



Good News
Bible Reading Program

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

— March 2005 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1-2 Mar	Bildad's first speech: God does not reject the blameless	Job 8
3-4 Mar	Job's response: How can a man contend with God?	Job 9–10
5-6 Mar	Zophar's first speech: Job needs to repent	Job 11
7-8 Mar	Job's response: Rather than seek answers of his worthless friends, Job would seek them of God	Job 12:1–13:19
9-10 Mar	Job appeals to God	Job 13:20–14:22
11-12 Mar	Eliphaz's second speech: It is the wicked who suffer endlessly, defy God and lose all they have	Job 15
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Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading

“If You Were Pure and Upright...” (Job 8)

March 1-2

Bildad the Shuhite now answers. Eliphaz had started by “attempting a word” (see 4:2). Bildad, in contrast, opens by outright blasting Job, asking him how long he would spew forth his nonsense. In verse 2 of chapter 8, “Bildad twists Job’s words of 6:26. Job had acknowledged that he had overreacted with words that belonged to the wind. To paraphrase Bildad’s sarcastic response: ‘Yes, you’re right, Job! All your words are like a mighty wind; you are full of hot air!’” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 8:2).

This demonstrates that Bildad had listened to what Job said—but only with his ears and not with his heart. Job had described himself as helpless and full of despair (6:13-14, 26). He had pleaded for comfort and compassion from his friends. Yet, while Bildad had silently mourned with Job for a week, what was his response now? “It seems almost incredible that Bildad would reply so callously. There is not only steely indifference to Job’s plight but an arrogant certainty that Job’s children got just what they deserved and that Job was well on his way to the same fate. The lesson we must learn is that there are such people in the world and that they do their heartless disservice to mankind under the guise of being the special friend of God” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on chapter 8).

Bildad’s reaction was evidently wholly focused on Job’s challenge in 6:24: “Teach me, and I will hold my tongue; cause me to understand wherein I have erred.” Bildad did not have a specific answer for Job. He was more concerned with the implication that Job had done nothing wrong to deserve what was happening to him. This contradicted his theological worldview. In chapter 8, Bildad’s “one and only theological point [was that] Job’s suffering was the proof of his sinfulness. Since God cannot be unjust (v. 3), there is only one conclusion—Job and his family (v. 4) had received the punishment they deserved. Job should plead for mercy (v. 5). Then, if he deserved it (v. 6), God would restore him (v. 7). Bildad failed to see that mercy implies the forgiveness one receives even though he does *not* deserve it” (note on verses 1-10). Indeed, the fact that all people are wholly undeserving of God’s grace is one of the great lessons of the book.

In support of his views, Bildad invokes the tradition of the fathers of times past (verses 8-10). The poetic discourse beginning in verse 11 appears to be quoting from this tradition. As with Eliphaz, it may be that Bildad is here quoting from an extant psalm—perhaps one that was known to Abraham and Isaac or possibly even written by them. Again, the principles espoused here are generally true, as Job himself will acknowledge (9:1-2). It is Bildad’s application of them with respect to Job that is the problem.

Verse 13 of chapter 8 speaks of the hope of the hypocrite perishing. Bildad reckoned that Job must surely have been a hypocrite. For while Job maintained his innocence, his suffering, Bildad reasoned, was proof of sin. The faulty premise here led to a completely wrong conclusion. His earlier remark, “If you were pure and upright...” (verse 6), was meant exactly as it sounded—to indicate that Job obviously was not.

Continuing in the poetic discourse, by applying the metaphor of the fleeting and frail spider’s web of verses 14-15 to the present situation, Bildad implied that Job had trusted in his wealth and estate rather than in God. This was not true. Recall that after the listing of Job’s possessions in 1:3 we immediately learned that he was constantly concerned about his family’s devotion to God (1:4-5).

The Hebrew at the end of Job 8:16-19 is difficult and the translation is disputed. The New Living Translation renders the passage this way: “The godless seem so strong, like a lush plant growing in the sunshine, its branches spreading across the garden. Its roots grow down through a pile of rocks to hold it firm. But when it is uprooted, it isn’t even missed! That is the end of its life, and others spring up from the earth to replace it.”

In verse 21, it is true that God will not ultimately cast away the blameless and uphold evildoers. Yet this does not mean that God will not allow the blameless to suffer or even to die. Nor does it mean that God will not, for the time being, sustain the lives of the disobedient. God in many ways sustains the whole disobedient human race—for now. But in the end, those who remain faithful to Him will be eternally preserved and those who choose to ultimately and forever reject Him will be destroyed. Once more, Bildad misapplied this general truth—seeing Job’s immediate suffering as proof that he could not be blameless.

Taking God to Court? (Job 9–10)**March 3-4**

Job acknowledges that what Bildad has said is true in principle (9:1-2). Yet he views himself as innocent—the intended nuance of the word “righteous” in verse 2. That is, “not absolutely sinless, but innocent of any sin comparable to his suffering” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 28).

Job’s despairing point here and in what follows is to say: How can I be found innocent before God when God, who is omnipotent and the ultimate Judge, has set Himself against me? In its note on verse 3, *The Nelson Study Bible* states: “The verb *to contend* indicates that Job was considering the idea of entering a legal case against God. The prophets often used this word when speaking of God bringing a legal case against Israel (Is. 1:2; Mic. 6:1). The Hebrew for *contend* is almost always used metaphorically in Job, referring to a ‘lawsuit’ between Job and God. Job’s legal dilemma before the Lord, who served simultaneously as Job’s judge and legal adversary (see [Job] 13:20-28), underscores the urgency and hopelessness of Job’s call for a mediator to hear his case ([Job 9] v. 33). Job calculates that the chances of answering God’s interrogation are very slim, one in a thousand—something God later verifies (see 38:1–42:6). The legal term *answer* means to respond to an accusation in court, particularly under cross-examination.”

