

**THE BOOK OF JOB**  
**Job 4:1—14:22**

**By Dr. James E. Potts**

Violence creates violence. With his surprising curse against the day of his birth, Job violated all the protocol of the Wisdom School. Through the measured steps of human reason, “wisdom” represented an attitude as well as a viewpoint. And, calm, cool, and collected reflection characterized the attitude of wisdom.

A wise person never panicked because reason served as the controlling influence and wisdom covered all possibilities. We understand now why Job’s three friends reacted so violently to his hysterical outburst. As a man who exemplified the ideals of wisdom, his reaction contradicted everything he had taught and everything for which he had stood.

Whenever any school of thought is threatened, someone must come to its defense. And that is what happens now in response to Job’s outburst. According to the debating process of the ancient Wisdom School, persons spoke in order of their age because age and wisdom were connected. Maturity of thought and breadth of experience are essential elements of wisdom—seeing things whole—and in Job’s time people yielded to age.

Seniority required that Eliphaz be the first to answer Job’s cry of anguish. With an air of reluctant contempt, Eliphaz responds to Job, and his impatience is obvious as he frames his opening question, ***“If we assay to commune with thee [If we risk responding to you], wilt thou be grieved [lose patience]?” (4:2).*** Then like a father scolding a child, Eliphaz reminds Job that his reaction to what happened to him contradicts everything that he had taught and counseled with others (4:3). And, as if to add insult to injury, Eliphaz then reminds Job that the moment he experienced reverses and suffering, he became discouraged and sad and was a poor model for his own teaching.

It appears that Eliphaz had touched a raw nerve, but he pressed on. Using the rhetorical question as his weapon, Eliphaz suggested that if Job were truly godly, he would be calm in his confidence and if he were blameless, he would not give up hope (4:6).

Then Eliphaz continued to lecture Job, he builds his case by citing three sources of his authority as a man of wisdom—reason, intuition/suspicion, and experience. Each

of these is personalized and difficult to refute. Eliphaz is a master of classical debate. Rather than coming directly to his point, he dances around the subject until he has covered every angle. Then he drives home the point.

The dance begins when Eliphaz states the authority of reason. Exercising the choice of his senior position, he asks Job to ponder this question: “*Who, being innocent, has ever perished?*” (4:7). Then playing heavily on the personal authority of his age and reputation, Eliphaz says, “*Even as I have seen [as I have observed].*” Job knows exactly what his friend is saying because he had spoken those very words time and time again.

Laying claim to a logical process that leads to an undeniable conclusion, Eliphaz puts the assumption, “... *they that plow iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same*” (4:5). For the Wisdom School thinkers this is a basic doctrine—sin produces suffering. To reinforce his point, Eliphaz refers to the law of nature in which even a lion, the king of the beasts, is broken despite his roar and growl (4:10-11). Job, the “lion of Uz,” gets the point. Even he is not exempt from the Law of Justice.

Under ordinary circumstance, Eliphaz might have rested his case at this point. But he knew that Job could always dispute reason with reason. So, he proceeds now with colorful descriptive language to tell Job that he has had a revelation from God. And this revelation came during a midnight visitation from a ghostly spirit who whispered to him with a hushed voice, “*Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his maker?*” (4:17).

As direct as these two questions may seem, Job understands what they mean. Job has been crushed by suffering and is in danger of dying without wisdom (4:18-21). Eliphaz has maneuvered Job into designed box. After all, it is hard to argue with a secret word, a floating spirit, and a hushed voice—even today!

We see next that beneath his fatherly advice, Eliphaz has a mean streak. With aggressive note, he challenges Job to appeal to the holy ones of either the past or present (5:1), for they will not hear him. And he follows that up by once again condemning Job for his violent outburst, “*For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one*” (5:2). In one sentence, Eliphaz, for all practical purposes, has removed Job from the Wisdom School. To be called a fool is to condemn him as a person who no longer fears God, is empty of wisdom, and is doomed to destruction.

Then, to press home his point, Eliphaz uses the authority of experience once again by saying, “*I have seen the foolish [a fool] taking root...*” (5:3). With those words

Eliphaz pulls rank on Job by stressing his age and experience by inferring that Job fits neatly into a pattern he has seen many times before. And he is saying that it is the consequences that count. Documenting the consequences of a fool, Eliphaz then reviews Job's losses for him, his home, his children, his harvest, and his wealth. In so many words he is telling Job, "*Don't blame the laws of accidents of nature. The reason for your suffering lies within you*" — "***Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward***" (5:7). Eliphaz is stressing the ancient idea that our hard times of suffering are caused by what we are and what we have done.

