control, probably a crocodile in Job 41:1, and probably a whale in Psalm 104:26.

Aspects of ancient myth are sometimes referenced metaphorically in Scripture, often in images of God's power or authority: <<**By his power he stilled the Sea; by his understanding he struck down Rahab**>> (Job 26:12). This is the first mention of this strange creature in the Bible, but Leviathan is mentioned prominently in a long discourse beginning at Job 41:1. Usually Leviathan is considered to be a mythical sea-monster or dragon that terrorised sailors and fishermen. In Job's present context, the idea may be that even as sailors and fishermen would curse the threatening Leviathan with all their might, so Job wishes the day of his birth would also be cursed.

The name Leviathan means 'twisting one' and is also used in other interesting places in Scripture:

- Psalm 74:12-14 refers to Leviathan as a sea serpent, and that God broke the head of the Leviathan long ago, perhaps at the creation.
- Psalm 104:26 also refers to Leviathan as a sea creature.
- Isaiah 27:1 speaks of the future defeat of Leviathan, also associating it with a twisted serpent that lives in the sea.
- Isaiah 51:9 and Psalm 89:8-10 also speak of a serpent associated with the sea that God defeated as a demonstration of his great strength, and identifies this serpent with the name Rahab, meaning proud one.
- Job 26:12-13 also refers to God's piercing defeat of a fleeing serpent associated with the sea.

Ancient rabbinic mythologies suggest that an evil serpent was in the primeval sea resisting creation, and that God killed the serpent and brought order to the world in Genesis 1:1-2. Satan is often represented as a dragon or a serpent (Genesis Chapter 3 and Revelation Chapter 12-13), and the sea is thought of as a dangerous or threatening place in the Jewish mind (Isaiah 57:20, Mark 4:39 and Revelation 21:1). Therefore, Leviathan may be another serpent-like manifestation of Satan, who was the original 'Rahab' or proud one.

II.a.iii Job 3:11-19 - Job Longs for Rest

Job's futile curses progress from the day of his birth to the first moments of life. Just as he wishes the day was darkness and time erased, so too he wishes that life had been death (vv.11-12 and v.16), for at least that would have brought peace in the company of the dead (vv.13-15 and vv.17-19).

- 11 'Why did I not die at birth,
come forth from the womb and expire?
- 12 Why were there knees to receive me,
or breasts for me to suck?
- 13 Now I would be lying down and quiet;
I would be asleep; then I would be at rest
- 14 with kings and counsellors of the earth
who rebuild ruins for themselves,
- 15 or with princes who have gold,
who fill their houses with silver.
- 16 Or why was I not buried like a stillborn child,
like an infant that never sees the light?
- 17 There the wicked cease from troubling,
and there the weary are at rest.
- 18 There the prisoners are at ease together;
they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.
- 19 The small and the great are there,
and the slaves are free from their masters.

Job 3:11-19

Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? Job continued his complaint from his place of misery. Using poetic exaggeration, Job powerfully communicated his present pain and the feeling that it would be much better if he had never survived to face such catastrophe. It is as if Job said at this point, “I have asked that the day of my birth be obliterated, and that has not and cannot happen. So why could I have not been a stillbirth?” It is easy - but very, very wrong - to think that Job was a sinner because he was so emotional.

Now I would be lying down and quiet; I would be asleep; then I would be at rest. Job describes death as rest from the toil of life by picturing its effect on persons both high and low in society and wishes he had joined all who were already in this state of rest rather than being born.

Job was wrong in his understanding of the afterlife, perhaps believing in something similar to the modern doctrine of soul sleep, which says that the dead lie in the grave in some sort of suspended state until they are resurrected on the final day. The idea of soul sleep is wrong because of what Paul clearly wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 - that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Paul understood that if he was not alive on this earth, he would be in the presence of God and not in a suspended state lying in a grave. Paul also understood that if he died it would be an immediate gain: <<*For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain*>> (Philippians 1:21), which also argues against the idea of soul sleep. Job’s lack of knowledge of the afterlife can be explained by understanding the principle of 2 Timothy 2:10 - that Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. The understanding of immortality was at best cloudy in the OT, but is much clearer in the NT. For example, Jesus knew fully what he was talking about when he described hell and judgement such as in Matthew 25:41-46. Christians, therefore, rely on the NT for their understanding of the afterlife much more than the OT. They also understand that this does not in any way take away from the truth of the Bible and the Book of Job. What is true is that Job actually said this and actually believed it; the truth of the statement itself must be evaluated according to the rest of the Bible. Later, God challenged and corrected Job’s presumptuous assertions regarding the afterlife, reminding Job that he did not in fact know that life after death was like; refer to Job 38:2 and 38:17.

In vv.13-15 Job refers to the kings and princes who laboured to obtain wealth and build cities but now lay without them in death: <<*Do not be afraid when some become rich, when the wealth of their houses increases. For when they die they will carry nothing away; their wealth will not go down after them*>> (Psalm 49:16-17).

In vv.16-19 Job focuses on the way death removes the constraints of social position, focusing attention particularly on the small and the slaves, and those who have been weary or prisoners.