Job mentions in 9:9 that God is responsible for the configuration of the stars in forming constellations, a fact noted later in Amos 5:8. God will later confront Job with this fact (see Job 38:31-33). Indeed, in 9:10 Job acknowledges that God does great things past finding out. Job should have applied that to his own situation rather than demanding a full explanation of what God was doing. Of course, considering the unimaginable ordeal he was going through, it is completely understandable that Job was not always perfectly rational in his thinking. Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi wrote: “Imagine how a man who is deprived of everyone he loves, and at the same time of his house, his habits, his clothes, in short, of everything he possesses: he will be a hollow man, reduced to suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint, for he who loses all often easily loses himself” (*Survival in Auschwitz*, 1958).

In his anguish and confusion, Job begins to consider some disturbing notions about God. As *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* summarizes: “Would God ever treat him justly? He doubted it (vv. 14-31). Does God mock the innocent? Job thought probably so (vv. 21-24). ‘If it is not he, then who is it?’ (v. 24). These are hard words, but his question instead of a statement implies doubt. These words are followed in vv. 32-35 with a yearning for someone strong enough to take up his cause with God. But in chapter 10 Job decided to plead his own cause and direct all his words to God. How could God who created him [with such obvious care] want to destroy him and that without any formal charges?” (note on Job 9–10). Job wanted to know what he did that was wrong. No doubt, he had been examining himself for months and remembering that he had tried so hard to please God in every detail—to the point God said he was blameless. Considering what he endured, the wonder of all of Job’s rhetoric is that he managed to stay so sane.

Regarding Job 10:17, *The Nelson Study Bible* notes: “The phrase *you renew your witnesses against me* is a legal metaphor that may refer to each new aspect of Job’s illness. In the equivalent *war* metaphor, the Lord was sending *changes* or troop reinforcements against him.” This could even refer to Job’s friends. Perhaps Job viewed them as sent by God to condemn him further.

Job ends by asking God to leave him alone in the few days he thinks he has left before he dies. He equates death here with utter darkness (verses 20-22).

“God Exacts From You Less Than Your Iniquity Deserves” (Job 11)**March 5-6**

Zophar the Naamathite is even more tactless and insensitive than Bildad. Obviously incensed at what Job has said, seeing it as a mockery of the truth, Zophar decides he needs to really “let Job have it.” And why not? For in Zophar’s misapplied theology, Job must be one of the greatest sinners ever.

In verse 4, Zophar seems to exaggerate what Job has said about his innocence, as the book does not record Job as having said that his doctrine—that is, his teaching—is pure. However, it may be that Job has said or implied this in the past and now Zophar sees it all as utter pretense and hypocrisy.

In fact, Zophar remarks that if God were to give testimony, it would reveal Job to be a worse sinner than even his suffering demonstrates. The New International Version translates the end of verse 6 as “Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* says that it reads literally as “God has forgotten for you some of your sin” and that it could, according to an Aramaic

reading, mean “God has made (allowed) you to forget” (footnote on verse 6). The point Zophar is making is that Job doesn’t know how sinful he really is—that he deserves worse punishment than he is receiving. Perhaps the implication is that Job deserves to die and it is only God’s mercy that preserves him.

The irony here is that there is some truth in what Zophar is saying. All of us deserve death for even the smallest of sinful thoughts and attitudes we have ever had. God is under no obligation to keep us from the worst pain and suffering. It is through God’s mercy that humanity is not destroyed for its constant sin. And it is through His grace that His servants are preserved despite their stumbling. Job will actually discover at the end of the book that his own righteousness is nowhere close to what God truly requires to have a relationship with Him. Yet Zophar means none of this. He views Job’s suffering as punishment for major sins in his life, yet with God mercifully pulling some punches.

The Nelson Study Bible notes on verses 7-9: “When Zophar interrogates Job about the impossibility of comprehending the *deep things of God*, he employs for *search out* the same term Job used to describe God’s wonders as beyond ‘finding out’ (9:10). Thus Zophar may be trying to turn Job’s words against him by saying that Job’s actions are inconsistent with his theology. Since these verses anticipate portions of the Lord’s speeches [later in the book] (see 38:16-18, 34-38), Zophar’s doctrine is correct, but the application is wrong. Biblical truth misapplied perverts the intent of the Scriptures and misleads. [Moreover] sound doctrine without love does not please the Lord.”

Zophar is harshly accusatory of Job. The statement in verse 11 regarding God knowing deceitful men is no doubt meant to imply that Job was such a person—either that he was intentionally hiding his sin or that, in the deceitfulness of his heart, he was not admitting his sin to himself. And “as a retort to Job’s rhetorical question (6:5) in which he compared his own cries to the braying of the ‘wild donkey,’ Zophar employs what may be a proverbial statement about the wild donkey...[possibly] implying that Job’s ‘empty talk’ indicates that he is *empty headed* ([Job 11] vv. 3, 12)” (note on verses 10-12).

As *The Bible Reader’s Companion* explains in its summary of chapters 11-14, here is the solution Zophar gives in his irrelevant sermonizing: “The paraphrase: ‘Be devoted to the Lord. Pray. Stop sinning. Then everything will be fine ([Job 11] vv. 13-16). What a dagger in the heart of a man who has been devoted to God, but is suffering anyway! And what pain Zophar’s description of divine blessing must have caused (vv. 17-20). This is exactly what Job’s life was like—and all has been lost, in spite of the fact that Job is not at fault!”

“I Desire to Reason With God...

