

## 11-14-24 BIBLE STUDY NOTES

### *THE BOOK OF JOB* *Job 15:1—21:34*

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After each speaker, from the eldest to the youngest, had his turn and the object of the discussion had responded, the cycle was repeated. Now, in this second cycle both the tone and target changes.

Eliphaz explains the change of tone in his opening statement. In his words we see nothing of his earlier mild attitude as he lashes out at Job and labels him a fool with empty notions (15:2a), a bag of hot air from the “*east wind*” of the desert (15:2b), and a sinner condemned by a crafty (deceitful) tongue (15:5).

In twenty-first century, language Eliphaz then goes on to ask, “Who do you think you are?” With heartless tones he drives his point home as he asks, “*Art thou the first man that was born? Or wast thou made before the hills?*” (15:7) and “*What knowest thou, that we know not? What understandest thou, which is not in us?*” (15:9). Eliphaz is convinced that Job’s trouble was brought on by sin, and he is outraged at Job’s insistence that he is innocent. Job’s attitude goes against everything Eliphaz believes. It is this that outrages Eliphaz, wise man this he is. This is why he now states, “*I will shew [show] thee, hear me; and that which I have seen I will declare; Which wise men have told from their fathers, and have not hid it*” (15:17-18). With these words Eliphaz boasts of his superior wisdom which is his both through personal visions and traditions of the wise men, past and present.

It is plain to see that Eliphaz sees himself as one of the wisest of men, and as such, Job has no choice but to hear him out and follow his advice. From our perspective Eliphaz seems to be pulling rank on Job. There is an arrogance in Eliphaz’s attitude and words that seems familiar as we remember certain people who are always right, who always have an answer—especially for your problem. It seems there is one in every crowd who is ready to point the finger and declare, “He brought it on himself!”

But although his tone softens a bit Eliphaz now spells out the kind of suffering a wicked and sinful person goes through: torment (15:20), fear (15:21), despair (15:22), distress (15:24), anguish (15:24), and defiance (15:26). His point is clear. These are all things Job is experiencing—so he must be guilty.

Then, having given a step-by-step description of how a sinful person will suffer because of his action, Eliphaz goes into an outburst describing the punishment for

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someone who has sinned grievously: *“He dwelleth in the desolate [ruined, deserted] cities”* (15:28); *“He shall not be rich”* (15:29); *“He shall not depart out of darkness [escape darkness]”* (15:30); *there is no payoff in trusting something that is useless”* (15:31). Then Eliphaz concludes his description of punishment by saying that the sinful person will be totally useless and non-productive before his time (15:32-33).

Throughout his speech-attack Eliphaz has not once mentioned Job by name, but his words have created a split between himself and his old friend. It had not been too long ago that he considered Job a wise and honored friend. It was friendship that had driven Eliphaz over the long miles to see his friend. But now Job is seen as hopelessly irredeemable, a man who liked the company of godless people, who profited from bribery, and who was deceitful (15:34-35).

Judgmental attitudes cut deep when people are going through difficult times. It is then that they need us to be with them, supporting and loving them, not attempting to establish cause. We have known people who under normal circumstances were gentle and understanding, but when they thought they were being questioned or threatened, they became vicious, defensive, and judgmental. This is what is happening in the Job story at this point.

As Job begins his response to Eliphaz this time, we pick up the tone of a weary and miserable man who speaks of his friends as “miserable comforters” who substitute long-winded speeches for a caring attitude (16:2). Then he pictures a reversed situation where they are suffering. He says if that were the case, he could talk the way they have, *“I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you”* (16:3-4). To shake or wag one’s head was a sign of being happy over someone else’s misfortune. But then he stacks coals of fire on them by suggesting that if they were in trouble, he would not do any of those things. Instead, he would speak comforting words of encouragement that would help them in their time of grief and pain (16:5).

The implication is clear as Job continues to appeal for understanding from his friends, if they were to walk in his sandals for a while, they might feel differently! Then he turns to God and admits that he is depressed and extremely weary and that he feels God has turned against him (16:7-9).

