

*How to Study the
Book of Job*
a concise guide

j r f

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A black and white photograph of a teapot and a teacup on a table with an open book. The teapot is on the left, and the teacup is on the right. The background is dark and out of focus. The number 1 is inside a dark oval in the upper center.

1

I N T R O D U C I N G

J O B

Introducing the Book of Job

The book of Job¹ can be somewhat daunting and intimidating, but without question the reward is worth the effort. No doubt, due to its size and complexity it's often considered among the more difficult books of the Old Testament to understand, let alone study. This guide on interpreting Job may be used as a roadmap for navigating the highways and byways of the book. In particular, this introductory chapter will provide some preliminary thoughts on the book as a whole before moving on to the different sections and subjects in the subsequent chapters. At the end of each chapter will be summary questions to help you process what you've read and lead you into a more productive study of Job. With that in mind, let's lay our intimidations aside and get started.

First, let's briefly address some general, introductory points common for most biblical studies, namely the author, date, and genre. Simply put with regards to Job, there's no certainty with the first two points. The author is unknown and dating the book is fraught with difficulties. The best estimations seem to put the time period for Job somewhere around the patriarchal period, but a later date is sometimes suggested as well. However, because Job is mentioned in Ezekiel 14:14 (alongside Noah and Daniel), a limit for a maximum date would seem to rest here, with the authorship of Ezekiel (593-571 BC).

As a side note, there's no reason to assume that the writing of Job has to occur within the time frame that events unfolded. Meaning, it's certainly possible that God in His divine superintendence of Scripture had the actual book of Job penned well after the events. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Job lived in a pre-Mosaic time and was most likely a non-Israelite. In the opening chapters where we find him functioning as a priest for his family, it may be safe to conclude that Job had far more in common with Melchizedek, and for that matter Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, than Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood.

Job falls within the wisdom section of Scripture alongside Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon and similarly contains some poetic elements. Some have attempted to subdivide Job's genre into either lawsuit, lament, or disputation. While each of these elements are certainly present in Job, it's probably pressing too hard to fit Job cleanly into one of these categories.

Second, Job offers its readers a myriad of theological themes, not the least of which is **the sovereignty of God**. From the opening chapters where the supremacy of God is observed in His questioning of (the) Satan and granting him permission to test Job

¹ Consider reading the entire Book of Job before beginning this guide.

to the concluding chapters where God makes Himself more fully known to Job, the sovereignty of God is vital to the book of Job. Similarly, **the justice, freedom, and goodness of God** are brought into view by means of Job's affliction and the "counsel" that his friends provide. Bringing this central theme into focus, Puritan Joseph Caryl summarizes the book of Job by posing two critical questions:

INTERPRETIVE TIP

THEOLOGICAL THEMES

*THE SOVEREIGNTY, JUSTICE, FREEDOM, AND GOODNESS OF GOD

*FAITH UNDER TRIAL

*PATIENCE IN PERSEVERANCE

*SUFFERING & COMFORT

*GOD'S GRACE

*RETRIBUTION

TRY READING THE ENTIRE BOOK OF JOB IN ONE SITTING TO GRASP IT'S FLOW AND STRUCTURE AND TO FEEL THE WEIGHT OF THE EMOTION, ESPECIALLY CH. 38-41.

OR, TRY READING THROUGH THE BOOK WITH A SMALL GROUP, ALTERNATING CHAPTERS FOR EACH PERSON TO READ AND THEN SHARE IN A BRIEF TIME OF DISCUSSION ON GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

1. Whether it doth conflict with the justice and goodness of God to afflict a righteous and sincere person, to strip him naked, to take away all his outward comforts. Or, whether it doth conflict with the justice and goodness of God, that it should go ill with those that are good, and that it should go well with those that are evil.

2. Whether we may judge of the righteousness or unrighteousness, or the sincerity or hypocrite or any person by the outward dealings and present dispensations of God towards him.

Several related themes are noteworthy when studying Job such as **faith under trial**, as we gain insight into the horrific events that Job experiences and then witness how God preserves the faith of His servant when all others have turned against him. Related, there is the theme of **patience in perseverance**, which becomes evident through the various responses of Job to his affliction. Given the manner in which Satan challenges God by questioning His integrity, through Job, we are witnesses to another theme, **the vindication of God's grace**, in the life of His servant by means of the previous two themes, faith under trial and patience in perseverance. There is interconnectivity between the trials and afflictions that we are subject to, the impact upon our God-given faith, and the grace which God supplies in our time of need.

This introduces a further theme for us, one that corresponds with the widespread and well-known theology of suffering in Job and the grace that God supplies to His children under trial, one which we will refer to as a theology of comfort.

While the suffering of Job is more well-known and garners the majority of attention throughout the book, balancing this is the desire for comfort. This desire for comfort from affliction, or more clearly stated consolation, begins with the arrival of Job's friends (2:11) and runs throughout the book, culminating in the only source of genuine comfort, God Himself (42:6).

Finally, our overview of themes brings us to the doctrine of retribution, *lex taliones*, or an “eye for an eye” which dominates the book of Job, particularly as it is misunderstood and wrongly applied by the friends of Job. This misapplication of retribution, in the case of Job’s friends, is summarized by Joseph Caryl:

He that is afflicted, and greatly afflicted, is certainly a great open sinner, or a notorious hypocrite: But Job, thou art afflicted, and thou art greatly afflicted: therefore certainly thou art, if not a great open sinner, yet a notorious hypocrite.

Properly defined, *lex taliones* simply means that the punishment fits the crime. Essentially, our actions have consequences. This creates a tension in the Book of Job that exists between the circumstances of Job and the misapplication of this doctrine by his friends with the Scriptural fact that God does punish the wicked and reward the faithful. Proverbs 11:21 and Galatians 6:7 say just that

*“Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished,
but the offspring of the righteous will be delivered.”*

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”

Additionally, we know that sin does have consequences, which can be catastrophic at times, as with Adam, Eve, Moses, David, and certainly we could add in the multiplication of our own experiences. Therefore, we must exercise caution in our assessment of the circumstances surrounding Job lest we fall into a trap of oversimplification and assume that we know the cause of his affliction.

Now, before we find ourselves championing the views of Job’s friends and counting Job among the wicked, we must be reminded that God does not submit Himself to this principal of retribution, rather it submits to God, meaning that it is within God’s divine prerogative to determine when or how to apply it. Likewise, affliction, as in the case of the blind man in John 9 is not a clear indication of retribution. Whether by retribution or by sovereign pleasure for the good of the afflicted, every case of affliction has the glory of God as its chief end.

God certainly punishes the wicked and blesses the righteous, but this does not always fit within a nice and tidy box, as Job’s friends assert. Instead, only at the final judgment will God’s justice be meted out in clear, black and white lines. Those who are without Christ, the wicked, will be condemned to eternal destruction, while the righteous, those who have repented of sins and trusted in Christ, will be eternally rewarded. Pressing that reality into this age, an over-realized eschatology, is the great crime of prosperity gospel peddlers. As we will see, there’s been little change from the time of Job’s friends to the prosperity gospel preachers of today.

Because the book of Job deals with complex issues by means of difficult dialogue, there's been no shortage of interpretive issues. In the next chapter we'll look at several of those interpretive challenges as well as suggest some interpretive keys and observations to make when studying through Job.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. In the past, what has been your experience with the Book of Job?
2. What difficulties have you had in understanding the Book of Job?
3. If you have experienced affliction of any kind in the past, was Job a comfort? How could it have been?