You Are All Worthless Physicians” (Job 12:1–13:19)

March 7-8

Job responds to his friends with cutting sarcasm: “No doubt you are the people [i.e., the right people to go to for all the answers], and wisdom will die with you” (verse 2)—as if all the wisdom in the world were concentrated in these three men. Job is essentially saying, “So you think you know it all.” He follows this by noting that he knows as much as them. In fact, he points out that what they have been saying is common knowledge (verse 3).

Yet again Job points out that in accusing him the truths they are relating are being misapplied—as he is innocent (verse 4). In contrast to their ideas, the wicked often prosper—despite the fact that all life is in God’s hand, as the whole creation could teach them (verses 5-10). This was another stab at the notion that they “knew it all” when it came to God. The fact is, they were ignoring what was obvious.

Job points out in verses 11-12 that people learn from what they hear and experience, gaining a measure of wisdom over the course of a lifetime. But real wisdom and strength, he explains in verse 13, lies with God. The arrogance of man, he goes on to show, is brought to nothing by the sovereign God who can do whatever He wants (verses 14-25). It is just foolishness for anyone to try to pin down and understand everything that God is up to in His dealings with mankind.

Rather than deal anymore with his friends, Job would much rather take his case directly to God (13:3). The friends have proven themselves “worthless physicians”—failing to diagnose the real problem—and even “forgers of lies” with their unjust accusations against him (verse 4). It would be better for them to cease from their grandiose speeches and just listen (verse 5).

Job points out that their mouths were going to get them into trouble. In their rush to defend God, they were basically bearing false witness against Job (verses 7-8). They were not even being honest in their defense of God, as they ignored evidence that ran counter to their beliefs about Him. Job says that God would ultimately rebuke them for that—as indeed He will at the end of the book. This passage is

remarkable on two counts. First, it shows that even if people put on a great display of piety in standing for God's integrity, God will not accept this unless it is heartfelt, deeply considered and in keeping with His overall ways. Second, we see here that despite Job's struggle to understand what God is doing in the world and in his own situation, he still trusts in God's flawless character and justice. This is why he believes he can ultimately find resolution with God.

"Job was so sure he would be vindicated that he repeated his desire for a hearing before God (vv. 13-19). He viewed this boldness on his part as one of the evidences that what they said about him was not true. If Job were a hypocrite, would he be willing to put his life in jeopardy in this way (v. 16)? Such a man would not dare come before God" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verses 1-27).

"If a Man Dies, Shall He Live Again?" (Job 13:20–14:22)

March 9-10

In Job 13:20, Job launches into His appeal to God. He asks two things: (1) that God would stop terrifying him with unrelenting suffering (verse 21) and (2) that God would stop hiding Himself and reveal the specific charges He has against him (verses 22-24).

In verse 26, Job mentions the iniquities of his youth—showing that his life has not been completely sinless. But have not these been forgiven since he committed to a relationship with God? Yet his early period of waywardness is the only thing Job can think of that could merit what is now happening to him.

In verse 28 through 14:6, Job sinks back into despair, uttering a poem on the plight of man, agreeing with Eliphaz's assessment that a person is born for trouble and viewing himself as the premier example of that. In verses 7-12, which may be a continuation of the poem, Job implies that life is better for a tree than a person—because at least a tree cut down can sprout again while death marks the end for a human being, at least until far in the future.

This refocuses Job's thoughts for a moment on the future resurrection, which he clearly believes in. He asks that God would bring him the relief of the grave until His wrath is past—that God would then call him forth at the appointed time. "To capture the force of Job's meaning of *halipati*, ['my change' or] 'my renewal' [NIV]), we must note that the same root is used in v. 7 concerning the tree. There the NIV [and NKJV] translated it 'sprout.' A basic meaning is 'to have succession.' In this verse Job is speaking of succession after death, not the healing of his body in this life" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, footnote on verse 14). The Greek Septuagint translates this as a word meaning "rebirth."

But Job's flicker of hope is short-lived here. As the remainder of chapter 14 shows: "Job knew that eventually God would cover all his offenses and long for him as the beneficent Creator who delights in those he made. But despite his faith in God's power over death, Job was convinced that God would not even allow him the exquisite release of death.... The waters of suffering continue to erode till his bright hope was a dim memory (v. 19) and nothing mattered anymore but the pain of his body and the continual mourning of his soul (v. 22)" (note on 13:28–14:22). In this world, it appears that he, along with the rest of mankind, has no hope and no future.

Yet through all this, Job who was suffering inconceivable distress, still did not curse God's name. We can only begin to grasp the mental strain Job endured during his time of suffering.

"The Wicked Man Writhes With Pain All His Days" (Job 15)

March 11-12

Eliphaz now speaks a second time. It seems that Job's statements are taking their toll on him. They are uncomfortable and, rather than really consider them, Eliphaz decides to lash out at Job in a torrent of accusation.

Job's words, Eliphaz says, are like a destructive east wind that brings harm. Notice verse 4 in the NIV: "But you even undermine piety and hinder devotion to God." *The Bible Reader' Companion* notes on this verse: "Some today are also shocked that anyone would ask questions about matters of faith. To express doubt or uncertainties, or to struggle with difficult questions, is viewed as an attack on belief in God. But God is great enough to survive our questions and doubts. Anyone who is honest in his or her struggle to understand God is far more likely to come to faith than lose it. The person who truly undermines piety is the one who insists others be satisfied with superficial or pat answers, is unwilling to face difficulties, and is afraid to ask questions. Remember again, it is Job who is the man of faith and the three friends that God condemns at the end of this book" (Lawrence Richards, 1991).

Eliphaz goes on to state that all Job is saying is condemning himself (verse 6). He refers to his earlier statements to Job as "the consolations of God...spoken gently" (verse 11)—yet which Job has

arrogantly rejected. Eliphaz then repeats the thought from his night vision that lowly, vile man cannot stand before God (verses 14-16; compare 4:17-19). So how dare Job call on God to question Him?