But that is not all. Not only does Job feel alienated/separated from God, but his friends and neighbors have turned against him. In Job’s words we hear feelings of separation and loneliness. Everyone has turned against him; he is alone. Nobody cares. He is nobody. Then out of the depths of his hopelessness Job compares God to an

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angry animal that grips his prey in his teeth and shakes them (16:9-12). He then continues and pictures God as an archer who uses him as a target (16:12-13) and as a warrior who charges at him in combat (16:14). It is easy to see from this picture Job's deep feelings of hurt over what he believes to be God's actions toward him. Yet Job insists that his integrity is untarnished, he is innocent of any wrong directed either toward God or his fellowman (16:17).

Out of the depths of this moment of despair a profound spiritual insight flashes into Job's thinking and then into his words as he envisions a time when Someone whom he identifies as *"my witness. . . in heaven, and my record [advocate].. will intercede for him (16:19-21)*. Surely, Job could not be aware of the full implications found in this flash of insight. But we see in this a foreshadowing of things to come many centuries later when the *"Witness,"* the *"Advocate,"* the *"Intercessor"* would be none other than Jesus Christ.

Paul captured this eternal truth in his letter to the Christians in Rome when he wrote, *"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34)*.

We will do well to listen closely when desperate people speak. Their cries of anguish need to be heard with understanding, and their flashes of insight should be treated as gems of the Spirit. During his times of prosperity Job did not see any need for an Intercessor. But after losing everything and hanging on the edge of death under what was thought to be an attack from God, he realized his need of a Savior and Advocate.

This eternal truth has remained unchanged with the passing of centuries. As believers we grow as we struggle through difficult and confusing moments. The ease of success—times when everything is running smoothly and without a hitch—seem somehow to slow our growth as individuals. So often it is our hard times, our periods of hardship, that we experience those new moments which lead toward maturity.

But as Job continues his response to his friends, we see his high moment of insight followed immediately by hopelessness as he sinks back once again to wait on his journey to a place of no return (16:22). After all, the thought of Witness or Mediator in heaven is pointless when there is no hope of eternal life. A depressive hopelessness falls on him again as with a broken spirit he settles back to wait his death.

He is very much alone. His friends are no help. He sees them as "mockers" whose eyes are filled with hostility (17:2). And he sees himself as the object of bitter misun-

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derstanding (17:4) and condemnation (17:6). Yet, somehow, a ray of hope causes him to dig in his heels and say, ***“The righteous also shall hold on his way [a righteous person will hold steady], and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger” (17:9).*** Despite the dark cloud of adversity and depression that hovered over him, I wonder if at this point if there was a hint of what the writer of the Book of James had to say centuries later, ***“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16b).***

As Job moves now toward the close of his argument at this point, he seems to be mocking his friends. It is true he feels hopeless because it seems God is afflicting him with almost more than he can handle. But he has held steady despite the attacks of his friends and their misunderstandings. Now he seems to be suggesting that they try again (17:10). They have accused him falsely based on their distorted idea of wisdom. With one last jab Job mocks their promises of hope. Their false interpretation of his trouble has turned his day into the blackness of night, and yet out of that darkness there is the suggestion the light is near at hand (17:12).

Job’s understandable mockery in this part of his response is on point. And he now closes his speech by daring his friends to answer the question, ***“And where is now my hope? As for my hope, who shall see it?” (17:15).*** He seems to be saying that if he is without hope and dies, the same result will be theirs, and they will all end up in the grave (17:16).

As Bildad responds to Job’s anger, he adds fuel to the disagreement as he accuses Job of treating them like dumb animals (18:3). He seems to forget that Zophar started the name-calling when he referred to Job as a witless donkey (11:12). Name-calling always hurts. The saying about sticks and stones hurting but name-calling being harmless is a myth. Angry and false words cut deeply, and to attach labels to people simply because they do not see things our way goes against the high mark that Jesus set for us.

The difference between Job and his friends have come into sharp focus through the heat of their discussion. To Bildad and his two colleagues the idea or doctrine of “natural justice” must be defended. The payoff for sin was natural disaster. This meant that if a person was sick or suffered loss through the forces of nature, that person must have sinned and was being punished. Therefore, Bildad and the others rejected Job’s conclusion that his suffering was an exception that required the setting aside of nature’s laws (18:4).

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So, with all of this in mind Bildad now proceeds to give us a profile of a person who is sinful and wicked (18:5-21). Nowhere in this profile does Bildad mention Job by name, but his wording is so specific that it is obvious that from his viewpoint he is describing Job.