"It is not the bee's touching of the flower that gathers honey, but her abiding for a time upon the flower that draws out the sweet. It is not he who reads most, but he who meditates most — who will prove the choicest, sweetest, wisest and strongest Christian." (Thomas Brooks)



2

I N T E R P R E T I V E

K E Y S

Interpretive Keys to the Book of Job

As previously mentioned, the book of Job can be a challenging and intimidating study, not only because the content focuses on the suffering of Job, but also because of the book's structure, difficult language, which includes the vocabulary, sentence structure, and often extreme statements, along with its poetic style, and historic references. Add to this the difficulties translators have had with an older Hebrew language and commentaries will be divided on how to interpret some of the more challenging passages. The problem, mind you, is not principally with the book, rather it is an internal problem that each of us bring to our study of God's Holy Word.

How then should we approach Job?

Our first answer is, as always, with humility. After that, there are several interpretive keys that will help us understand the main flow of the book, even if some of the obscurity remains a mystery.

To begin, the foundational background of the book may be found in the interaction between God and Satan; Satan vs. God, not God vs. Satan. God is not actively engaged in a struggle with Satan. Satan is not a loose cannon or a rogue employee. He's a dog on a chain, but he's God's dog, completely unable to act apart from the permissive will of God, as we see here in Job. A corroborating New Testament passage is Luke 22:31 where Jesus informs Peter of Satan's desire to sift him like wheat. As with Peter, so here with Job, Satan had to have permission to tempt and afflict (Job 1:12; 2:6). Within this interaction, we have our **first interpretive key** for understanding Job, namely the character of God.

Setting the stage for unfolding this first key, to see just how integral God's character is, we must note that the sons of God present themselves before God, Satan among them. At first glance it may be easy to presume that this interrogation takes place in heaven, and it may, but in reality, we cannot be too dogmatic about the location. In other words, we don't know for sure that Satan was "in heaven". Additionally, we have no indication that this is a recurring event, nor that it lasts for an extended period of time. What we do know is that it is God's own initiative to offer up Job to Satan. He alone is sovereign and displays that authority both in his offering up of Job and limiting the influence and power of Satan.

With this, Satan begins his antagonism toward God in which he questions God's very character.

"9 Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and

his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” Job 1:9-11

“4 Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” Job 2:4-5

Satan is asserting that the reason Job is blameless and upright is directly related to God’s hand of blessing on him. In a sense then, he becomes the father of the prosperity gospel, a health and wealth false gospel that sees physical blessing and reward in this life as a “divine right” and a direct result of personal faithfulness. Satan challenges God to remove His protective hand and watch how Job will curse Him to his face. Fittingly in is his role as the accuser of the brethren, Satan accuses Job of hypocrisy by issuing the challenge to God that should He take away Job’s possessions and then his health, he would curse Him. By doing so, in a roundabout way, Satan is challenging the very character of God.

INTERPRETIVE TIP	
KEYS	
1.CHARACTER OF GOD	
2.CHARACTER OF JOB	
3.FRIENDS ARGUMENT	
4.TAKE THE GOOD/LEAVE THE BAD	
5.TIME:THIS AGE VS. AGE TO COME	
DIVISIONS	
CHAPTER 1-2:	THE BACKGROUND
CHAPTER 3:	INTERLUDE
CHAPTER 4-27:	DIALOGUES
CHAPTER 28:	INTERLUDE
CHAPTER 29-31:	FINAL DEFENSE
CHAPTER 32-37:	ELIHU
CHAPTER 38-41:	YAHWEH
CHAPTER 42:	VINDICATION

In other words, Satan believes that the way to attack the integrity of God is to attack the integrity of Job. If Job’s faith turns out to be fraudulent and a model of hypocrisy, then Satan will be proved truthful in his declaration that Job only served God for a blessing. What’s at stake here is the worthiness of God to be worshipped and served for who He is, not for the blessings He has bestowed. Satan’s argument, inherently implies that God is not worthy of being served in and of Himself.

Keeping this in mind while reading through Job will help in navigating the purpose for Job’s affliction, i.e. to prove the worthiness of God through magnification of His grace by the preservation of his servant. Additionally, it will help to maintain the tension of the situation of whether Job will persevere, vindicating not only his own integrity, but the worthiness of God to be worship by His creation.

The **second interpretive key**, understanding the descriptions given about the character of Job, is critical for maintaining the flow of argumentation between Job and his three counselors. In the opening of the book we are given two couplets describing the character of Job: *blameless and upright, fears God and turns away from evil*. This does not mean that Job is living some kind of sinless perfectionist life, nor does it mean that Job was in a special category of super-saints. It does mean that Job was not living in any kind of open sin; that Job was not hypocritical, claiming one thing yet living a lie behind closed

doors. God affirms this in His own declaration of Job's character as He repeats it to Satan, twice (Job 1:1; 2:3).

Knowing that Job truly is a godly man and that there's no indication of an unrepentant, hidden sin helps us understand his persistence of his innocence, as well as the vigor with which Job defends his integrity and desires vindication. Similarly, it gives us added perspective of the interaction between Job and his counseling friends, particularly in their accusations against Job.

Which brings us to the **third interpretive key**, namely the line of argumentation from Job's friends. Their central argument against Job is rooted in the equivocation of sin with affliction, as per our definition of *lex taliones* in the previous chapter. They each see a one to one correspondence between affliction and sin, the former a product of the later. (on this errant view, see the earlier summary by Joseph Caryl.)

The counseling friends of Job fall into the same kind of trap that our Lord's disciples did in John 9,

"2 Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."

It should be pointed out again that the law of retribution is not a foreign concept to Scripture, indeed it is a central tenet. However, the problem from the friend's perspective is their incorrect application, subordinating God to His own principle and insisting that Job's affliction must be the result of retribution. In overemphasizing the principle of retribution by dogmatically asserting the guilt of Job, inherently the friend's limit the freedom of God to act when, upon whom, and how He sees fit for the purposes He has ordained.

Next, our **fourth interpretive key**. It is common to read Job and take all that he says as good while taking all that is friends say as bad. This will inevitably lead to misinterpretation. Personally, I've been hesitant in the past to quote from anything that the friends have to say, even though it may look and sound like a truth, simply because it came from their mouth and, traditionally, they have been viewed as poor counselors (which they are!!). However, it might be better to take the good and leave the bad. This applies both to Job and the counselors, as each side presents some good arguments. Summarizing John Calvin on the matter, he points out that Job maintains a good case but pleads it poorly while the others bring a poor case but plead it well. He concludes that "when we have understood this, it will be to us as it were a key to open to us the whole book."

Finally, through our **last interpretive key** we must note that there is a temporal layer in the argumentation from both Job and his friends. The friends consistently appeal to the blessings of God *in this life* as directly flowing from the spring of repentance

from sin. This over-realized eschatology frames their application of the prosperity gospel to Job's situation. This is precisely the error of modern day proponents of this false gospel who press the promises of Scripture, particularly those of the Old Testament, which highlight material and physical blessings, into this age. Indeed, God may bless His children materially in this life and may give them a long abundant, healthy life. But on the other hand, He may not. Ultimately, the material blessings of scripture, i.e. health, wealth, and prosperity, are fulfilled perfectly and without measure in the age to come.

The breadth, width, and depth of Job is immense and it can inevitably be overwhelming. Preparation in studying Job may be just as important, if not more so, than the actual study. Outlining a plan with a few of the interpretive keys mentioned above can be a helpful step in rightly interpreting the book and properly applying its richness to the Christian life.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Read Job 1-3. What do you think causes the change in perspective with Job between chapters 2 and 3?
2. What role does God play in Job's affliction? Is it active or passive?
3. Conversely, what role does Satan play? Is it active or passive?

A black and white photograph of two men in conversation. The man on the left is older, with a mustache, wearing round sunglasses and a light-colored striped shirt under a textured jacket. The man on the right is younger, wearing a dark flat cap and a dark jacket. They are both looking towards each other, suggesting a dialogue. The background is blurred.