In Eliphaz's mind, the time for soft words is over. He proceeds to really blast Job. He says outright that it is the wicked who writhe continually in pain (verse 20), who live in dread and whose prosperity is destroyed (verse 21), who are hopeless (verse 22) and who defy God (verses 25-26). In short, he is calling Job wicked.

As Eliphaz sees it, the wicked might prosper for a moment—illustrated by the fatness of verse 27—but they will soon get their deserved comeuppance (verses 28-35). Once again, there is truth in this in the context of eternity—and often even in this life over the long haul. Yet Eliphaz does not see the frequent reality of the wicked prospering for years—or the righteous suffering for a long time.

Regarding the final remarks of this speech, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* points out that “Eliphaz made sure that all the things that had happened to Job were included—fire consumes (vv. 30, 34; cf. 1:16), marauders attack (v. 21; cf. 1:17), possessions are taken away (v. 29; cf. 1:17), and houses crumble (v. 28; cf. 1:19). Although the modern reader often misses the point that these barbs are all directed at Job, we can be sure that Job himself felt their sting” (note on verses 21-35).

“Oh, That One Might Plead for a Man With God” (Job 16–17)

March 13-14

Job reproaches his friends for their treatment of him, calling them “miserable comforters” (16:2) or, literally, “comforters of trouble”—people who make matters worse rather than better. If the shoe were on the other foot, he would not act like they are now acting but would try to be a source of encouragement and comfort to them (verses 4-5), in keeping with godly character.

“The phrase *shake my head at you* indicates a mocking posture (as in Ps. 22:7). However, the word *comfort*, meaning ‘to nod the head sympathetically,’ is used in [Job] 2:11 of the friends who came to console him. [Yet they obviously failed in their mission.] In effect, Job is saying: ‘Please nod your head with understanding instead of mocking and ridiculing me’” (*The Nelson Study Bible*, note on 16:4-5).

But they would not. Job sinks back into mourning his condition. Shockingly, he seems to refer to God as his tearing, hating, gnashing adversary or enemy (verse 9), though it is possibly that he is personifying his *illness*—continuing from the previous verse where he said, “My leanness rises up against me.” The Hebrew word for “adversary” here can mean “a narrow or tight place,” figuratively meaning trouble or affliction (Strong's Lexicon, No. 6862). Of course, it is clear, as we have seen, that Job thinks God counts *him* as if an enemy (13:24; see also 19:11). Interestingly, however, in chapter 18 Bildad seems to think that Job is referring to him and the other two counselors as tearing beasts (and thus Job's enemy referred to here) and retorts that Job is the one tearing himself (see 18:3-4). It is true that Job saw himself as a fallen man who was being kicked while he was down—seemingly something only enemies would do. It is also conceivable that Job realized that Satan, as the enemy of humanity and God, was particularly his own enemy.

In any case, whoever or whatever Job is labeling as his devastating enemy, there is no question in his mind that his illness and even the torment from his friends is ultimately from God—either directly or because God has allowed it. And this was in fact so. Job is correct in verse 11 when he states: “God has delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over to the hands of the wicked.” For as we know, God had told the very king of the wicked, Satan the devil, “Behold, he is in your hand” (2:6).

Yet by the wicked here, Job probably had particular people in mind—passersby perhaps—who were taunting and even striking him and spitting on him, though he may be using these terms metaphorically for mistreatment (16:10; 17:6; see also 30:1, 9-12). Indeed, if metaphorical, it is possible that Job is referring to his friends, classifying them among the wicked.

Job 16:9-11 seems to also be a foreshadowing of the suffering of Jesus Christ. The words “They gape at me with their mouth” are later used by David in Psalm 22:13—this psalm picturing the future suffering of the Messiah. In His time of greatest torment, Jesus finally came to the point where He, like David, cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). Christ obviously felt some of what Job was feeling.

“[Job 16] verses 18, 22, and 17:1 indicate that Job thought he would die before he could be vindicated before his peers; so he was concerned that the injustice done to him should never be forgotten. That is what he meant when he called on the earth never to cover his blood or bury his cry (v. 18). In Genesis 4:10-11 Abel's innocent blood was crying out to God as a witness against Cain. So Job was

consoled to think his cry would continue after his death. And there is one in heaven who would listen to it (vv. 19-21)” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on 16:18–17:2).

In 16:21, Job longs for someone to intercede for him with God. On one level, this was probably a desire for Job’s friends to cease from their accusations and start praying for him. Yet it may also anticipate the role of Jesus Christ, our Intercessor and Advocate (see Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1).

In praying to God in Job 17:3, “Job uses the language of ancient business contracts and asks some ‘pledge’ (down payment) from God as security against the vindication that will surely come. Only God can demonstrate Job’s innocence and despite his despair and ambivalence he believes that God will” (*The Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verses 3-9).

The translation of verses 8-9 is disputed. Some see the meaning as truly righteous people being unhappy with the hypocritical friends—or that they would be if they were made aware of the situation. Yet others see Job as being sarcastic here—speaking of “the innocent” (his friends) stirred up against “the hypocrite” (himself). In context, the latter seems more likely. The Good News Bible paraphrases the passage this way: “Those who claim to be honest are shocked, and they all condemn me as godless. Those who claim to be respectable are more and more convinced that they are right.” This flows right into verse 10: “As for all of you, come back and try again! But I will not find a wise man among you” (New Living Translation).

In the Hebrew wording of verses 11-16, it is not clear if Job is entertaining the possibility of hope and realizing the foolishness of wishing for death or if he is belittling the idea of hope and is in fact wishing for the relief death would bring.