There the wicked cease from troubling. Job was also wrong in this view of the afterlife. He had the feeling that many people have - that the world beyond this is somehow a better place for everyone. In fact, the wicked do not cease from troubling in the world beyond; their trouble only increases. The prisoners do not rest and perhaps the only voice they hear is that of their oppressor.

This deception is remarkably widespread. One notable example involves the infamous Columbine murderers, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who left behind a videotaped document spelling out their motivation. In the last segment of tape, shot the morning of the murders, Harris and Klebold are dressed and say they are ready for 'our little Judgement Day.' Then Klebold, looking tense, says goodbye to his parents. He concluded, "I did not like life too much. Just know I am going to a better place than here." Incredibly, these young men believed they were going to a better place.

II.a.iv Job 3:20-26 - Job Laments his Suffering

The final sequence of 'why' questions reflects Job's current miserable state, carrying forward the themes of light (v.20 and v.23) and death (vv.21-22). Musing on those who dig for treasures (v.21b), Job anticipates the terms in which some of his puzzles will be solved in the poem on wisdom; refer to Chapter 28.

- 20 'Why is light given to one in misery,
and life to the bitter in soul,
21 who long for death, but it does not come,
and dig for it more than for hidden treasures;
22 who rejoice exceedingly,
and are glad when they find the grave?
23 Why is light given to one who cannot see the way,
whom God has fenced in?
24 For my sighing comes like my bread,
and my groanings are poured out like water.
25 Truly the thing that I fear comes upon me,
and what I dread befalls me.
26 I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
I have no rest; but trouble comes.'

Job 3:20-26

Why is light given to one in misery. Job wondered why God allowed those in misery such as his to go on living and why life was given to those who were so bitter of soul. It is a moving, poetic expansion of the idea expressed in the previous passage, speculating that death was better than his present misery. Job was among those who long for death, but it does not come: *<<And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them>>* (Revelation 9:6). Yet he did not commit or seem to seriously consider suicide. Again, this is the outpouring of an honest, agonising soul.

Why is light given to one who cannot see the way, whom God has fenced in? Job's trouble does not come because he has lost faith in God. He feels and fears that God has lost faith in him. He asks, "Why continue living," i.e. why is light given, "if I cannot see the way and God has trapped me in this place?"

In his accusation, Satan argued that Job was upright only because God had put a fence of blessing around him (Job 1:10). Here, in the opening lament of the dialogues, Job refers to his sustained life amid inscrutable circumstances of suffering as rendering him one whom God has fenced in: *<<He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has put heavy chains on me>>* (Lamentations 3:7), and: *<<Therefore I will hedge her way with thorns; and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths>>* (Hosea 2:6). Satan's contention is disproved through Job's continued faithfulness. Job's overall lament of his situation is something which God both reproves (refer to Chapters 38-41) and commends: *<<After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has'>>* (Job 42:7).

The man here described can see no reason for the trouble he is in; who cannot see the way: *<<The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what they stumble over>>* (Proverbs 4:19), *<<We grope like the blind along a wall, groping like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among the vigorous as though we were dead>>* (Isaiah 59:10), and: *<<Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, into which they shall be driven and fall>>* (Jeremiah 23:12a). Yet there was actually a wonderful answer to Job's question, if he could only see it. God allowed Job to continue on in life:

- To teach a lesson to angelic beings.
- To teach him special reliance upon God.
- To teach him to not regard the wisdom of man so much.
- To vindicate him before other men.
- To make him a lesson and an example for all ages.
- To give him more than he ever had before.

The promise for the Christian life, no matter what strife may befall it, is: <<Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'>> (John 8:12), <<Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going'>> (John 12:35), and: <<I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness>> (John 12:46).

For my sighing comes like my bread, and my groanings are poured out like water. The great emotion in Job's speech can be sensed and were certainly known to God: <<O Lord, all my longing is known to you; my sighing is not hidden from you>> (Psalm 38:9). He was not a stoic or concerned with keeping what is known as a 'stiff upper lip' in the midst of his entire calamity. Such an emotionless Christian life is never presented as a Biblical ideal.

Truly the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. Before this disaster came to his life, Job did not live a happy-go-lucky care-free life. He was concerned that trouble might come to him or to his family, so he took precautions before God to prevent it; refer to Job 1:5.

I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest; but trouble comes. With these final four blows of the hammer, Job ends his first speech. Through it all he shows that even a great man of faith can fall into great depression and despair.

Charles Spurgeon describes just such a season in his own life: "I was lying upon my couch during this last week, and my spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for - but a very slight thing will move me to tears just now - and a kind friend was telling me of some poor old soul living near, who was suffering very great pain, and yet she was full of joy and rejoicing. I was so distressed by the hearing of that story, and felt so ashamed of myself, that I did not know what to do; wondering why I should be in such a state as this; while this poor woman, who had a terrible cancer, and was in the most frightful agony, could nevertheless 'rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.'" (Charles Spurgeon, The Christian's Heaviness and Rejoicing).

Scripture provides two distinct ways: <<'There is no peace', says the Lord, 'for the wicked'>> (Isaiah 48:22), and: <<Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid>> (John 14:27).