To strengthen the defense of his beliefs Bildad now proceeds to spell out in clear and simple language all of Job's losses—

- The loss of visibility (18:5-6)
- The loss of strength (18:7)
- The loss of peace (18:11)
- The loss of health (18:13)
- The loss of security (18:14)
- The loss of name (18:17)
- The loss of belonging (18:18)
- The loss of children (18:19)
- The loss of fame (18:20)

As Bildad has carefully listed all that Job has lost and suffered, for him, the conclusion is clear. Blind to any other alternatives, Bildad now makes it clear that anyone who suffers such losses is not only guilty of wicked behavior but is sinful at the very core of his being and ***“knoweth not God”*** (18:21). Bildad and his friends were so drenched in the belief of their time that there was just no other answer.

True to the nature of suffering, Job's emotions continue in a roller coaster pattern. Now, rather than answer Bildad's accusation in anger, Job appeals to his friends one more time, ***“How long will ye vex [torment] my soul, and break me in pieces with words?”*** (19:2). His torment comes from their refusal to accept his innocence and suffering. So, he now insists that if he has sinned, the responsibility is his and not theirs—it is between him and God alone. They should stop playing God. Judgment belongs to Him, and not to them (19:5-6).

Overwhelmed by all that has happened, Job's words now border on blasphemy (wickedness) as he seems to shout that he has been wrong in his understanding of things and there is no justice (19:7). God has remained silent and has deserted him. God does not hear his cries for help; he is fenced in and cannot see for the darkness; his identity is gone and everything has been uprooted and is in a shambles; and God's wrath has descended on him full force (19:6-12). Then as if to back up everything he feels, Job proceeds to document his own list of losses.

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Job's list includes some of what has already been mentioned along with some that have not been mentioned before. As Job sees it, he has been—

- Alienated from brothers (19:13)
- Isolated from acquaintances (19:13)
- Deserted by kinfolk (19:14)
- A stranger to those who had been guest in his home (19:15)
- Unanswered by servants (19:16)
- An offense to his wife (19:17)
- Repulsive to brethren (19:17)
- Scorned by little children (19:18)
- Detested by his most intimate friends (19:19)
- Rejected by loved ones (19:19)

With the completion of this list, we have been exposed to the raw edges of Job's suffering. For the most part, Bildad's list did not focus on the deepest hurts. But as we examine Job's list, we see that his greatest loss is not fame or fortune, but friends and family. And while his physical suffering is brutal, it is the loss of human relationships, loved ones and friends, that has reduced him to skin and bones (19:20).

***“All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me. My bones cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh [I am only skin and bones], and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth” (19:19-20).*** Job has hit bottom. Despite his frantic appeal to his friends for pity, he remains alone with the God he believes has struck him down (19:21-22).

Much has been written about the “patience” of Job in suffering. He was also stubborn. After accusing God of attacking him wrongly, one would think that he would give up on God. But not stubborn Job. Still holding on to his innocence, he wishes that his protest could be ***“painted in a book!”*** or ***“graven with an iron pen and lead In the rock forever!”*** (19:23-24). Job has given up any hope that his innocence will be proven in his lifetime. Only history could judge him. So, he puts his last shred of hope in a permanent record for future generations to read.

A “good name” meant everything in Job's society. Even though he had lost his sons and his money through catastrophe, he still wanted to keep his reputation as a man of integrity. Job's reputation was darkened only by unexpected suffering. His former friends condemned him as a sinner and God had not moved to restore him. Job knew that if he died, the shadow would remain. So, stubborn in his innocence and adamant

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about his reputation, he prayed for a written record and an engraved rock that would not only outlive him, but also the religious idea that labeled him a sinner.

Immediately following that prayer, the curtain of revelation rises and Job grabs at one of the most amazing truths that undoubtedly staggered his imagination. Without knowing the full implications of his words Job said, ***“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (19:25-26).***

We stand on the peak of truth in the Old Testament. No book of the Bible or passage of Scripture is more profound than this revelation of God to Job. In the shell of one brief sentence, Job anticipates Jesus Christ, His Incarnation, His Atonement, and His Resurrection. Job is so far ahead of his time that only the Holy Spirit could have led him to this affirmation of faith.

After giving up on his friends, accusing God of wronging him, and admitting that he has no hope left in this life, the Spirit of God lifts him to the highest heaven and gives him a personal glimpse of his Living Redeemer. Earlier, Job prayed in vain for a Mediator and Witness who would stand between him and God to plead his case. Now, God answered his prayer, but with a Redeemer who is far more than a Mediator.