What Did You Call Me? (Job 18)

March 15-16

Bildad takes offense at what he believes Job has implied about him and the other two counselors: *So you think we’re beasts. So you think we’re stupid* (compare verse 3). He then lashes out in a rather vicious diatribe. Bildad paints Job as the wicked punished with disease and loss of family—and whose memory and posterity is to be wiped from the earth.

Why was Bildad really here? Was it to comfort Job? Or was it to feel good about himself—to be able to congratulate himself for doing some good deed? If the former, he should have expected a suffering, grief-stricken person to say some highly emotional things. And he should have been ready to roll with the punches, as it were. Yet Job had *offended* him—this noble man who was here to help. How dare someone put him down?

Furthermore, Job’s words were probably causing Bildad to question some deeply ingrained beliefs. Indeed, Job was demanding that these beliefs be questioned—and overturned. Bildad was incensed at the audacity. And rather than face the disturbing questions, he did as Eliphaz had done and reacted emotionally—basically more forcefully trying to ram the same old argument that the wicked receive total retribution in this life down Job’s throat.

In all likelihood, Bildad still justified his approach with the notion that he was helping Job in leading him to a proper understanding. Previous arguments hadn’t worked—so now it was time to put some fear into Job. Of course, this was ridiculous considering how much Job had already lost and the fact that he had no doubt completely mulled all of this over already for the past several months. Moreover, it was cruel and insensitive considering what Job had gone through and was still experiencing. Did Bildad truly think this was going to fix the problem?

For all of us, Job’s three friends are a tremendous example of what not to do and how not to react when trying to comfort a suffering, grieving person.

“For I Know That My Redeemer Lives, and...I Shall See God” (Job 19)

March 17-18

The words of Job’s friends do not bounce right off him. They wound him deeply—leaving him shattered—on top of what he’s already going through. His friends have wronged him with all their accusation and lack of pity and comfort (verses 1-3).

Job’s response to their using the disgrace of his disease to plead the case that he is guilty of sin is to say that *God* has wronged him (verses 5-6). Perhaps softening this accusation is the fact that the word translated “wronged” could also be rendered “overthrown,” as it is in the earlier King James Version and in Green’s Literal Translation. Either way, while it is true that God bears responsibility for what is happening to Job, Job’s understanding of what is occurring is gravely mistaken. Furthermore, as has

already been stated, people in great suffering often blurt out things they don't fully mean. The great God of perfect compassion understands.

Job goes on to relate more of his unrelenting sufferings—unable to comprehend why God would afflict him with these things. Verse 9 shows him stripped of glory and crown—demonstrating that Job was probably a king (see also Job 29).

In 19:20, after Job says, “My bone clings to my skin and to my flesh,” we see words that have become an idiom in the English language for a narrow escape: “I have escaped by the skin of my teeth” or, as it is more properly rendered in the earlier King James Version, “with the skin of my teeth.” The idea that a narrow escape is meant here is probably incorrect. In context, perhaps he is simply saying that of all his bones, his teeth alone do not cling to skin—as they have no skin. On the other hand, some see the skin of the teeth as meaning the gums—and that Job is saying that only his gums are unaffected by his illness. *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible* offers this intriguing possibility: “Some have thought that Satan, when he smote Job from head to feet with ulcers, spared his mouth, lips, and teeth, the instruments of speech, that he might therewith curse God, which was the thing he aimed at, and proposed to bring him to, by getting a grant from God to afflict him in the manner he did.”

Suffering as he does, having described his abandonment by friends and family (verses 13-19) and seemingly by God, he cries out from his isolation to his three visiting friends for pity (verses 21-22).

Then in verses 23-24 Job wishes that his words would be written down, engraved as a permanent record. His thought here was the same as in 16:18, where he asked that the earth not cover his blood when he died—that it would remain as a witness. Bildad had warned how death would remove the memory of Job from the earth (18:12). The amazing fact is that Job's words have remained for all time—preserved through this book of Job we are now reading.

Surprisingly, in the midst of his despair, we learn that Job is confident that God will *not* forget him. He looks forward to the far future when his “Redeemer”—the divine Kinsman who would buy him back from suffering and death and ultimately vindicate him—would at last stand on the earth (verse 25).

Job seems immediately to relate this to his own resurrection at that time. The NKJV says: “And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God” (verse 26). The last clause here is disputed. As *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* notes, “The debate centers around whether it is ‘in the flesh’ or ‘apart from the flesh’ that Job [will have] this experience. The Hebrew could go either way” (note on verses 25-27). The Holy Scriptures translation by the Jewish Publication Society (JPS), renders it: “Then without my flesh shall I see God.” Many insist that the meaning here must be “in my flesh” because Job mentions his *eyes* then beholding God (verse 27), which is only possible with a body. The truth of the matter, however, is that it is possible to have a body that is not made of flesh. Indeed, 1 Corinthians 15 explains that the resurrection bodies of the saints will be composed of spirit, as “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (verse 50; compare verses 45, 49).

Yet there is another possible translation of this passage that does allow for “in my flesh”—and fits in context with Job's lamenting. Note it in the new JPS translation: “But I know that my Vindicator lives; in the end He will testify on earth—this, after my skin will have been peeled off. *But I would behold God while still in my flesh*, I myself, not another, would behold Him; would see with my own eyes” (verses 25-27, Tanakh). In other words, this translation sees Job as basically saying, “I know I will see God at the resurrection, but I would really like to face Him right now—to confront Him with my situation.”

Job ends in verses 28-29 with a warning to his friends. Rather than be all concerned with trying to establish the fact of his sin, they should be worried about their own wrong in how they are dealing with him. For they are right about one thing—a judgment is coming.