By using the authority of reason, institution, and experience, Eliphaz feels as if he has finally reprimanded Job for his outbursts and reestablished the teachings of the Wisdom School. Job is suffering because he has sinned. And, furthermore, he has lost his fear of God. Secure in his conclusion, Eliphaz now becomes worried. We can almost hear the fatherly tone as he counsels Job, "***I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause***" (5:8).

How quickly Eliphaz changes his tune. The rest of his speech is a beautiful hymn of praise to the goodness of God. Prosperity is promised to the righteous (5:8-11). The wicked are frustrated (5:12-14), and the poor will receive justice (5:15-16). A beatitude follows. Eliphaz assumes to know why Job suffers, "***Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore, despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty***" (5:17).

Rising to his full stature as the eldest and wisest of the three friends, Eliphaz believes that his arguments are final. He leaves Job no alternative but to apologize for his sin and accept God's discipline in order to be restored. Now, he concludes his speech by using all the authority of his position, "***Lo this, we have searched it, so it is [because of our study and experience, you can be sure that is the way it is]; hear it, and know thou it for thy good [listen to me because what I've said is the truth]***" (5:27). Despite Job's outburst and Eliphaz's speech harassing him for his self-indulgence, the climate is still calm. Job's response to Eliphaz is to ask that his friends understand the reasons for his feelings.

First, and most important, Job pleads for them to share with him in the depth of his suffering: "***O that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together [If my anguish and heartbreak could be weighed on scales]! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea [They would outweigh the sands of the sea]***" (6:2-3). These words give us a colorful and first-hand picture of the extent of Job's feelings.

Second, he pleads with them to understand why he has asked God to let him die. At least he would have the comfort of knowing that he had died without denying ***“the words of the Holy One.”*** As strange as it seems, Job sees death as the joy that would make bearable his persistent pain (6:10).

Then follows another plea for understanding as Job tries to explain to his friends why he has no hope, ***“What is my strength, that I should hope? And what is mine end, that I should prolong my life?”*** (6:11). With an almost brutal honesty that is characteristic of Job, he admits that he has used up all his strength and hope for living and has no power or ability to help himself (6:12-13). Although Job’s outcry borders on hysteria, we see in his explanation the focus of a disciplined mind. At one and the same time, Job’s outburst of anguish was as logical as it was emotionally explosive.

The more Job tries to explain the depth of his feelings and his violent outburst to his friends, the more confused and defeated he seems to feel. It is possible that while trying to explain himself another stabbing pain riddles his body once again. Or he may see bitterness reflected in the eyes of his friends as they listen to him. For we now hear him lashing out unmercifully at his friends for their hard-skinned response to his suffering. And as with most of us, in such moments of frustration, he was guilty of overkill, ***“To him that is afflicted pity should be showed from his friends [one’s friends should be loyal in times of trouble]; but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty [even if he has turned his back on God]”*** (6:14).

Job scolds his friends for their insensitivity to his suffering. He compares them to desert streams that overflow in the winter and spring but dry up in summer when they are most needed. Grief flows through Job’s heart as he compares himself to camel caravan drivers travelling across the desert in anticipation of an oasis in which their thirst will be quenched. Instead, when they arrive, they find only a dry riverbed (6:15-20).

Counting on the support of his friends when he came to his time in need, Job now says, ***“For now ye are no thing [you aren’t any help to me]; ye see my casting down and are afraid [you see my condition and are afraid]”*** (6:21). Sarcastically, Job reminds them that he never begged favors from them. All he needed and wanted was their understanding. And that really is what being a friend is all about.

Next, although, Job’s mood shifts, as in a milder tone he makes himself vulnerable to his friends. Always willing to learn, he says, ***“Teach me, and I will hold my tongue: and cause me to understand wherein I have erred”*** (6:24). But at the same time, he appeals to them to accept his complaint, however rash, as honest. ***“Look at***

*me*” he urges them. In the land of the East, the eyes are identified as the sensors of the soul.

