

The Book of Job: Part 2

Job's Lament and the Dialog Between Job and His Friends

Ch. 3 Job's Lament (NRSV)

The Poetry Section begins with a lament by Job on his miserable situation.

3:1-3 After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. Job said:

“Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night that said, ‘A man-child is conceived.’”

The Discourse Between Job and his Friends

		Eliphaz	Job	Bildad	Job	Zophar	Job
Cycle 1	Chapters	4-5	6-7	8	9-10	11	12-14
Cycle 2	Chapters	15	16-17	18	19	20	21
Cycle 3	Chapters	22	23-24	25	26		27

The First Cycle: God's Moral Governance of the World (The Message) - Sample Readings

Ch. 4-5 Eliphaz

4:7 "Think! Has a truly innocent person ever ended up on the scrap heap? Do genuinely upright people ever lose out in the end? It's my observation that those who plow evil and sow trouble reap evil and trouble. One breath from God and they fall apart, one blast of his anger and there's nothing left of them.

4:15 “A spirit glided right in front of me—the hair on my head stood on end. I couldn't tell what it was that appeared there—a blur and then I heard a muffled voice: 'How can mere mortals be more righteous than God? How can humans be purer than their Creator? Why, God doesn't even trust his own servants, doesn't even cheer his angels, So how much less these bodies composed of mud, fragile as moths? These bodies of ours are here today and gone tomorrow, and no one even notices—gone without a trace.

5:17 “So, what a blessing when God steps in and corrects you! Mind you, don't despise the discipline of Almighty God! True, he wounds, but he also dresses the wound; the same hand that hurts you, heals you. From one disaster after another he delivers you; no matter what the calamity, the evil can't touch you.

Note that Job's suffering is called discipline.

Ch. 6-7 Job

6:24 “Confront me with the truth and I'll shut up, show me where I've gone off the track. Honest words never hurt anyone, but what's the point of all this pious bluster?

7:1 “Human life is a struggle, isn't it? It's a life sentence to hard labor. Like field hands longing for quitting time and working stiffs with nothing to hope for but payday, I'm given a life that meanders and goes nowhere—months of aimlessness, nights of misery!

7:17 (Parody of Psa. 8:3) (Speaking to God) “What are mortals anyway, that you bother with them, that you even give them the time of day? That you check up on them every morning, looking in on them to see how they're doing? Let up on me, will you? Can't you even let me spit in peace? Even suppose I'd sinned—how would that hurt you? You're responsible for every human being. Don't you have better things to do than pick on me? Why make a federal case out of me?”

Ch. 8 Bildad

2 “How can you keep on talking like this? You're talking nonsense, and noisy nonsense at that. Does God mess up? Does God Almighty ever get things backwards? It's plain that your children sinned against him—otherwise, why would God have punished them? Here's what you must do—and don't put it off any longer: Get down on your knees before God Almighty. If you're as innocent and upright as you say, it's not too late—he'll come running; he'll set everything right again, reestablish your fortunes.

20 “There's no way that God will reject a good person, and there is no way he'll help a bad one. God will let you laugh again; you'll raise the roof with shouts of joy.”

Note that suffering implies punishment and traditional wisdom says punishment implies guilt.

Ch. 9-10 Job

9: 2-4 “So what's new? I know all this. The question is, 'How can mere mortals get right with God?' If we wanted to bring our case before him, what chance would we have? Not one in a thousand! God's wisdom is so deep, God's power so immense, who could take him on and come out in one piece?”

9:14-24 “So how could I ever argue with him, construct a defense that would influence God? Even though I'm innocent I could never prove it; I can only throw myself on the Judge's mercy. If I called on God and he himself answered me, then, and only then, would I believe that he'd heard me. As it is, he knocks me about from pillar to post, beating me up, black and blue, for no good reason. He won't even let me catch my breath, piles bitterness upon bitterness. If it's a question of who's stronger, he wins, hands down! If it's a question of justice, who'll serve him the subpoena? Even though innocent, anything I say incriminates me; blameless as I am, my defense just makes me sound worse. “Believe me, I'm blameless. I don't understand what's going on. I hate my life! Since either way it ends up the same, I can only conclude that God destroys the good right along with the bad. When calamity hits and brings sudden death, he folds his arms, aloof from the despair of the innocent. He lets the wicked take over running the world, he installs judges who can't tell right from wrong. If he's not responsible, who is?”