3

D I A L O G U E S &

D I A T R I B E S

Digesting Dialogues and Diatribes

The majority of Job consists of speeches (monologues or soliloquies) and dialogues between Job and his three friends, who arrive at the end of chapter 2, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Each in their respective turn, forming a series of speeches, offer counsel to Job followed with a response from Job. This series essentially stretches from chapter 3, beginning with Job's lament, to chapter 27, where Job concludes the dialogues with an interlude (Ch. 28) before preparing for his closing remarks in chapters 29-31. The speeches can most easily be digested by separating them into three cycles with introductory and concluding remarks by Job (see below).

Speech Cycles

Historically, the focus of studies on the book of Job have centered on the prologue (Ch. 1-2) and the epilogue (Ch. 42) with little emphasis on the dialogues. Reasons for this may abound, but are probably due to the complexity of the language and the lack of desire to dive into the weeds, so to speak. However, as with any good Bible study, the diamonds lie beneath the surface. This is the case when we pause to analyze the speakers and their speeches.

Cycle one begins in chapter 4 with Eliphaz's response to Job's lament and runs through the entirety of chapter 14. Following Eliphaz is Bildad in chapter 7 and Zophar in chapter 9. This order is repeated in *cycle two* with the counseling speeches occurring in chapter 15, 18, and 20 respectively, while Job's response and commentary again intermingled between them. *Cycle three* again opens with a word from Eliphaz in chapter 22 followed yet again by Bildad in chapter 25. However, this time in the cycle Zophar is mysteriously absent and is instead replaced by an additional speech by Job (Ch. 27-28). Of the three cycles, the first is arguably the most critical as it outlines each participant's main argument. The subsequent cycles contribute to the overall sweep of the book but add a lot of repetitious argumentation.

Job's Lament

As mentioned above, the lament of Job in chapter 3 opens the section of speeches. Here we find the faith of Job and his confidence in God rattled as emotion and grief begins to overwhelm the stalwartness that was so evident from chapters 1 and 2, cited below

"21 And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' 22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong." Job 1:21-22

“10 But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” Job 2:10

Job’s lament can be broken down into three sections, the first of which is his desire to have never been conceived (3:1-10). Next, his desire that he would’ve died at birth (3:11-19). In the third and final section, Job wishes that death would be imminent for the afflicted (3:20-23), particularly as it is applied to his own case. Though Job did not sin with his lips in chapters 1 and 2, one is left wondering if cursing the day he was born isn’t shortsighted in its failure to recognize that God had ordained both his birth and his afflictions, with plans beyond what Job can see, a theme which will permeate Job.

INTERPRETIVE TIP

CONSIDER WRITING OUT ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS FOR EACH SPEECH FROM CHAPTERS 4-27:

-WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF THIS SPEECH?

-WHAT IS THE KEY VERSE(S)?

-WHAT IS THE KEY TRUTH BEING DISCUSSED?

-WHAT IS THE KEY ERROR?

SPEECHES (3 CYCLES)

ELIPHAZ: CH. 4,5,15,22

JOB: CH. 6,7;16,17;23,24

BILDAD: CH. 8,18,25

JOB: CH. 9,10;19,26

ZOPHAR: CH. 11,20

JOB: CH. 12,13,14;21,27

Three Observations

A helpful tool for understanding chapters 4-27, and really the rest of the book of Job, is to arrange the speeches into digestible bites. The chapter divisions, though a 13th Century addition (the numbering of verses came 3 centuries later), offer some interpretive help in recognizing where natural pauses or changes of direction might occur. These inserted chapters, while not infallible, were developed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton. They can sometimes be unhelpful and prohibitive, but as they relate to Job, they essentially correspond to the transitions in speeches.

Once the speeches are broken down by each speaker, three principle observations may be asked of each: the main theme, key verse or verses, key truths and error(s).

Attempting to **identify the main theme** in these chapters of Job can prove to be difficult. The language is often that of similitudes and the structure that of poetry. However, that doesn’t mean that the task is impossible. Generally speaking the speeches either identify a main point early on or devote the majority of the content towards the main idea. So, for instance, though Bildad has much to say in rebuking Job in

chapter 8, verse 3 would seem to establish a major theme for him, namely the justice of God, *“Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?”*

Second, and more pointedly, **identifying the key verse or verses** of the speech can help weed out some of the supporting verses and aid in clarifying the main theme. Here you are looking for a statement that either expresses a critical truth concerning the character of the speaker, audience, or God, a detail about a change in the situation, or a doctrinal proposition being put forth, just to name a few.

Third, as has been previously mentioned, in these speeches, we need to **take the good and leave the bad**. Remember that in stating this, it's a recognition that both parties in the debate have good things to say though, many times they are wrongly applied, particularly by Job's friends. Having said that, there are also many errors and inconsistencies that are stated as well, sometimes simply in the form of inflammatory or unhelpful counsel. By identifying these key errors and key truths it will provide guardrails for correctly interpreting the content and meaning of the dialogues.

Summary

Thankfully, for the sake of interpretation, the cycle of speeches gets shorter as the book progresses, and the content of the speeches begins to become repetitive. In the opening cycle (chapters 4-14), the focus is upon the character of God by means of the affliction of Job. In cycle two (chapters 15-21), the focus is much more on the character of the wicked and the justice of God meted out against them. By the time we reach cycle three (chapters 22-27), we get more of the previous two themes with the addition of Job's expression of suffering AND the prosperity of the wicked, along with the divine prerogative of God to delay His justice as He sees fit.

Understanding the central portion of Job is foundational for understanding the role of Elihu, in chapters 32-37, as well as the purpose and meaning of God's reply in chapters 38-41. As such, there's no reason to rush through or even skip this section as many have tried to do in the past. Sometimes the treasures and gems are hidden away in locations for those willing to put forth the effort to find them.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Read Job 4-27. What is a lament? Find 3 additional examples in Scripture (Hint: Psalms is a good place to start)
2. What has been your experience in receiving counsel during times of affliction? Was it helpful or hurtful?
3. What difficulties do the speeches of Job's counselors present in your reading and understanding the *Book of Job*?

4

J O B S W O R D S

A R E E N D E D



The Words of Job are Ended

The words of Job reach their *denouement* in the 31st chapter of the book with the concluding statement, *“The words of Job are ended.”* To this point, we have heard Job speak at liberty in a variety of ways which began with his first brief response at the onset of affliction in the opening chapter, *“And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’”* (Job 1:21)

This was followed by his second response a chapter later, *“But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?’”* (Job 2:10) And then silence; for at least seven days in the presence of his friends, but probably longer due to the time it took them to travel.

By chapter 3, we have no clear reference for how much time has elapsed since the loss of Job’s wealth, the death of his children, and the onset of his excruciating disease. The seven-day silence is then broken by Job in his lament for death. We next read Job’s words as he takes his turn in the cyclical interactions with his counseling friends in chapters 6-7; 9-10; 12-13; 16-17; 19; 21; 23-24; and 26-27.