Redemption is a term that comes from the image of the marketplace where a precious item is bought back by its original owner. The story is told about a boy who spent many hours building a model sailboat. On its maiden voyage on the lake, a brisk breeze whisked it out of sight and on to parts unknown. The boy grieved over the loss of his creation until one day he passed a shop window in a neighboring town. Centered in the window was his sailboat with a price tag. Rushing into the shop, the boy told the owner that the boat belonged to him, but without proof the owner insisted on his price. For weeks, the boy worked until he earned enough to buy back his boat. As he held it in his hands once again, he said, *“You are twice mine now because first I made you, and now I have you back.”*

Redemption is God’s double payment for us. First, He made us for Himself and when sin took us away from Him, He bought us back at the cost of His Son, Jesus Christ. Only love can redeem. So, God assures Job of far more than the justification of his innocence sometime in the future. He lets him know that he is loved, not because he is innocent, but because he is God’s creation and needs to be redeemed. In Job, we see our hope. Whatever our physical, emotional, social, or spiritual condition may

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be, the eternal assurance is ours. We are twice God's. He made us and, through Christ, He bought us back.

Once Job caught the vision of a living Redeemer, his faith took wings. Far, far ahead of his time he anticipated the incarnation of Jesus Christ as his living redeemer as he proclaimed, ***"...he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth"*** (19:25). Through the rising curtain of God's revelation, Job seemed to catch a glimpse of what the Apostle John would write about many centuries in the future, ***"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth"*** (John 1:14).

Seeing even further into the future, Job burst all of the bounds of the limited revelation of his time to envision the resurrection of his body from death. This is the greatest leap of faith. According to natural revelation, death meant the end to human existence. It would take a giant step of faith to believe and declare that there was life after death. Yet, Job's faith propelled him into an orbit beyond human imagination ***shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another"*** (19:26-27).

With these words Job joined a select company of people in the Scriptures who said, ***"This I know."*** David the Psalmist wrote, ***"Be still and know that I am God"*** (Ps. 46:10). Blind Bartimaeus testified, ***"...one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see"*** (John 9:25b). The Apostle Paul wrote, ***"I know whom I have believed..."*** (2 Tim. 1:12). From the depths his most horrendous suffering, when his human support system was shattered, Job affirmed his faith in God. It was then he was able to catch a vision of that time when he would be personally and bodily joined as a redeemed soul with a loving God in eternal life.

As quickly as Job had climbed to the peak of faith, he fell back into the pain of his suffering at the hands of his friends. Turning to them once again, he concludes his response to Bildad with a word of truth out of which the sting of personal sarcasm has been taken away. With strong language he reminds his friends that if what he has seen is true and they continue to judge and condemn him, they will come under the sword of God's judgment (19:29).

We usually hear what we want to hear. Even though Job spoke prophetic truth, which is the hope of humankind, Zophar heard is as an insult to his intelligence. By his own description, he is boiling inside because Job has struck him a telling blow. More than Zophar's faith has been questioned; his ego has been threatened.



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When we are threatened, we always resort to our favorite defense mechanism. This time Zophar resorted to reason, or what he calls ***“The spirit of my understanding”*** (20:3). Whether he knows it or not, he has exposed the weakness of his faith. Reason has become his substitute for dependence upon God. Zophar assumed that logic alone could answer any question or resolve any issue—intellectual, moral, emotional, or spiritual. So, with reason as his weapon, he tried to take the offensive by preaching a sermon that is a model of sound thinking and good style.

Zophar’s near perfect sermon has three points: **1)** the joy of the wicked is temporary (20:4-11); **2)** the sin of the wicked is secret (29:12-19); **3)** the punishment of the wicked is sure (20:20-29). As Zophar speaks again, he appeals to the wisdom of the ages as the source for his authority, ***“Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite [the godless] but for a moment [is short]?”*** (20:4-5). To prove the point that the joy of the wicked is temporary, Zophar cites evidence that the wicked die young (20:7), disappear without a trace (20:7-9), and leave their children to beg from the poor (20:10).