“I Have Heard the Rebuke that Reproaches Me” (Job 20)

March 19-20

Zophar now speaks for the second and last time. He “took Job's words, especially [Job's] closing words in 19:28-29, as a personal affront. Job had dared to assert that on Zophar's theory of retribution Zophar himself was due for punishment. To Zophar such could only happen to the wicked. Zophar was the most emotional of the three; and he was not about to let Job's rebuke go unanswered, though in chapter 19 Job had earnestly pled for a withdrawal of their charges. Here he had nothing new to say to Job but said it with passion. The speech is full of terrifying imagery” (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verses 1-3).

Indeed, Zophar's speech is utterly scathing. Where Job had asked the earth to not cover his blood and stated that he had a witness in heaven (16:18-19), Zophar says that the earth would rise up against the wicked—meaning Job—and that heaven would reveal his sin. In fact, Zophar said that the wicked person would perish forever like his own dung (verse 7), which is buried in the earth.

It is staggering to witness the steeply escalating excoriation and threatening warnings in the speeches of Job's friends. As he scrapes at his painful boils and struggles in agony to understand what is happening to him, crying out to his friends ever more fervently for caring pity and comfort, they instead hammer and bludgeon him worse than before.

“Why Do the Wicked Live and Become Old...?” (Job 21)

March 21-22

Job makes another attempt to answer his friends but believes they will just keep mocking him as they have been (verses 1-3). He responds to their notion that the wicked always get what they deserve in this life in short order with observations of just the opposite—that they usually seem to live out their lives pretty comfortably.

In verse 19, he anticipates a response of, “Well, at least their children will pay for what they've done.” But how, he asks, would that be justice when the wicked themselves are left unaffected—when they won't even know what their children are experiencing because they'll be dead? (verses 19-21).

The translation of verse 30 is disputed. In the New King James Version, the meaning seems to be that the wicked will ultimately get theirs on the final day of judgment—implying that most of them have smooth sailing until then. Yet other versions render this as the wicked being kept *from* any present day of judgment—being brought out *in escape* from current calamity.

In verse 22, Job seems to admit that he is not worthy or capable of instructing God on what is righteous and just, but he just has to question what God is thinking here. It is a hard matter, and Job thinks his friends are ridiculous for thinking they have it all figured out—especially when he is here shredding their arguments, showing their answers to be empty and false (verse 34).

In actuality, their arguments bore a kernel of truth. The apparently idyllic life of the wicked is often an outward façade. Sin does carry consequences in the here and now. Automatic penalties for faithlessness and disobedience are often at work in the lives of the wicked, denying them true happiness and fulfillment. However, Job's friends were completely mistaken in thinking that sinful living would result in almost immediate direct retribution from God. They also denied the obvious fact that the wicked did not live in constant terror and agony. And further, they were completely wrong in their assumption that those who faithfully serve God never experience terror and agony except when they stumble and sin.

“Is Not Your Wickedness Great, and Your Iniquity Without End?” (Job 22) March 23-24

Eliphaz now responds for the third and last time, giving a renewed rebuke and a call to repentance. He opens by asking of what benefit or pleasure it is to God whether Job is innocent (verses 1-3). The question itself seems absurd. It is true that God does not *need* righteous servants, but He does *desire* them. From other passages, we know that God delights in the righteous and that He experiences joy when people repent. Eliphaz's questions seem to imply that God doesn't really care one way or the other—and that Job is an arrogant fool for thinking otherwise.

Yet Eliphaz sees this as really a moot point—since he believes Job is *not* innocent. In verse 4, Eliphaz mocks Job: “Is it because of your *fear* of Him that He corrects you...?” Eliphaz sees no evidence of a right fear of God on Job's part. Instead, to him, all the evidence points to sinfulness.

In fact, as Eliphaz sees it, since Job's suffering is great, his sin must be great too (see verse 5). Eliphaz then launches into a list of specific charges of particular sins. Where in the world did he come up with these? Probably from reasoning backwards. First of all, Job's ongoing insistence regarding his own righteousness before God probably made it look like he was actually convinced of his faithfulness to God, which to Eliphaz means Job must have made a pretense of religion while neglecting important areas. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* suggests: “Eliphaz felt Job had deceived himself by trusting in his ritual piety (what he had done for God) while his real sin was what he failed to do for his fellow man” (note on verses 4-11). And since Job's sufferings were the worst ever seen, his sins must have been particularly severe—social oppression and neglect being perceived as very serious in a society that viewed hospitality as one of the chief human responsibilities. It appears that Eliphaz fabricated these particular charges to fit the facts as he saw them.

There was one big problem though—these were not facts at all. They were baseless, made-up lies. Job was not like this at all, as we know from the testimony of God himself at the beginning of the book.

Moreover, Eliphaz accuses Job of thinking that God is so far off as to not be able to see what Job is doing (verses 12-14). Yet while it is true that Job has lamented God's apparent indifference to the wicked, he has also directly complained of God's overbearing watchfulness over him to pursue him with calamity. Job certainly did not think he could hide anything from God.

Notice verses 17-18. Eliphaz denounces hypocritical wicked people for rejecting God even though God has "filled their houses with good things." Did you catch that? Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have been contending that God only *curse*s the wicked—but here we see Eliphaz saying that God has *blessed* them with their possessions. Which is it? Eliphaz could not see the contradiction in his own beliefs.

In verses 21-30, Eliphaz gives a wonderful call to repentance—for a person "to submit; to be at peace with God (v. 21); to hear God's word and hide it in his heart (v. 22); to return to the Almighty and forsake wickedness (v. 23); to find delight in God rather than in gold (vv. 24-26); and to pray, obey (v. 27), and become concerned about sinners (vv. 29-30)" (*Expositor's*, note on verses 21-30). The big problem with this statement is that Eliphaz is making it to the wrong person. Job is innocent of the charges leveled against him. He is in no way the uncaring, wealth-obsessed miser Eliphaz has painted him as. Indeed, this man whom God called upright was just the opposite. Job will in fact repent at the end of the story, but not for any of the false accusations of Job's friends.