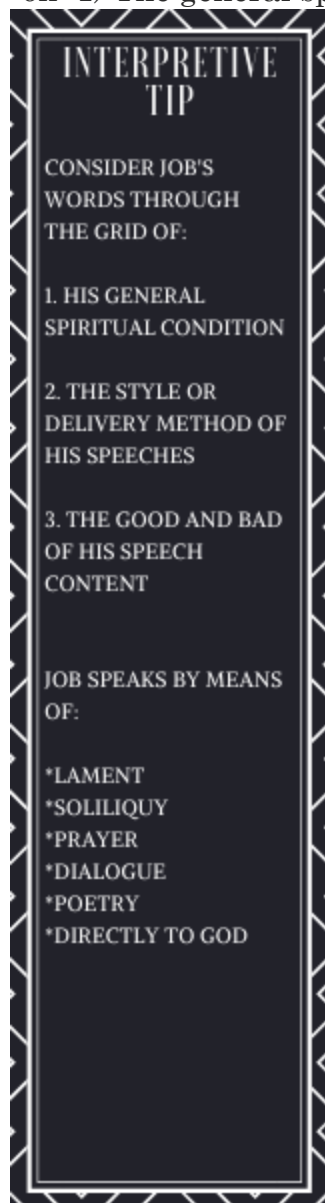
Job’s extended discourse in chapters 26 and 27 is interrupted by the presence of a poetic outburst, in which he proclaims the wisdom of God in chapter 28. While the location of this chapter in the flow of Job, as well as who the actual speaker may have been in this poem, has been the source of debate, it’s best to avoid the speculation by embracing the poem as Job’s interlude in preparation for Elihu’s upcoming speeches and more importantly for the arrival of Yahweh.

In the final three chapters of the words of Job (Ch. 29-31), we see **three distinct movements** of thought. The **first** of these is Job’s nostalgic longing for the good-ol’ days when he walked closely with the Lord and was thought of highly in his community. This overview of the past by Job gives us some insight into his life prior to the events of chapter 1 and adds to our understanding of his overall righteous character. **Second**, this pining for the “days of old” shifts to the present in chapter 30 and Job once again enters into a lament by detailing how his life in the past has been reversed and flipped on its head. Out of that lamentation, Job begins his **final** defense, the well-known chapter 31, wherein he lists a series of acquittals from sin. In this list, Job exonerates himself from at least 12 sins by name, some of which he has been accused of by his friends. Whether or not Job has exercised wisdom and discretion in announcing his freedom from certain sins is a point to be taken up by the reader. Regardless, in chapter 31 Job lays before us an exemplary pattern for holy living.

Three Observations

Looking back over the previous chapters, and summarizing what we have read from the mouth of Job, we may observe that he has often spoken by way of lament or prayer expressing his desire to die. He's offered complaints against God, commendations of God, complaints against his friends, and perhaps most frequently has expressed his desire for vindication, or to be cleared from all accusations of wrong doing. Through the words of Job, which have meandered and progressed along these various paths from the opening chapters to their conclusion in chapter 31, several observations may be made that will help us with the overall interpretation of the book. These will focus on: 1) The general spiritual condition of Job, 2) The style or delivery method of Job's

words, and 3) The good and the bad (again!).



Regarding Job's spiritual condition, it's important to discern that Job vacillates between hope and despair. With this in mind, we should note when the occurrence of each takes place and then subsequently take the context of the words he speaks into account. In other words, when he is in a moment of despair from the weight of his tragic circumstances and utters words which would make us cringe, we need to understand the context of the wounds out of which these words are spoken. Likewise, when we read words of hope and restoration, we must realize that this is the faith of Job on display, shining brightly in the shadows of affliction.

Similarly, from the words of Job, we've seen that he often wavers between the flesh and the spirit, an internal struggle that every follower of Christ has. In the New Testament, this is most evident in Romans 7:7-25. Historically, Martin Luther seems to have placed his finger on the pulse of this malady with the Latin phrase *simul justus et peccator*, or "simultaneously justified and sinner". In Job, we can sometimes see momentum building in the strengthening of his spirit, while at other times he sinks into the flesh bemoaning his condition, cursing the day he was born, and generally questioning the justice and goodness of God. Looking over the corpus of Job's words from chapter 3 to chapter 28, or even 31, it's reasonable to conclude that Job gains ground in this daily struggle, becoming more resolute as His faith in God is strengthened and his indwelling sin continues to be purged.

Finally, in observing Job's spiritual condition, we see his desire for vindication and the defense of his integrity, which is the central argument of Job towards his critics, and adds significantly to whether his words are rightly

interpreted. If Job concedes to the argument of his friends, that only those embroiled in great wickedness are afflicted (and that since he is afflicted, he must therefore be wicked), then he proves himself to be nothing more than a hypocrite, superficially serving God while being materially blessed, all the while living a wickedly sinful life. This concession on Job's part would in turn prove Satan truthful and God a liar (see Chapter 2: Interpretive Key #1 – The Character of God). While Job is not aware of the behind the scenes activity from chapters 1 and 2, the reader must feel this tension as the progression of the drama unfolds.

Our next observation is **the style or delivery method of Job's words**. Generally, Job's speeches take the form of a soliloquy, essentially talking to himself out loud for others to hear. Additionally, we find him speaking as prayer towards God, dialogue with his friends, the aforementioned poem (chapter 28), and later, by way of response directly to God, albeit much briefer than his earlier spoken words (and for good reason!). Giving attention to which method Job is employing adds to the ability to properly interpret him.

As with the interpretation of the friend's speeches, so too with Job, we must **hold on to the good and leave the bad**, our final observation from his words. Generally, Job's words are strong displays of theological precision, particularly when hope abounds and the spirit is winning the war over the flesh. However, the potential for the reader to derail into an interpretive ditch can occur if we simply assume that all Job has to say is correct or that the tone with which he speaks is generally positive. This isn't always the case. Job often comes within a hair of outright blasphemy by questioning God's wisdom, justice, and goodness. Likewise, he repeatedly sees God as his enemy who has done little more than set him up as a target of His wrath. Additionally, too often Job's tongue borders on self-righteousness and pride as the debris of indwelling sin is stirred to the surface through his ongoing affliction and interaction with his friends.

As one reads through the book of Job, it's nearly impossible not to feel the emotion of Job's words and to find ourselves siding with him verbatim while dismissing the words of his friends. Instead, we would do well to interpret the book consistently by maintaining the tension between both good and bad that come from all those who speak up until the arrival of Yahweh. The Epistle of James presses upon this theme of the forked tongue when he says,

"From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water." James 3:10-12

Perhaps nowhere in Scripture is this more clearly on display than with the words of Job and even more so with his friends. Thus, the words of Job are ended.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Read Job 28-31. To this point, what can you surmise about Job's view of God?
2. Why does Job so emphatically desire a mediator?
3. Read through Job's acquittal in Chapter 31. Take some time to identify the sins that he acquits himself of.

A black and white photograph of a microscope, showing the eyepiece, objective lenses, and stage. The image is used as a background for the book cover.

5

E X A M I N I N G

E L I H U

Examining Elihu

The poetic interlude in the 28th chapter of Job prepares the way for the arrival of a new character on the scene. By the time the words of Job are ended in chapter 31, the silence created by his last defense allows for the opening and introduction of a young man, Elihu the “*son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram.*” Job 32:2

As the narrator introduces Elihu, we are informed that his anger burns towards Job and his three friends – the former because “he justified himself” and the latter because they had failed to properly answer Job and only condemned him. It would seem that the dialogues and diatribes from the previous chapters took place in a public venue and Elihu was one of, perhaps many, observers.

Elihu’s Speeches

Confusion regarding the presence of Elihu in the midst of Job abounds. Some commentators have viewed him as the mouthpiece of Satan while others see him as a Christological figure providing the mediation that Job had long desired. With such a wide spectrum of opinions, how then are we to understand Elihu’s overall contribution to the book and more importantly, how are we to rightly interpret his speeches? To arrive at these answers and others from questions yet to be asked, we need to examine Elihu in order to discern whether he is helpful or hurtful, friend or foe.

The speeches of Elihu span from chapter 32 to chapter 37 and are often long-winded and wordy. Over these six-chapter divisions, which we may be reminded are not original (see discussion from chapter 3 above), Elihu offers four speeches. Speech 1 occurs in chapters 32 and 33 and generally may be viewed as an apologetic introduction. Speech 2 is contained entirely in chapter 34, largely consisting of rebukes towards Job and his friends. The third speech is found in chapter 35, where Elihu transitions away from Job and his three poor counselors to theology proper, namely God Himself. The fourth and final speech of Elihu fills the remainder of the chapters (36-37) and is chiefly a discourse on the character and majesty of God as he prepares for His arrival in the subsequent chapter.