As Job continues to wrestle with his disgusting and desperate condition, he asks the question that plagues us in our times of suffering— ***“What is man?”*** His immediate response takes on a pessimistic note as he ponders his ***“months of vanity [futility]”*** (7:3). Looking down, he sees himself ***“clothed [covered] with worms and clods of dust”*** (7:5).

From Job’s point of view, life is hard (7:1), life is short (7:6), and life is futile (7:9-10). With that outlook, he sees himself as a person with nothing to lose, so, he will continue to ventilate his anguish and his bitterness (7:11), but with a difference. Having given up on his friends, Job takes his complaint directly to God, and once again asks, ***“What is man?”***

Out of the emptiness of his own soul Job challenged God with these words, ***“What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? And that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him [Why should You consider him important]? And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try [test] him every moment?”*** (7:17-18).

Indirectly, by asking these questions, Job is blaming the all-powerful and all-knowing God for playing games with His creation. Then, almost as if he was involved in a lover’s quarrel, Job says, ***“How long wilt thou not depart from me [won’t you look the other way], nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle [and leave me alone to swallow my spit? [If] I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee [how does that hurt You], O thou preserver [watcher] of men? Why hast thou set me as a mark [target] against thee, so that I am burden to myself [to thee]? And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity [why don’t you pardon my sins and remove my feelings of guilt]?”*** (7:19-20).

We see in these words the cry of a desperate man, one who longs to be reassured by God. Job was not aware of any transgression that could have brought on his deep trouble, but we catch a hint here that he is beginning to wonder whether he might be guilty of some wrong.

Then, Job even dares to tease the Lord like a jilted lover, as he reminds God that he will die. And when that happens, a deep relationship that is precious to both God and Job will be broken—God will search for him and miss him when he is gone (7:21).

Next, Job's second friend Bildad speaks. He is far less patient than Eliphaz, which perhaps reflects their difference in age and position. There is an angry tone to Bildad's comment that was not present in the speech of Eliphaz. To open further the rift that is developing between Job and his friends, Bildad begins by labeling Job as a bag of wind (8:2). And he then proceeds to defend the justice of God. In a most simplistic restatement of the doctrine of justice, he asks, "***Doth God pervert judgment? Or doth the Almighty pervert justice?***" (8:3).

Perversion is a twist of truth. To Bildad, any deviation from the idea that sin produces suffering is perversion—a cruel statement at a time like this. But Bildad's cruelty is not limited to an explosive outburst. He goes on then to attack Job at the point of his deepest hurt and loss—the death of his children. The idea being expressed (8:4) is that Job's sons were sinners, even as Job is, and their death is proof of God's justice.

After cutting Job to the bone by speaking of his dead children, Bildad's angry tone seems to soften as he comes out with the promise that if Job would repent of his sin, whatever it was—if he would become "***pure and upright***"—God would forgive him and give him peace and a prosperity that would exceed what he had before (8:6-7).

Then, to establish authority for what he is saying Bildad betrays his traditionalist mind-set by using the thinking of wise men of the past— "***consider what the fathers have found***" (8:8). Without overworking our imaginations too far it sounds as if Bildad, to appear profound, is trying to identify himself with wise men of the past and their sayings (8:8-10). This is a favorite strategy even today with speakers and writers whose experience is limited and who, to offset their own lack of experience and knowledge, quote from the sayings and writings of people out of the past.

Bildad then draws three specific parables from wise men of the past to illustrate his beliefs on the doctrine of justice (8:11-19)—a withering reed (8:11-13), a fragile spider web (8:14-15), and a rootless plant (8:16-19). Each of these, Bildad points out, is doomed to destruction because of some internal weakness. His reference is blinding, for he is driving the point home that Job's suffering is due to the sin in his life that is finally exposed. In other words, what has happened to Job is, to Bildad, proof of God's justice.

Bildad uses another old technique in his attempt to prove that Job is wrong. He sandwiches condemnation between layers of promise and praise. Having already promised a future that would exceed everything he had known before if he repented and became pure upright (8:7), Bildad wound up his speech by painting an ideal picture of Job's future, "***Till He fill thy mouth with laughing, and thy lips with rejoicing***

*[full of laughter and joy]. They that hate thee shall be clothes with shame; and the dwelling place of the wicked shall come to nought [your enemies will be shamed or disgraced and disappear]” (8:21-22).* In today’s language, if Job “shapes up” he will be happy, and everything will be smooth.