In its note on verse 30, *The Nelson Study Bible* states: "Eliphaz's prediction that God would deliver one who is not innocent through the purity of Job's hands would be fulfilled ironically through Job's prayer for the three friends [at the end of the book] (42:8-10)."

"I Would Present My Case Before Him" (Job 23–24)

March 25-26

Job does not answer Eliphaz's outrageous charges. Instead, he groans and wishes he could go to God and present his case before *Him*. In verse 5, the phrase "I would know the words which He would answer me" means "I would *like* to know His answer."

In contrast to Eliphaz's apparent contention that God did not really care whether Job was innocent (see 22:1-3), Job is convinced that God did care and that if he could reason with God, then he would at last be delivered.

While Job cannot travel about to find God, he realizes that God, in contrast, knows exactly where to find him because God is putting him through his current trial (verses 8-10). Job's point in verse 10 about emerging from God's test as gold compares to similar imagery in later passages where the purification of gold and silver are used to typify trials refining God's people (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:20; Psalm 66:10; Isaiah 48:10; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12; Revelation 3:18). However, in Job 23:10 it is not clear if Job is saying that his current trial will burn away his impurities leaving only gold, or pure character, remaining—or if he means that the test will reveal him as having had pure character all along. The latter seems more likely since, in the next two verses, he states that he has not departed from God's commandments (indirectly refuting Eliphaz's charges).

The precise meaning of Job 24:1 is debated. The phrase "Since times are not hidden from the Almighty" could also be rendered "Why are times not stored up [or reserved] by the Almighty?" The point of the entire verse might be: "Why does God not reserve particular times or days and make His servants aware of them?" These times could refer to God setting days for holding court or to meet with His servants in need (in conjunction with Job's desire in chapter 23 to appear before God). Alternatively, the times could refer to set periods of judgment (to deal with the sinners Job describes in 24:2-17).

It seems that Job's concern for his own unjust suffering has sparked the thought about the broader issue that many innocent people in the world are made to suffer at the hands of sinners who themselves do not have to pay for their crimes. How is that fair?

Verses 18-25 are disputed. Note how the New King James Version has added the italicized word "*should*" a number of times in verses 18 and 20. Without this, the verses are statements of fact concerning the fate of the wicked, as other versions render them. Many, including the NKJV editors, do not think Job would be saying that the wicked will get theirs, as this seems not to fit in context and agrees too much with his friends' argument. However, Job could well be noting that the wicked will eventually receive punishment in the end—and is just upset that they seem to get off scot-free until then. Others see him as pronouncing a curse on the wicked here (because God doesn't seem willing to) or stating what

God *should* do as in the NKJV. Verses 22-24 may refer to not just the wicked but *all* men ultimately being brought low, seeming to show that God uses His power arbitrarily.

There is so much wickedness—so much of man hurting his fellow man. Why does God let it go on? Why doesn't He bring immediate judgment? Why do the innocent have to suffer at the hands of cruel and wicked men? Why does God Himself bring terrible suffering on Job, who is innocent? This is the essence of what Job wants to understand in this passage—the case he would bring before God.

Man a Maggot? (Job 25–26)

March 27-28

In chapter 25, Bildad speaks for the third and last time. He still cannot accept Job's declaration of himself as righteous. Furthermore, as *The Nelson Study Bible* notes on verses 5-6, "Bildad's view of God's dominion and majesty in the heavens causes him to devalue mortal man as a maggot. He responds insensitively to Job by suggesting that Job does not need to wait until he dies to be grouped with maggots (the same Hebrew word that Job used in 17:14). This was caustic sarcasm, for Job was in fact covered with worms (see 7:5)."

While Bildad is right in making the point that human beings of themselves, corrupt and impure, are morally unworthy to have anything to do with God, he is wrong in making it seem that mankind is essentially worthless in God's eyes. God would later show just how much He values mankind through Jesus Christ actually becoming a human being and suffering for them—and that to rescue even the worst of sinners.

Bildad's brief speech here is the last we hear from Job's three friends in the book. Zophar has no third speech.

God Is Beyond Human Understanding (Job 25–26)

Mar. 27-28 Cont'd

Job evaluates the counsel of Bildad as worthless (the "you" here being singular in the original Hebrew). While the New King James Version presents the opening verses of the chapter as questions, they could also be translated as sarcastic statements, as in the New International Version and New Living Translation. The Good News Bible renders verses 1-4 this way: "What a big help you are to me—poor, weak man that I am! You give such good advice and share your knowledge with a fool like me! Who do you think will hear all your words? Who inspired you to speak like this?"

In the remainder of the chapter, Job makes several statements about God's great power and majesty (verses 5-14). This response may have been sparked by Bildad's cosmic references, where he said the moon and stars pale before God (compare 25:5). Most likely, Job was criticizing Bildad and his other two friends for thinking they knew all about what the Almighty Creator was doing. Job points out some of the great mysteries of the creation and then asserts that these things don't even scratch the surface of God's wonders and ways (compare verse 14).