There are at least **four key themes** that may be gleaned from Elihu’s speeches, and probably more, but for our general examination here we will limit them to:

1. A rebuke of Job’s demand for vindication
2. A general reproof of pride
3. The majesty of God
4. The purposes of God in affliction

As the young man enters center stage, we read of his lengthy apologetic in chapter 32, setting the stage for his own assertions regarding the afflictions Job. There is somewhat of an initial tone of humility expressed by Elihu and we have no real reason to assume anything other than proper motives for voicing his own opinions here. However, he does at times go too far in his harshness and, as with the other speeches, his cannot simply be taken as inerrant. In his opening remarks we see that he has respectfully waited his turn to speak while his elders offered their extensive advice to Job.

First, the rebukes of Job come early and often, as Elihu holds back very little, if anything, of what has been building up inside, like wine waiting for venting. His initial rebukes of Job are often accompanied by quotations of things that Job has said. With these reproofs, there has been confusion whether Elihu has intentionally misconstrued what Job has said, or whether he is simply making generalizations. Determining which position to take on these quotations likely determines whether one views Elihu in a positive or negative light. In his opening apologetic, he has already informed his audience that he has been a diligent listener of the proceedings (Job 32:11-12). It seems unlikely that Elihu is undertaking a smear campaign by intentionally distorting Job's previous speeches. Instead, a more reasonable conclusion would be that Elihu is generalizing, though sometimes the details are expressed inaccurately, for the purpose of summarizing the tenor of Job's speeches.

This occurs in Elihu's first rebuke of Job from chapter 33:8-13 (ESV)

*"Surely you have spoken in my ears,
and I have heard the sound of your words.
9 You say, 'I am pure, without transgression;
I am clean, and there is no iniquity in me.
10 Behold, he finds occasions against me,
he counts me as his enemy,
11 he puts my feet in the stocks
and watches all my paths.'
12 'Behold, in this you are not right. I will answer you,
for God is greater than man.
13 Why do you contend against him,
saying, 'He will answer none of man's words'?"*

This passage (Job 33:8-13) is typical and exhibits well the characteristic thoughts of Elihu regarding Job. In this we see Elihu's attentiveness to the arguments which were previously laid out, his summation of Job's perspective on his affliction, and his concluding rebuke. Verse nine, cited above, illustrates the difficulty with how to interpret Elihu's take on Job's complaints. On the one hand, some have taken it to conclude that he misconstrues Job by claiming that he spoke of his innocence, as a

whole. However, Job did no such thing, only maintaining his innocence with regard to his present affliction. In fact, on several occasions we read of Job referring to past sins (Job 13:23-26; 14:16). Other commentators on Job have concluded, and perhaps rightly, that Elihu is simply making generalizations of Job statements when he maintains his righteousness by denying any correlation between his affliction and unconfessed or hidden sins. Additional rebukes of Job in Elihu's speeches occur in Job 34:5-9; 34:35-35:4; 35:16; 36:16-24 and 37:14-20



A second key theme of Elihu, as we enumerated above, is the subject of pride. Perhaps this theme is less obvious than the rebukes of Job and less powerful than the exaltation of God's majesty, yet nevertheless, it percolates throughout, primarily by way of mentions in Job 33:17; 35:12; 36:9; 37:24. Context for each of these are informative.

The *first* mention (*Job 33:17*), occurs while Elihu outlines some purposes of God for affliction, which we will look at in more detail below. By stating that affliction may serve to humble and keep one from pride, Elihu has essentially placed his finger on the pulse of Job's chief malady. *Second*, in Job 35:12, he informs us that God may choose not to answer the prayers of those who are being afflicted because of their pride (cf. James 4:7). The *third* passage, Job 36:9, seems to specifically associate the righteous with those who are in positions of authority, i.e. kings, who are "*caught in the cords of affliction*" in which the Lord, "*declares to them their work and their transgressions, that they are behaving arrogantly.*" Again, our context for pride rises out of God's purposes in affliction. *Finally*, Job 37:24, the final words of Elihu, conclude by stating that the Lord "*does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.*" If we are to conclude that often what is most important is spoken last, then we are on sure footing when concluding that pride is a major theme in these speeches and an indication of the true sin that Job possessed.

These emphases on pride are used in the speeches of Elihu, both directly and indirectly, to rebuke Job of this hidden, indwelling sin that wasn't stirred up until affliction struck. Job's continual lamenting, at some point, crossed over from anguish and spilled into self-pity rooted in pride. Ultimately, while Job may have indeed been innocent of a direct correlation between sin and his affliction, he nevertheless became guilty of pride and it was from this condition of the heart that

his tongue spoke a presumptuous knowledge that darkened the wisdom and majesty of God.

Which brings us to **the third key theme** of Elihu, namely the exaltation of the Majesty of God. This is actually not a new theme in Job, as we have seen bits and pieces from Job himself and his friends. However, with Elihu, it serves a preparatory function, awaiting the arrival of God. While each of his speeches are peppered with statements that highlight the character and attributes of God, it's Job 36:22 through the end of chapter 37 that really prepares the way for the arrival of God by proclaiming the majesty of God, particularly as it relates to his creation. Perhaps, in a very real sense, Elihu is functioning as a type of John the Baptist. In this way, God's speeches are not a shock to Job, nor to us as readers, when He speaks of ostriches and wild donkeys, but are instead a continuation, albeit now from the voice of God Himself, of thoughts previously expressed.

The final key theme found in Elihu's speeches is the purpose of God in affliction. There are at least 8 clear purposes, but perhaps more that can be gleaned from these four speeches. These occur in Job 33:17; 33:30; 34:27; 36:10-11; 36:16; 36:22; 37:7 and 37:13. With these wide varieties of God's purposes, which may be found in affliction, Elihu has risen above the argument of Job's friends who said affliction is limited to the wicked. Additionally, he has solved Job's dilemma which recognizes that while the wicked suffer, so too do the righteous. However, where Job had wrongly assumed, at least in his case, that these sufferings flow from a capricious God, having the appearance of being arbitrary and largely meaningless, Elihu has shown that affliction from the hand of God has a purpose (c.f. Romans 5:1-5; 1 Peter 2:8-22; 4:12-19; 5:6-14)

Given this overview of Elihu, what may we conclude? With the exception of perhaps some sharp language in his rebuke of Job, he was correct in his assessment of pride, his exaltation of God's majesty, and the purposes of God in affliction. At the conclusion of his speeches, we are given some additional indications that validate Elihu. First, Elihu was the only contributor that Job did not reply to. Second, and perhaps most importantly, in His final analysis of Job and his friends, God did not issue a rebuke to Elihu. Having undertaken this examination of Elihu, we may conclude that Elihu was indeed helpful.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Read Job 32-37. How does the arrival of Elihu change the tone set by the counseling and interaction from Job's three friends?
2. What are some notable differences between the counseling methods of Elihu and the previous three counselors?
3. From Elihu's speeches, what can you conclude are some purposes of God for affliction?