The dialogue between Job and his friends is now going around in circles. In responding to Bildad, Job agrees that what his friend has said is true. And he affirms his own belief in the doctrine of justice. But the question remains, **“How should [can] man be just with God [righteous before God]?”** It is a question of power or ability as well as justice.

Then Job goes into detail to spell out his belief that no human being can question the wisdom and power of God (9:2-20). Next Job gives vent to the uselessness of his dilemma as he understands it, **“If I justify myself [If I am right], mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect (innocent), it shall also prove me perverse [my words may betray me]” (9:20).**

And so, in desperation Job at this point concluded that human beings lack the power to strive with God and the wisdom to argue with Him. In addition, God seems too distant to Job—He exerts His power without discrimination on those who are struggling to do the right thing as well as those with evil intent (9:22). Through Job’s words here we see an innocent, yet questioning man, confessing his feelings of uselessness and hopelessness.

Job continues to argue his case as he struggles to make sense of his dilemma (9:23-32). We see in these words how Job is longing for God and yet is fearful of Him as he searches for a hope that seems now to escape him. Finally, in desperation he gets an insight far beyond his time as he prays, **“Neither is there any daysman betwixt us [no one to arbitrate], that might lay his hand upon us both [no one to judge us]” (9:33).**

In these last few verses of Chapter 9 Job seems to be understanding the future as he probes the idea of God becoming man as a means of closing the gap between the eternal God and His creation. Without knowing the full meaning of his words, Job is looking ahead to the coming of Jesus Christ, the God-man Mediator who once and for all closed all gaps between God and people.

From our vantage point in history almost two thousand years after the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus we find it difficult to put ourselves in Job’s sandals. Yet, in spite of the fact that we are favored with the history of God at work with His

people the Israelites and with the birth of the church, and how God has turned the course of history upside down through the faithfulness of Christians, we, too, at times get distracted by the reality of “unjust” suffering. In our efforts to understand how bad things can happen to good people and how bad people seem to escape the consequences of their actions, we encounter Job’s dilemma. Yet, we have so much more going for us than Job did as we seek to enter the mysteries of our pilgrimage of faith.

Now, out of the depths of his despair Job talks frankly to God and tells Him he is tired of living (10:1). Matter of fact, he asks God to tell him the reason God is treating him so badly— “. . . *shew me wherefor thou contendest with me*” (10:2). Job’s boldness in talking as he does to God indicates that he was not holding on to secret feelings of guilt. He has to be innocent of any wrong, otherwise he would not have to say such things as, “*Is it good unto thee that thou shouldst oppress [Does it make You happy to oppress me]?*” (10:3) . . . “*Hast thou eyes of flesh [Do you see the way we do]?*” (10:4) . . . “*Are thy days as the days of man [Is Your life short like mine]?*” (10:5).

Then as Job moves toward the end of his speech, he takes another bold step in his questioning of God as he lists what appear to him to be contradictions in God’s behavior. For better understanding I will paraphrase these questions, “*Would You destroy me—Your own creation?*” (10:9) . . . “*Would You take away the life You gave me to born?*” (10:18). With that last question, Job’s thinking has made a full circle, and he is right back where he started—cursing the day he was born. But this time he is not shouting the question to the winds, but to God.

Now, Job’s third friend enters the battle, Zophar the Naamathite. We do not know the location of Naamath, for this is the only time this name appears in the Bible. Speaking last as he does tell us that Zophar was the youngest of the three friends. He does not enjoy the confidence of age and experience that Eliphaz had or the security of leaning on tradition as Bildad was comfortable with. He now moves in and attacks Job personally by accusing him of being slick, deceit, and even lying. Zophar labels Job’s words as a sham that must be answered (11:1-3).

Zophar was then guilty of his own lack of maturity by personalizing his attack and making the mistake of putting words into Job’s mouth, “*For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure [what I believe is without error], and I am clean [pure, spotless] in thine [God’s] eyes*” (11:4). Although in his agony Job had made some rash statements, he had never been guilty of such presumptuous and arrogant claims.



Repeatedly Job had admitted that he was not equal to God’s wisdom, and he had confessed his sinfulness.