9:32-35 “God and I are not equals; I can't bring a case against him. We'll never enter a courtroom as peers. How I wish we had an arbitrator to step in and let me get on with life— To break God's death grip on me, to free me from this terror so I could breathe again. Then I'd speak up and state my case boldly. As things stand, there is no way I can do it.

Ch. 11 Zophar

11:3 “Job, do you think you can carry on like this and we'll say nothing? That we'll let you rail and mock and not step in? You claim, 'My doctrine is sound and my conduct impeccable.' How I wish God would give you a piece of his mind, tell you what's what! I wish he'd show you how wisdom looks from the

inside, for true wisdom is mostly 'inside.' But you can be sure of this, you haven't gotten half of what you deserve.

13 “Still, if you set your heart on God and reach out to him, If you scrub your hands of sin and refuse to entertain evil in your home, You'll be able to face the world unashamed and keep a firm grip on life, guiltless and fearless. You'll forget your troubles; they'll be like old, faded photographs. Your world will be washed in sunshine, every shadow dispersed by dayspring. Full of hope, you'll relax, confident again; you'll look around, sit back, and take it easy.

Note Job's blasphemous rhetoric warrants even more punishment than he is now receiving.

Ch. 12-14 Job

12:2-6 “I'm sure you speak for all the experts, and when you die there'll be no one left to tell us how to live. But don't forget that I also have a brain— I don't intend to play second fiddle to you. It doesn't take an expert to know these things. I'm ridiculed by my friends: 'So that's the man who had conversations with God!' Ridiculed without mercy: 'Look at the man who never did wrong!'

It's easy for the well-to-do to point their fingers in blame, for the well-fixed to pour scorn on the strugglers. Crooks reside safely in high-security houses, insolent blasphemers live in luxury; they've bought and paid for a god who'll protect them.

13:3 “I'm taking my case straight to God Almighty; I've had it with you—I'm going directly to God.

13:18-24 “Now that I've laid out my defense, I'm sure that I'll be acquitted. Can anyone prove charges against me? I've said my piece. I rest my case. Please, God, I have two requests; grant them so I'll know I count with you: First, lay off the afflictions; the terror is too much for me. Second, address me directly so I can answer you, or let me speak and then you answer me. How many sins have been charged against me? Show me the list—how bad is it? Why do you stay hidden and silent? Why treat me like I'm your enemy?

The Second Cycle: The Place of the Wicked in a Moral World (The Message) - Sample Readings

Ch. 15 Eliphaz

4-22 “Look at you! You trivialize religion, turn spiritual conversation into empty gossip. It's your sin that taught you to talk this way. You chose an education in fraud. Your own words have exposed your guilt. It's nothing I've said—you've incriminated yourself! Do you think you're the first person to have to deal with these things? Have you been around as long as the hills? Were you listening in when God planned all this? Do you think you're the only one who knows anything? What do you know that we don't know? What insights do you have that we've missed? Gray beards and white hair back us up— old folks who've been around a lot longer than you. Are God's promises not enough for you, spoken so gently and tenderly? Why do you let your emotions take over, lashing out and spitting fire, Pitting your whole being against God by letting words like this come out of your mouth? Do you think it's possible for any mere mortal to be sinless in God's sight, for anyone born of a human mother to get it all together? Why, God can't even trust his holy angels. He sees the flaws in the very heavens themselves, So how much less we humans, smelly and foul, who lap up evil like water? "I've a thing or two to tell you, so listen up! I'm letting you in on my views; It's what wise men and women have always taught, holding nothing back from what they were taught by their parents, back in the days when they had this land all to themselves: Those who live by their own rules, not God's, can expect nothing but trouble, and the longer they live, the worse it gets. Every little sound terrifies them. Just when they think they have it made, disaster strikes. They despair of things ever getting better— they're on the list of people for whom things always turn out for the worst.