6

Y A H W E H

S P E A K S

YAHWEH Speaks

There is a sense in which all that has come before chapter 38 in the book of Job has been preparatory for the arrival of God. Job has essentially begged for an audience with God, his friends have at times assumed to speak for God, and Elihu has announced the arrival of God at the conclusion of his final speech. Here, in Elihu's speech, at the beginning of chapter 37, he prepares the way for God's speeches by using the metaphorical language of a storm to refer to the voice of God. This anticipation is seen in the passage below

*“Keep listening to the thunder of his voice
and the rumbling that comes from his mouth.
3 Under the whole heaven he lets it go,
and his lightning to the corners of the earth.
4 After it his voice roars;
he thunders with his majestic voice,
and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice is heard.
5 God thunders wondrously with his voice“*

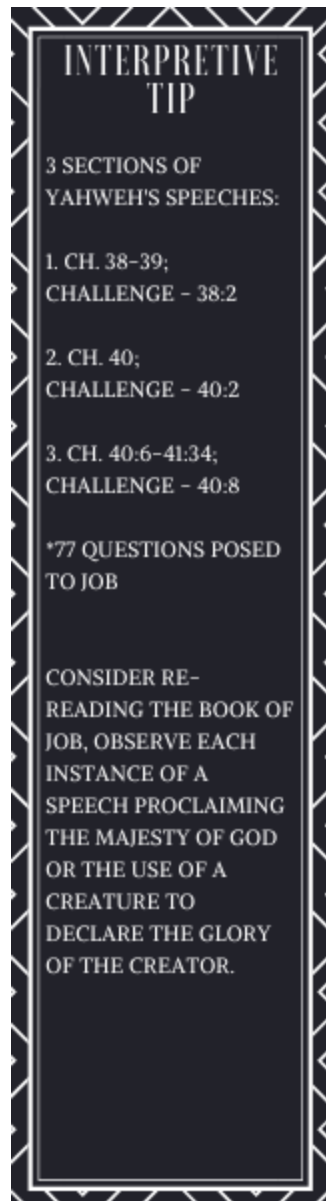
At the end of this chapter, Elihu again uses storm imagery to describe the imminent arrival of God

*“And now no one looks on the light
when it is bright in the skies,
when the wind has passed and cleared them.
22 Out of the north comes golden splendor;
God is clothed with awesome majesty.
23 The Almighty—we cannot find him;
he is great in power;
justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate.
24 Therefore men fear him;
he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.”*

All of this, and as noted, the entirety of the book, prepares us for chapter 38, the long-awaited arrival of God as He calls Job to account through two (possibly three) speeches, spanning chapters 38 to 41. Puritan James Durham notes that these speeches occur in three distinct sections, each with a key verse that functions as a challenge issued to Job. The first is found in chapters 38-39 with challenge #1 at Job 38:2. The second occurs in chapter 40 with challenge #2 at Job 40:2. The final section occurs in chapter 40:6-41:34 with challenge #3 issued in Job 40:8. In, interpreting these speeches, the starting point is examining the introductory arrival of God, followed by the content, purpose, and accomplishment of each speech.

The Arrival

As God arrives on the scene, several observations may be made from the narrator's introduction, *"Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said"*. **First**, we may observe that the covenant name, Yahweh (LORD; as opposed to Lord, meaning Adonai), is now being used for the first time (Job 12:9 is the lone exception) since the opening chapters. This is significant because it serves to highlight the loving relationship that God has maintained with his servant Job, despite Job's complaint that the opposite was true.



Second, we may observe that God answers Job from His own divine prerogative. God is under no obligation to respond to anyone, let alone Job, despite his integrity. Through the speech that follows, God will accomplish all that He has intended in bringing Job to repentance and recognition of His majesty, yet it is by His condescension that He replies to Job at all, a product of His grace.

Third, Yahweh speaks to Job out of the whirlwind. While not the exact word used in chapter 1 to describe the storm that killed Job's children, nevertheless a parallel must be drawn between the scenes. Additionally, it is remarkable that God chooses here to speak to Job "out of the whirlwind" yet chose in 1 Kings 19 to speak to Elijah by a still small voice. God knows by what means to respond to His children in order to get their attention. Elijah was broken, Job had need to be broken. This relationship is noteworthy (cf. James 5).

The Content

The content of these speeches is not altogether unique, as it pertains to the Book of Job, though certainly now God is speaking with regard to His own attributes, with the authority of the sovereign Creator. Many of the sustaining acts of creation, as well as some of the creatures, have been previously mentioned in Job. In fact, the general tenor of Yahweh's speeches, namely the highlight of His sovereignty and providence, have been a subject broached throughout the book. Some noteworthy occurrences come from the mouth of

Eliphaz (Job 4:7-11; 5:8-16) and Zophar (Job 11:7-9), but most prominently from Job (Job 9:3-12; 12:7-10; 26:5-14) and Elihu (Job 35:10-11; 36: 24-33; 37:2-24).

The speeches of Yahweh consist of 77 questions, 61 if you count the question marks in the English Standard Version. The difference is due primarily to the fact that many of the questions are multifaceted serving to build upon each other and add weight to the interrogation of Job. Additionally, the questions, while rhetorical in nature, all carry an implied “no” as their expected response from Job. In the first speech, the focus is primarily on the creative and sustaining acts of God, while the second (possibly third, depending on how one divides them) speech is focused primarily on the creatures that God has created. In all, at least 8 animals are described, plus the mysterious creatures Behemoth and Leviathan.

The delivery of these questions is sometimes paused briefly for a moment of personal application. This occurs in Job 38:21; 38:36; 40:15; 41:8-11. Among these, Job 40:15 stands out because it sharpens the point of the sword of this discourse on the Behemoth by associating its creatureliness directly with Job’s. The attention drawn out in this relationship helps focus the true purpose behind God’s discourses on His creation.

The Purpose

The purposes of God’s speeches directed toward Job are numerous but begin with the exaltation of His character, namely His majesty, goodness, and freedom. In declaring His sovereign acts of creation and ordering the universe, we gain a glimpse of the majesty of God. Statements on how He cares for the least of His creatures and by implication His greater care for mankind reveal God’s goodness, not merely as a sovereign Creator, but as a caring and loving God. Additionally, we are also given a glimpse into His freedom doing whatever His hand desires.

A second purpose of God’s speeches are to humble the creature, namely Job, and by extension all mankind, in the light of His own exaltation. By providing a glimpse of His attributes and expressing His supreme ability to care for His creation, God creates a contrast between Creator and creation. Subsequently by asking Job if he is capable of exhibiting the same divine, providential care it serves to humble Job through the contrast with Yahweh. Additionally, by highlighting His providential care over creation, God draws Job’s (and the reader’s) mind to consider how His creation reflects back upon His character, a point we will focus on below in discussing the accomplishment of the speeches. A similar method is illustrated in Luke 12:27-28.

Through His response to Job, God does not answer the “Why is God” nor the “Where is God” but the “Who is God.” In the midst of affliction, or more broadly in the midst of tragedy in general, too often the demand is to answer the former two questions, “Why is God allowing this to happen?” or “Where was God when this was happening?” meanwhile the latter question, “Who is God?” is largely ignored

altogether. This makes the manner and purpose of God's answer to Job completely unexpected.

The Accomplishment

Finally, we must address the accomplishment of God's speeches. Narrowly, the effect of God's speeches is seen through the humbling of Job to the point of repentance for his errant words against God. Broadly, God's speeches accomplish the purpose of bringing the eyes of mankind toward the observation of His creation for the purpose of exalting the Creator. Durham summarizes this well

"God would by all this learn folks to drink in the thoughts of his greatness from his work of day and night, rain, snow, etc., out of everything, to be getting some lesson. And the great lesson of all is to exalt God and abase the creature; a suitable frame for us to be in, [which] would keep us from many debordings [deviations] that we are ready to fall out." (pg 225)

Reading the words of Yahweh should stir our souls, particularly if we begin a few chapters prior and allow the anticipation for His arrival to carry us as it is meant to. Applying a simple interpretive grid will help us better understand the reason that God answers the way He does and open our eyes to the significance of this in the case of Job, and our own cases of affliction as well. One final point of accomplishment, that is, through God's words in chapters 38-42 we are given the plumb line of truth for all of the previous speeches. God's words are the standard by which everything else that has been said should be measured and weighed.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Read Job 38-41. Why do you think God appeals so heavily to His creation/nature?
2. How does this inform how we view God's creation?
3. What observations or conclusions can you make on the differences between Creator and Creation highlighted in God's reply to Job?