Job demonstrates surprisingly accurate scientific understanding in this ancient context. Notice verse 7, where he states that God "stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing." Author Grant Jeffrey remarks on this verse in his book *The Signature of God*: "This [verse] was an astonishingly advanced and accurate scientific statement. The ancient pagans, who were contemporary with Job, believed that the earth was balanced on the back of an elephant that rested on the back of a turtle. Other pagans believed that the mythological hero Atlas carried the earth on his shoulders. However, [nearly] four thousand years ago, Job was inspired by God to correctly declare that God 'hangs the earth on nothing.' Only a century ago scientists believed that the earth and stars were supported by some kind of ether. Yet Job accurately stated that our planet moves in its orbit through empty outer space. [Moreover] an astonishing discovery by astronomers recently revealed that the area to the north of the axis of our earth toward the polar star is almost empty of stars in contrast to the other directions. There are far more distant stars in every other direction from our earth than in the area to the far north of our planet. As Job reported, 'He stretches out the north over empty space' (Job 26:7). Mitchell Wardrop wrote the following statement in an article in *Science* magazine. 'The recently announced 'hole in space,' a 300 million-light-year gap in the distribution of galaxies, has taken cosmologists by surprise.... samples in the Northern Hemisphere, lying in the general direction of the constellation Bootes, showed striking gaps ...' (Mitchell Wardrop, 'Delving the Hole in Space,' *Science* magazine, Nov. 27, 1981). This relative emptiness in the direction to the North of our solar system is not visible by the naked eye. It is only as the result of very careful observation by [modern] telescopes that scientists have recently proven that Job was correct" (1996, pp. 114-115).

The “serpent” God pierced in Job 26:13 is probably related to God stirring up the ocean in verse 12, as the original Hebrew in verse 12 has “the ocean...*Rahab*”—a word meaning “fierce” that other passages define as a serpent cut apart by God (see Psalm 89:10; Isaiah 51:9). Isaiah 30:7 analogizes Egypt as *Rahab*. And as was stated in the Bible Reading Program commentary on this reference, *Rahab* seems to be equated on one level with the Egyptian crocodile god Sobek, whose name means “rager.” Yet the real power behind the throne of human empires and the one behind the mask of pagan deities is Satan the devil. The serpent of old who was in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3; Revelation 12:9), Satan is the ultimate serpent *Rahab*. This name actually occurs earlier in the book of Job. In 9:13, “allies of the proud” is literally “allies of *Rahab*”—who will lie prostrate beneath God. As we will later see, *Rahab* seems also to be equated with the sea monster Leviathan, which is another likely picture of Satan.

Ironically, Job did not realize that all that he himself was going through would yet demonstrate God’s power over Satan.

“Far Be It From Me That I Should Say You Are Right” (Job 27–28)

March 29-31

Job continues with his response, now addressing not just Bildad but all three of his friends (as the “you” in verse 5 is plural).

In verses 2-6, though Job accuses God of denying him justice and dealing him a bitter experience, he takes an oath in God’s name to be completely honest and hold fast to his integrity and innocence. In whatever he himself says, he will not stoop to the level of his friends in their dishonest approach.

In verse 7, Job asks that anyone who would be his enemy (the Hebrew here means “hater”) would be reckoned among the wicked. And there is no way Job is going to act like such a person because, despite Job’s previous statements that things often seem to go well for the wicked, Job knows that there is no guarantee that this will be so—and if things do take a downturn, the wicked cannot expect God to help them (verses 8-10). This shows that Job considered that he himself had a reasonable expectation that God *would hear him*.

Job’s point here and in the remainder of the chapter is to warn his friends that by treating him as they have been, they are actually joining the ranks of the wicked and can expect the punishment of the wicked—the very thing they have been warning *him* about. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* notes on verses 11-12: “Job was saying, ‘Must I teach you about God’s power to punish? Indeed, I could never conceal from you a subject on which you have expounded at length.’” Yet he proceeds, in verses 13-23, to remind them of just what lies in store for the wicked—using their own approach against them.

“Where Can Wisdom Be Found?” (Job 27–28)

Mar. 29-31 Cont’d

In the next chapter, Job makes the point that while man is special, distinct from animals, in being able to employ technology to explore the hidden depths of the earth and mining its ores and gems, he can’t find wisdom this way. True wisdom cannot be found through natural exploration (28:1-14). Nor can it be bought (verses 15-19). True wisdom, Job explains, comes only from God (verses 20-23).

God is the only one who knows everything that can be known (compare verse 24). Once again, Job displays some remarkable scientific knowledge—understanding that itself seems to have come from God. Note verses 24-26: “For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees under the whole heavens, to establish a weight for the wind, and apportion the waters by measure. When he made a law for the rain, and a path for the thunderbolt.” *The Signature of God* by author Grant Jeffrey states: “In this intriguing statement the Bible reveals that the winds are governed by their weight, a fact that scientists have only determined in the last century. How could Job have known that the air and the wind patterns are governed by their actual weight? Meteorologists have found that the relative weights of the wind and water greatly determine the weather patterns. The passage also reveals a profound appreciation of the fact that there is a scientific connection between lightning, thunder and the triggering of rainfall. Apparently, a slight change in the electrical charge within a cloud is one of the key factors that causes microscopic water droplets in the clouds to join with other droplets until they are heavy enough to fall to earth. In addition, we now know that a powerful electric charge as high as 300 million volts in a cloud sends a leader stroke down through the air to the ground. Instantaneously, only one-fiftieth of a second later, a second more powerful return stroke travels back up to the cloud following the path through the air opened by the leader stroke. The thunder occurs because the air within this channel or path has been vaporized by superheating it to fifty thousand degrees by the lightning. The superheated air expands outward at supersonic speed creating the noise of thunder. Job’s description, ‘He made a law for the rain and a path

for the thunderbolt' (Job 28:26) is startling in its accuracy. No human could have known this in ancient times without the divine revelation of God" (pp. 118-119).

Verse 27 notes that God established His wisdom from creation. And the only way for a person to really come to understand it, as the next verse explains, is to have a proper fear of God and depart from evil (compare Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). It is interesting to consider how God described Job at the beginning of the book: "a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). And through Job's relationship with God, he will ultimately gain the understanding he seeks.

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