Note the continued reliance on conventional wisdom which he believes came from God.

Ch. 16-17 Job

16:2 “I've had all I can take of your talk. What a bunch of miserable comforters!

16:10 “People take one look at me and gasp. Contemptuous, they slap me around and gang up against me. And God just stands there and lets them do it, lets wicked people do what they want with me.

17:1 “My spirit is broken, my days used up, my grave dug and waiting.

17:11 “My life's about over. All my plans are smashed, all my hopes are snuffed out—

Ch. 18 Bildad

4 “Why are you working yourself up like this? Do you want the world redesigned to suit you? Should reality be suspended to accommodate you? "Here's the rule: The light of the wicked is put out. Their flame dies down and is extinguished. Their house goes dark— every lamp in the place goes out.

12 “The hungry grave is ready to gobble them up for supper, To lay them out for a gourmet meal, a treat for ravenous Death. They are snatched from their home sweet home and marched straight to the death house

21 'Oh no! So this is what happens to perverse people. This is how the God-ignorant end up!.'”

Note his insistence that the evil are always punished; its the rule of God.

Ch. 19 Job

5 “Why do you insist on putting me down, using my troubles as a stick to beat me? Tell it to God—he's the one behind all this, he's the one who dragged me into this mess. "Look at me—I shout 'Murder!' and I'm ignored; I call for help and no one bothers to stop

21 “Oh, friends, dear friends, take pity on me. God has come down hard on me! Do you have to be hard on me too? Don't you ever tire of abusing me?

Ch. 20 Zophar

2 “I can't believe what I'm hearing! You've put my teeth on edge, my stomach in a knot. How dare you insult my intelligence like this! Well, here's a piece of my mind! "Don't you even know the basics, how things have been since the earliest days, when Adam and Eve were first placed on earth? The good times of the wicked are short-lived; godless joy is only momentary.

25 “They're knocked around from pillar to post, beaten to within an inch of their lives. They're trapped in a house of horrors, and see their loot disappear down a black hole. Their lives are a total loss— not a penny to their name, not so much as a bean. God will strip them of their sin-soaked clothes and hang their dirty laundry out for all to see. Life is a complete wipeout for them, nothing surviving God's wrath. There! That's God's blueprint for the wicked— what they have to look forward to.”

Note his insistence that the wicked will always get their punishment. Since this must be true, then the righteous must get their reward also if conventional wisdom is true..

Ch. 21 Job

7 “Why do the wicked have it so good, live to a ripe old age and get rich? They get to see their children succeed, get to watch and enjoy their grandchildren. Their homes are peaceful and free from fear; they never experience God's disciplining rod.

13 “They have a long life on easy street, and die painlessly in their sleep.

17 “Still, how often does it happen that the wicked fail, or disaster strikes, or they get their just deserts? How often are they blown away by bad luck? Not very often. You might say, 'God is saving up the punishment for their children.' I say, 'Give it to them right now so they'll know what they've done!' They deserve to experience the effects of their evil, feel the full force of God's wrath firsthand. What do they care what happens to their families after they're safely tucked away in the grave?

27 “I'm not deceived. I know what you're up to, the plans you're cooking up to bring me down. Naively you claim that the castles of tyrants fall to pieces, that the achievements of the wicked collapse. Have you ever asked world travelers how they see it? Have you not listened to their stories of evil men and women who got off scot-free, who never had to pay for their wickedness? Did anyone ever confront them with their crimes? Did they ever have to face the music? Not likely—they're given fancy funerals with all the trimmings, Gently lowered into expensive graves, with everyone telling lies about how wonderful they were. "So how do you expect me to get any comfort from your nonsense? Your so-called comfort is a tissue of lies.”