From the very beginning of his remarks Zophar seems to have shown contempt for Job. Instead of being a comforting friend his comments have all the earmarks of any self-righteous enemy on the attack. Zophar next assumes to know what God would say if He spoke to Job (11:5-6). These words of Zophar’s classify him as a religious fanatic—a person who speaks as God would if He had all the facts. With Zophar on the scene God does not have to say a word, Zophar speaks for Him! Imagine the gall of such claim. And yet we run into folks who claim to know exactly what God wants and who claim to speak for Him.

But Zophar is not through, for we now see him move in for the kill as he labels Job as a witless donkey who lacks understanding (11:12). And then, having driven home the ultimate insult, Zophar moves quickly now with the assurance that in spite of all this, if Job will just repent of his wickedness God will restore his health and prosperity (11:13-20).

All the ground rules for argument and debate have now changed. No longer does discussion center on Job’s irrational outburst—his intellect is now in question. Is he a wise man or a witless donkey? But as we have already learned, Job is a fighter. The trigger edge of sarcasm is felt in his quick response, ***“No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding [good sense] as well as you; I am not inferior to you, who knoweth not [doesn’t know] such as these? (12:2-3).***

At the same time Job admits that he has been stung by the attack of his friends. By their words and attitude, Job says they have made him a laughingstock even though he is innocent (12:4). If they take him seriously, he still has hope; if they laugh at him, all hope is gone. Ridicule is the ultimate insult and the cruel destroyer of hope.

Job responds to their ridicule with sarcasm, as he pokes his own fun at his friends who have called him a witless donkey and have acted as if he knows nothing about the wisdom and power of God. With humor he suggests that they could learn a great deal about the realities of life by consulting with animals and birds and even fish (12:7-8). Then, with overkill, Job cites example after example of God’s all-knowing and all-powerful ways (12:17-25). And as Job moves toward the end of this part of his response, he shows how deeply they have hurt him by saying again, ***“What ye know, the same do I know also: I am not inferior unto you [I am as good as you are]” (13:2).***

Job's friends have let him down in his hour of need. They have misunderstood him and lied about him. Now he urges them to keep still while he takes his case to God (13:3-14). Then come those frequently quoted words, ***“Though he slay me, yet will I trust him” (13:15)***. Even though Job is suffering and being misunderstood by his friends, his relationship with God remains secure. Over the years he has learned that God is reliable—He can be counted on! As I look at the small risks that I have taken in trying to do the will of God, I have counted on His promises for me and my family, and never once has He failed me. Matter of fact, God has always done more than I expected.

Next, we see in this lesson that Job turns from his friends who have failed him and takes his case directly to God (13:18). But in doing this he makes two requests, ***“Withdraw thine hand far from me [remove Your hand from me]: and let not thy dread make me afraid [take away my fear of You]” (13:21)***. If God will grant these two requests, Job is willing to take his chances and demand from God a hearing about his sins. He is making himself vulnerable as he insists that either God must show him his hidden sin or give him an explanation for his suffering (13:22-28).

Now as Job continues to lay his case and arguments before God in an effort to understand why all of this is happening to him, he questions God as to the meaning of life after all (14:1-6). And then Job refers to the hopelessness of human death, which is unlike a tree that when cut down can sprout again, ***“But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?” (14:10)***.

In these words, Job is struggling with the idea of death without the hope of the eternal. Out of his despair comes a glimpse of a future hope, ***“If a man die, shall he live again? ...will I wait, till my change come” (14:14)***. Yet, throughout these closing verses (14:15-22) we have a picture of a lonely man caught in the despair of his pre-sent pain as he wrestles with his own question, ***“What is man?”*** In this picture we see him moving from glimmers of faith to the seeming uselessness of his circumstances. But throughout his struggle we also see a man who refuses to give up his trust in God as he pulls at straws of a living faith out of which he can rebuild a lasting hope.

Who of us in the hard times and desperate struggles of life cannot identify with this ancient man who was trying to make sense out of his life somewhere in the eastern desert? Our struggles for identity and meaning in a fast-changing culture can be shattering. But there is no need for believers to sink into despair and lose hope—either in this life or in anticipation of the next.

Paul, in writing to the Christians at Corinth said it well, ***“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus [Jesus’ death], that the life also Jesus might be made manifest in our body”*** (2 Cor. 4:8-11).

Paul again, in writing to the Christians at Rome said, ***“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”*** (Rom. 8:18).

10/16 & 30/24