7

V I N D I C A T I O N

O F J O B

The Vindication of Job

The final chapter in the Book of Job brings us to what might best be summarized as *The Vindication of Job*. However, rather than occurring at a single point in the book, Job's vindication has been an unfolding process throughout the book, unbeknownst to him, that culminates during and at the conclusion of Yahweh's speeches.

In order to rightly interpret this final chapter and feel the weight of the emotion expressed here, we must remind ourselves that the overwhelming chorus of Job's speeches has been his insistence on maintaining his integrity and his desire for vindication by means of a mediator. We may call to mind Job 9:15-30; 10:7; 13:15-23; 16:17; 23:7-12; 27:3-6; 31:36-37 as instances where vindication is central in the thought and speech of Job. With these reminders before us, we turn now to the climax of Job's vindication in chapter 42, which generally unfolds in three sections that we will summarize as The Response (42:1-6), The Rebuke (42:7-9), and The Restoration (42:10-17).

The Response

Then Job answered the Lord and said:

2 *"I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.*
3 *'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'*
*Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.*
4 *'Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.'*
5 *I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;*
6 *therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."*

In interpreting the response cited above, we must also look at Job's initial response to God found in Job 40:3-5.

3 *Then Job answered the Lord and said:*
4 *"Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.*
5 *I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but I will proceed no further."*

A comparison and contrast of the two is necessary in order to ask and answer one principal question, “What was lacking in the first response that caused God to continue His verbal barrage?” The answer should be clear.

Despite Job’s recognition of his own inferiority in comparison with the supremacy of God and his pledge of silence in his first response from chapter 40, he had not yet expressed repentance. This becomes central in his second response, found in this last chapter, where Job’s contrition is on display through not only his words, but his actions. Job’s response to God has 5 principle parts

1. Recognition
2. Recitation #1, with confession
3. Recitation #2, with confession
4. Retraction
5. Repentance

It’s significant that Job begins with a *recognition* of the supremacy of God, which he qualifies by statements on God’s omnipotence and God’s sovereignty. This is the fountain from which the remainder of Job’s words flow and a direct result of the Word of God in chapters 38-41 which served to till and plow the proud heart of Job.

From this soil of recognition, Job *recites* two questions, which God had originally posed to him, and answers them with subsequent confessions of his own inadequacy. He then *retracts* his misspoken words in the form of a statement of self-loathing before finally *repenting* in dust and ashes.

The Rebuke

⁷After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. ⁸Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” ⁹So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

In this next section of the chapter, we find The Rebuke of Job’s friends serving as a critical component to the overall statement of Job’s vindication. After the Lord spoke to Job, He directs His attention to Eliphaz, the unofficial spokesman of Job’s three counseling friends. This address begins with an assertion of God’s character in describing how His wrath has been kindled through the ignorant tongues of the three

friends. In the midst of this rebuke, we are given the first layer of Job's vindication, namely that he will intercede for his friends.

INTERPRETIVE TIP

3 PARTS OF JOB'S VINDICATION:

1. THE RESPONSE
(CH. 42:1-6)
2. THE REBUKE
(CH. 42:7-9)
3. THE RESTORATION
(CH. 42:10-17)

JOB'S RESPONSE TO YAHWEH HAS 5 PRINCIPLE PARTS:

1. RECOGNITION
2. RECITATION #1
3. RECITATION #2
4. RETRACTION
5. REPENTANCE

KEY INTERPRETIVE QUESTION: DOES GOD'S RESTORATION OF JOB, AFTER HIS REPENTANCE, VALIDATE THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL OF JOB'S FRIENDS?

This initial point of vindication is formed around a crucial address which God repeats three times in verse 8, "My Servant Job". Literally meaning "slave", the word translated as servant, is preceded by a pronoun expressing possessive ownership of God, "My". The first of these occurs after God issues His instructions to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar where He commands them to bring seven bulls and seven rams to His servant Job. This is followed by the second reference in the context of Job's intercessory prayer for his friends, which is then followed by the third reference in the midst of a rebuke towards the words of Job's friends and subsequently a commendation of Job's words.

At this point, by way of reminder, we need to recall the name used to introduce God in His speeches, Yahweh, which was a reminder of the unwavering covenant love and relation of God to Job. Here, however, we see a second aspect of God's relationship to Job, that of Master to servant (or slave). If the former indicated goodness and love on God's part, the latter indicates freedom and a reinforcement of the hierarchy, that of Creator to Creature, which we will see more clearly below. The one description denotes intimacy, the other denotes distance. Both are true of how God relates to His creation.

In the next verse (9), we have an indication of the spiritual condition of the three friends, namely their unquestioned obedience to the command of God to bring their sacrifices to Job, despite their errant applications of affliction. Immediately after this, we read of further vindication for Job, "the Lord accepted Job's prayer." The New American Standard Bible (NASB) footnote for verse 9 provides

a more striking translation of this phrase as, "*The Lord lifted up the face of Job.*" This translation is similar to Job 9:24; 11:15; and 22:26.

Again, it should be pointed out that this is Job's intercession of his friends, whom until now have been a continual thorn in his side, serving much more as his enemies than his friends. It is therefore not difficult to find parallel with our Lord Jesus Christ who not only prayed for His murderers on the cross, but provides continual prayer and intercession as High Priest for those who were once His enemies.

The Restoration

With this statement of acceptance by God of Job in verse 9, we are ushered into the final section of Job's vindication, The Restoration, introduced for us in 42:10.

10 And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. 11 Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

12 And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. 13 He had also seven sons and three daughters. 14 And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. 15 And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. 16 And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. 17 And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

In Job 42:11-13 we are given the particulars of Job's restoration from God in doubling all that he had before, including his children (It should be noted that he had 10 children before and has 10 children again, for a total of 20, giving an implicit reference to expectation of resurrection and rejoining his lost children). Following this, we read of an interesting interlude where the daughters of Job are mentioned by name, commended for their beauty, and rewarded with an unprecedented share of Job's inheritance, a seat usually reserved for the first born and almost exclusively for sons.

The summary and conclusion come in the final two verses as we read of the culmination of Job's life and the blessings bestowed upon him through granting him to see four generations of grandchildren. The restoration of the fortunes and family of Job, brings up a pivotal interpretive impasse for the entire argument of the book, namely this:

"Does God's restoration of Job, after his repentance, validate the prosperity gospel of Job's friends?"

This is not a trivial question, in fact it goes to the heart of the interpretation of the book. If the answer to the question is yes, then we must reject each of the interpretive keys defined earlier which have steered in the direction of the friend's misinterpretation of Job's affliction and subsequently their misapplication of the retributive justice of God to the case of Job. If those keys are wrong, then we must

read this vindication of Job as validation of the friends and thereby cause us to reinterpret the entire book, by necessity, this time reading the words of the friends as correct and Job's as wrong. If this were the case, then it contradicts the statement of Job's commendation made by Yahweh in 42:9.

So what are we to conclude?

Recall that there were two (at least) attributes of God that neither Job nor his friends could reconcile with the events of affliction that were taking place, namely the goodness and freedom of God, which we alluded to earlier. It wasn't until the speeches of Elihu (chapters 33-37) that Job was instructed on God's good purposes for affliction. Then, similarly, it was in the speeches of God where Job was instructed on the freedom of God.