From the *Smyth & Helwys Commentary* on Job , Chapter 21 (page 323):

Throughout the second cycle of speeches, the friends have tried to teach Job the truth about the fate of the wicked in the moral order of God's world (15:17-35; 18:5-21; 20:6-29). To this point, Job has mostly ignored their arguments. His primary concern has been not the wicked but the righteous, not the punishment due the guilty but the justice owed to the innocent. Job's question is this: Is there any place in heaven or on earth where the cries of the unjustly accused are heard and addressed (cf. 16:18-19; 19:23-27)? The friends insist that the answer to Job's question lies in the doctrine of retribution (see (Retribution]). They believe that as long as half of this doctrine can be verified--the punishment of the guilty--then the other half--the vindication of the innocent--should be assumed. Job now responds directly to this argument. He insists that even the half-truth the friends espouse is not really true. By refuting the claim that the wicked are punished, he destroys the single plank that supports the friends' theological house of cards.

Ch. 22-27 The Third Cycle: Similar arguments as in the first two cycles but more intense.

In ch. 23:3-7, Job again states that if he could appear before God to argue his case, he would be acquitted. This is not without precedent in Hebrew literature. Recall the parable in which the prophet Nathan tells king David which causes him to repent (2 Samuel 12). This argument displays confidence in God's ultimate righteousness, even though at present God's actions are unjust.

From the *Smyth & Helwys Commentary* on Job , Chapter 23 (page 359-360):

When Job declares that his "complaint" (...21:4) against God is too grievous to be born patiently, Eliphaz counsels him to let it go. If Job truly desires relationship with the Almighty, then his only option is to "agree with God" and conform to the model of submissive faith that God requires (22:21). Once again Job refuses to do as he is told. Instead, he launches into one of the most intensive complaints about God's inexplicable absence found anywhere in scripture. Chapter 23 frames this complaint with two statements that insist faith must sometimes be construed as moral rebellion, not silent compliance. In v. 2 Job argues that his "complaint" ... is "defiant" ... "bitter"). In v. 17, he announces that despite the way God terrorizes him, he will not "be silenced" or "eliminated" ... by the threat of overwhelming darkness. Inside the "claims of time and sorrow" ... Job's compelling hope is that he might find a God who is more present and more just than the One he now knows (23:3-7). His lingering fear is that the unjust and implacable God who terrorizes him is all there is (23:8-16).

On the heels of this complaint, Job offers the most scathing indictment of God's justice that occurs in the book. He begins with a critical question that authentic faith permits no innocent sufferer to leave unasked: Why do those who know God never see the judgment that God promises (v. 1)? Why do the wicked run free, leaving their victims to cry out for help to a God who sees nothing wrong with the way the world is working (vv. 2-12)? Why do those who rebel against the light have license to subvert the moral order of the cosmos by using darkness as a cover for their criminality (vv. 13-17)? By any normal definition of justice, such evidence requires God's intervention, yet the abuses pile up and God remains silent. Given God's apparent indifference to injustice, Job dares to believe that he must speak out on behalf of all those who share his plight and his faith. He will declare the judgment on the wicked that God seems unwilling or unable to do (vv. 18-24).

Chapter 28: Interlude - The Wisdom Poem, Where Can Wisdom be Found?