Zophar then goes on to show that the sin of the wicked is secret (20:12-19). He admits that outwardly it appears as if the wicked and godless person is happy and prosperous but insists that this is only a deception because deep down, he is already experiencing the judgment of God. What is sweet in the mouth of a godless person is sour in his stomach (20:12-14); what he swallows in riches is vomited up again (20:15); and what he makes in profit from his business gives him no enjoyment (20:18). Then Zophar goes on to explain why this is so: ***“Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor. Because he hath violently taken away [appropriated] a house which he builded not [did not build]”*** (20:19).

With these words Zophar has made a logical jump that cannot be justified. He is assuming that people get rich by oppressing the poor and stealing from others. There are many cases where he is right. But to make every rich person an oppressor and a thief is not only false, it is viciously false.

Up to this point, Zohar’s remarks could be taken as a general statement about godless and wicked people in general. But now, his intentions are clear. Under the pretense of sound reason, he intends to build an airtight case against Job as the epitome of wickedness. By identifying Job with the wicked rich who oppress the poor and steal from others, he hopes to stir the sympathy of his listeners who are naturally suspicious of the rich.

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Then Zophar proceeds to prove that the punishment of the wicked is sure, ***“Surely, he shall not feel quietness in his belly [experience no relief from his craving], he shall not save of that which he desired [there isn’t anything left for him to eat]”*** (20:20). The rest of Zophar’s remarks about the punishment the godless person experiences reads like a biography of Job’s troubles (20:21-29). Although Zohar still does not mention Job specifically by name, there is a direct connection between Zophar’s list and Job’s experiences of suffering.

As Job responds to these last remarks of Zophar, we get a clear indication that he has not been overwhelmed; he is far from finished. In fact, as we catch the spirit of his words now, we get the sense that the momentum of the discussion has shifted. Job has more of the sound of being in charge as he now challenges his friends to stop mocking him, to be quiet and look him in the eye, and above all to listen carefully to what he has to say (21:1-5). Through the vision of his living Redeemer, he has gained a measure of confidence.

Zophar’s arguments relied on reason to prove that wicked and godless people will suffer swift and sure punishment for their sins. But Job’s suffering had taught him that reason can be faulty, so he now asks the difficult question, ***“Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?”*** (21:7). That is a powerful question. Why is it that wicked and ungodly people may live to old age and enjoy a prosperous life?

Zophar has said that the joy of godless people is temporary, and God’s judgment is swift. But now Job is saying that the facts of life contradict Zophar’s beliefs. Job is dealing with facts and not theory or philosophy. He has seen people who did not pay any attention to God live to old age and enjoy prosperity. He has seen them watch their children and grandchildren grow up. He has seen the godless live without fear and acquire great wealth. From all outward appearances they seemed to have it made even though they ignored God (21:8-16).

Job is wrestling with questions we all ask—why is it that Godly people must endure suffering and why should godless people seem to prosper? Why? Why? Job continues to press his point (21:17-20). He calls for Zophar to prove, if he can, the rule that suffering and hard times are the result of sin and that God’s judgment is swift and sure.

Job is on the winning side of the discussion now. He knows that Zophar’s logic is faulty, so now he unleashes as he says, ***“Shall [Can] any [man] teach God knowledge? Seeing He judgeth those that are high [in heaven]”*** (21:22). Since Zophar

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cannot prove that he is right, he has not presumed to speak for God in what he has said, but he has also attempted to tell God how he should act. In all that Zohar has said he has been playing God.

Little has changed even though countless centuries have passed from Job's day to these closing days of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are still guilty, as Zophar was, of wanting to take matters into our own hands and tell God how to run His world. With arrogance we are still not sure God can handle things without our interference. But the words of the wisdom writer are still the best advice we can get, "***Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding***" (Prov. 3:5).

As Job moves now toward the end of his response to Zophar, he takes issue with his friends for using tradition as the basis for his reasoning. Rather than look to the wisdom of the past ages for the answer to the why of suffering, Job suggests that a poll be taken with those who have traveled over the road (21:29). In other words, consult with people who have experienced life in the wider world beyond the land of Uz.

In his closing sentences (21:32-33) Job takes a risky position in opposition to his friends and the belief of his time—suffering is not the automatic consequences of sin any more than prosperity is the guaranteed right of a righteous person. And he brings down the curtain on his remarks by denouncing his friends' position as empty and false (21:34).

There is a boldness in Job's thinking and words now that foretells the boldness of Jesus Christ when with considerable risk He opened up the way to new life that is threatened the belief and the "wisdom" of His day.

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