In this final part of Job's vindication, The Restoration, God combines both His goodness and freedom and puts it on display in the form of physical blessings in restoring Job's health, wealth, and family. What a marvelous display of God's grace and condescension in restoring His servant Job, while revealing more of His infinite character to Him. However, with this, let us be reminded that God is under no obligation to act in this way for every one of His saints who are brought through the refining fires of affliction. Restoration is not the rule but is instead the product of God's divine freedom to have mercy upon those whom He will have mercy.

The vindication of Job is an interpretive key for the entire book because

1. God vindicates the integrity of Job, even though all that Job has said has not been accurate.
2. God rebukes Job's friends even though all that they have said has not been wrong.
3. The restoration of Job invalidates the prosperity gospel while simultaneously asserting the freedom of God. This should teach us to read God's Word, particularly the individual books, completely, allowing them to unfold before us, and in their context before rushing to interpretive decisions

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Read Job 42. How is Job ultimately preserved?
2. How should we respond in the face of affliction?
3. How does Job inform our practice of counseling those in affliction?
4. Looking back over the entirety of the book, consider reexamining your responses on the role of God and Satan in the afflictions brought on Job's life (see chapter 2, questions 2 & 3)



8

C H R I S T

I N J O B

Finding Christ in Job

Having looked at some keys to interpreting the *Book of Job* in its original context, it would be irresponsible to leave our studies without addressing its foundational impact on the New Testament, but more specifically how this book anticipates the coming of Christ and informs our understanding of His person and work.

There are a few general ways in which this relationship between Old and New Testaments have traditionally been understood, which we'll mention below, but most importantly we must understand that all of Scripture, its 66 books, is divinely inspired, meaning that above all it has one central Author, the Almighty God, and that His revelation of Himself is perfectly consistent from book to book, human author to human author (1 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21).

A few of the ways in which the Old and New relate to each other are by way of

1. Direct quotations of the Old in the New
2. Promise – Fulfillment
3. Echoes, how one may “hear” one book or passage resonating with another
4. Allusions, a passing reference of one passage seen in another that may or may not be fleshed out in its original context
5. Types, a relationship of lesser to greater between people, places, events or institutions (type-->antitype)

Examples of each abound in Job, as in the rest of the Old Testament and while we could certainly spend time examining each of these ways in which Scripture uses, relates, and interprets itself, our focus here will be on how Job himself is a major typological contributor (#5) to understanding the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In a sense, Job lays for us the foundation of how to understand the justice, goodness, and certainly the freedom of God in afflicting the righteous. How is it that God can remain both just and good in afflicting someone righteous without provocation? Though this is seen in Job through his own divinely wrought personal afflictions, it is heightened and reaches its culmination in the sin-bearing, wrath-absorbing death of God's Son Jesus Christ. The relationship between Job, as a sinful-righteous sufferer and Christ as the sinless-righteous sufferer is: Job as the type (lesser), Christ as the antitype (greater). This relationship exists in numerous ways, but chief among them is the form or pattern of a suffering servant.

Here we want to call to mind Job's sufferings, though well chronicled throughout the book, we should recall the loss of possessions, family, and friends, as well as the physical suffering that he endured to the point of an unrecognizable physical appearance (Job 2:12). In considering Christ as the Suffering Servant, the principle passage is a familiar one, Isaiah 52:13-53:12. While it is an Old Testament prophecy

of a Messianic figure coming as a sufferer, not as a King in splendor, it is fulfilled through the person and work of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Below are some summary observations from this passage in Isaiah

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Marred physical appearance beyond recognition | 11. Wounded to bring healing |
| 2. No form, majesty, or beauty; undesirable | 12. Bore the sins of man |
| 3. Despised and rejected by men | 13. Oppressed and afflicted |
| 4. A man of sorrows | 14. Led like a lamb to slaughter |
| 5. Acquainted with grief | 15. Buried among the wicked |
| 6. Despised and unesteemed | 16. Crushed by the Father |
| 7. Bore our griefs, carried our sorrows | 17. Anguished in soul |
| 8. Afflicted by God | 18. Poured out His soul to death |
| 9. Pierced for our transgressions; crushed for our iniquities; | 19. Numbered with the transgressors |
| 10. Chastised to bring about peace | 20. Bore the sins of many |
| | 21. Made intercession for the transgressors |

The parallels between what Job experienced and what Isaiah was prophesying that the Son of God would experience, may be somewhat obvious. For instance, the previously mentioned, unrecognizable physical appearance, as well as the rejection, grief, and suffering. Furthermore, with Job, we observe the derision and abandonment that he faced from his friends, family, and even the young men in the town square (Job 12:4; 17:6; 29:7-10, 21-25; 30:9-15). In a similar fashion, so too did our Lord face derision, though arguably greater, just as the prophet foretold

"27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him.28 And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him." Matthew 27:27-31

As a point of contrast in our examination of type-antitype relationship of Job with Christ we may consider the response of each towards their individual affliction experience. As previously discussed, the *Book of Job* is comprised of monologues, dialogues, and speeches and even the substance of the speeches is the consideration of giving a speech. Needless to say, the substance of the book can at times can feel longwinded, even to the point of rambling. Verbosity is king and everyone has something to say, often unfiltered, until of course the only Voice worth listening to arrives on the scene. As an example of the wordiness, Job's speeches were sometimes pride-filled and too often bordered on blasphemy in questioning the very nature and

character of God. In a very real way, Job was far too free with his words and allowed the circumstances of affliction to stir up indwelling sin and overflow into the words of his mouth. Seemingly, out of the abundance of his heart, his mouth spoke (Luke 6:45).



Conversely when our Lord faced derision and abandonment, suffering and anguish, though He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, He never uttered a word in return, neither in self-defense, nor for a cry of vindication. Note 1 Peter 2:22-23, citing Isaiah 53:9

*²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.
²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*

As the Book of Job concludes, we are drawn once again to the words of Job, though much briefer and penitent this time around, as he repents of his words towards God (Job 42:1-6). By way of this contrition and recognition of God's majesty, Job submits to the divine affliction that he has endured. Keep in mind, to this point there is no indication that the affliction will subside, so remorse is evidentially genuine.

As to our greater example of this submissive attitude, Christ submitted to the will of the Father from beginning to end,

"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." Luke 22:42

Finally, the vindication and exaltation of Job should draw our minds to the greater vindication that Christ received from the Father through His resurrection from the dead, and His subsequent exaltation to right hand of the throne of God.

¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." Ephesians 1:19-23

The sufferings of Job serve as a two-way lens through which on one side we may see the sufferings of Christ magnified while through the other side our own sufferings minimized. Job offers a foreshadow of the truly righteous, suffering servant to come. The sufferings of Job, great as they were, pale in comparison to the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not only did He bear the marks of suffering in His physical body, which is important, but He bore the weight of sin and the wrath of God by becoming the propitiation for the sins of all those who would come to faith in Him, trusting in His meritorious sacrifice.

May Job be an encouragement to us in our sufferings and afflictions, but ultimately may he point us to Christ, who suffered for us willingly, bearing the wrath of God for all who have or will believe on Him. Furthermore, He also is our far greater example of perseverance in suffering, *“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” 1 Peter 2:21*

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. How does this chapter help you understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and more specifically how all of Scripture relates to Christ?
2. How does seeing Christ as the truly righteous Sufferer help you to understand the justice, freedom, and goodness of God in the midst of affliction?
3. How has the book of Job helped your perspective on affliction, counseling, and comfort?

Recommended Resources

Brooks, Thomas. *The Mute Christian*.

Calvin, John. *Sermons on Job*.

Caryl, Joseph. *Practical Observations on the Book of Job, 12 Vols.* Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2001.

Durham, James. *Lectures on Job*. Grand Rapids: Naphtali Press, 2003.