“The poem on wisdom in chap. 28 is one of the most exquisite poetic compositions of the entire Bible. Precious jewels serve as an important image within the poem and might also serve as an image for the poem itself. Like a gemstone, this poem is beautifully crafted, clear and luminous, yet full of mysterious depths.... The first section of the poem (vv. 1-11) describes the place of precious metals in the world and the heroic human search to find and obtain them. These verses serve as a foil to the second section of the poem (vv. 12-27), which describes the inability of humans, in contrast to God, to find or obtain wisdom. This second section is divided into two parts both by the repetition of the thematic rhetorical question concerning the source and place of wisdom (vv. 12, 20) and by the repetition of the statement that neither living beings nor the personified cosmic realms of Sea and Death are able to locate and so gain access to wisdom (w. 13-14, 21-22). Thus the structure of the poem draws attention to the contrast between the inability of humankind to obtain wisdom, even in exchange for all the riches procured by mining (vw. 15-19), and God's knowledge of the way and place of wisdom in the cosmos, expressed most fully in God's encounter with wisdom in the act of creation (vv. 23-27). The final verse of the poem (v. 28) stands apart from the comprehensive structure and provides an unexpected conclusion to the poem. In contrast to the contention that humans cannot obtain wisdom, v. 28 presents God as saying that, for humans, piety (“fear of the Lord”) is the equivalent of wisdom, and morality (“turning from evil”) is the equivalent of understanding.”¹

23 God understands the way to it, and he knows its place.

24 For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens.

25 When he gave to the wind its weight, and apportioned out the waters by measure;

26 when he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the thunderbolt;

27 then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out.

28 And he said to humankind, Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.”

“The interpretive v. 28 sets up a parallel with vv. 25-27. "Fear of the Lord" and "turning from evil" play the same role in relation to humans that "giving weight to the wind" and "setting a limit for the rain" play in relation to God. God's acts are cosmos-creating acts, and God perceives and establishes wisdom in the midst of that activity. The human actions of true piety— fearing God and turning from evil—those too are acts of creation. They are cosmos-creating acts, not as acts of physical creation but as acts of moral creation. Humankind cannot find wisdom by searching for it as though it could be mined or purchased. One cannot possess wisdom; one can only embody it...."Turning from evil" is a condensed expression for the moral capacity of human beings. That, too, is a form of participation in divine creativity. Love does not exist without someone who will love. Justice does not come into being without someone to do justice. This notion is embedded in the Hebrew phrase to "do righteousness," a phrase used of humans as well as of God (see, e.g., Ps 106:3; Prov 21:3; Isa 56:1; 58:2; Jer 9:23; Ezek 18:21). To do righteousness and to turn from evil are acts of moral creation.”²

¹ Carol Newsom, Introduction and Commentary on the Book of Job, *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 4*, Abingdon Press, 2006, p. 528-529

² Newsom, p. 533-534

Ch. 29-31 Job

31: 5 “Have I walked hand in hand with falsehood, or hung out in the company of deceit? Weigh me on a set of honest scales so God has proof of my integrity.

Job gives examples of what he has done and not done which support his claim of righteousness.

31:13 Have I ever been unfair to my employees when they brought a complaint to me? What, then, will I do when God confronts me? When God examines my books, what can I say?

The inference is that since Job is accountable to God for justice, God, as a moral being, should also be accountable.

31:35 “Oh, if only someone would give me a hearing! I've signed my name to my defense—let the Almighty One answer! I want to see my indictment in writing. Anyone's welcome to read my defense; I'll write it on a poster and carry it around town. I'm prepared to account for every move I've ever made to anyone and everyone, prince or pauper. "If the very ground that I farm accuses me, if even the furrows fill with tears from my abuse, If I've ever raped the earth for my own profit or dispossessed its rightful owners, Then curse it with thistles instead of wheat, curse it with weeds instead of barley." The words of Job to his three friends were finished.

Ch. 32-37 The Speech of Elihu

This section of 6 chapters is thought to be a later addition to the book. Elihu is not mentioned in the Prose Tale with the other friends, and is not included in God's rebuke of Job's friends. “Many compositional and stylistic features also suggest a different author. Elihu is the only character bearing an Israelite name... (The word) used for knowledge is not found elsewhere in the book.”³ Elihu emphasizes traditional beliefs about God punishing people but holds that this is meant to help redeem them. In other words, God sends suffering on people to make them better. In many ways, his arguments are similar to that of Job's three friends and emphasizes that God always acts justly. Elihu says, “Therefore, hear me, you who have sense, far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong. For according to their deeds he will repay them, and according to their ways he will make it befall them.” [34:10-11]

³ Newsom, p.358