

## Job-by Tommy Lee

### Chapter 1

This first chapter has three scenes. **The first scene** is vs.1-5: this is our introduction to Job, a man of integrity, honor, the fear of the Lord, ten loving children, abundant blessing, high social esteem, worship, humility, prayer, and abiding faithfulness. Note two things here especially: 1. Job is not an Israelite; he is a Gentile worshipper of God (v.1), of which there are many in the Old Testament. 2. As the head of the family, he acts as the priest of his family, praying for them "*continually*" (v.5). **The second scene** is vs.6-12: here we see the "*sons of God*" (v.6, referring to the angels, both fallen and unfallen) appearing before the Lord. One of them, "*Satan*" (v.6, literally "*the accuser*"), believes that Job is God's "*servant*" (v.8)—not for God's sake, but for the sake of all his abundant blessings and rewards. Note here: "*the Satan*" cannot act without God's permission. He is far from an equal. **The final scene** is vs.13-22: there are four disasters, two from human enemies and two from "*heaven*" (v.16). Job does not blame bad luck or God. He confesses and worships (vs.20,21). God's boast (v.8) was true.

### Chapter 2

Last week we saw Job's response to the awful trials in his life: "*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*" (1.21). Note three particular things about that response: he confessed that the Lord was still sovereign ("*the Lord has taken away*"); he did not forget God's blessing ("*The Lord gave*"); he did not deny the realities of the trial ("*taken away*"). God points out to Satan, "*he still holds fast his integrity*" (v.3); may this be true of us as well, in the midst of our trials. But the Accuser dares God to test Job further, asserting that if Job's personal health fails, "*he will curse you to your face*" (v.5). Job's bodily pains are wretchedly described further in the book: see 7.4,14; 19.20; 30.17,30; etc. But even under these conditions and foolish provocation from his (nearly equally suffering) wife, "*Job did not sin with his lips*" (v.10). This does not mean that he sinned with his thoughts; it means that Satan's assertion in v.5 proved false. Now we are introduced to Job's friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (vs.11-13).

### Chapter 3

Yesterday we met Job's friends, and were likely quite impressed with them. "*They came each from his own place... they made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him... they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven*" (2.11,12). For a solid week "*no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great*" (2.13), but they stayed with him, grieving alongside. We'll come back to them. But first, in chapter three, Job speaks. He does not curse God—as Satan predicted and as Mrs. Job encouraged (2.5,9)—but he does curse the day of his own birth. He is expressing enormous grief in this chapter, and it's distressing to us just to read it. His suffering has been violent; his grief is equally violent. Much of the chapter is very personal, but note that in vs.20-23 he speaks to the experience of a suffering humanity in general. There he's basically asking why people cannot simply die when they are ready to do so? It's a riddle he ponders before God, not an action he presumes to take against himself.

### Chapter 4

The first of Job's three friends now speaks: Eliphaz the Temanite, and his first speech covers chapters 4 & 5 (but we're only reflecting on 4 today). One key to understanding this long dialogue that lasts from 3.1 - 31.40 is that we, the readers, have been let in on the secret as to why Job is suffering. We have read chapters 1 & 2. But Job and his three friends have not. The friends, as their words will show, cannot believe that Job does not deserve this suffering. They have accepted the idea that all of our suffering is directly attributable to our own personal sin. This is not true. We now live in broken moral order and a

fallen world; there are thousands of reasons for human suffering. But this is actually the most comforting of the speeches. Eliphaz affirms that Job has been a man of integrity who has often comforted others (vs.3-6). He says that because Job is *not* one of those who "*plow iniquity*," he need not fear sharing the final destruction of the wicked (vs.7-11). However, Eliphaz reports that he had a vision (vs.12-16), and the sum of the vision is that Job is not perfect (vs.17-21). Duh.

### Chapter 5

Here we find the second half of Eliphaz's first speech; he continues his theme from yesterday, certain in his dogmatic view that our suffering is always deserved because of some personal sin (for a similar mentality in the disciples, see John 9.1,2). In vs.1-7 he's basically arguing that our suffering and "*affliction does not come from the dust, nor does [our] trouble spring from the ground*" (v.6). We always bring these things upon ourselves, as a simple cycle of cause and effect. In vs.8-16 Eliphaz is urging Job to seek God and commit his cause to God (v.8), for God is the great reverser of fortunes (vs.11-16). Of course, Job will do this often in the book (7.20-21; 10.18-22; 13.20-23; etc.); it's the one piece of the friends' advice that is truly helpful and always relevant. In vs.17-27 Eliphaz assures Job that if he will just accept this suffering as "*the discipline of the Almighty*" (v.17), it will become a great blessing to him. We cringe to hear him insensitively refer to Job's children in v.25 (see also back in v.4), don't we? But Eliphaz is quite self-assured (v.27). However, see Jesus' word to his friends in John 9.3.

### Chapter 6

Eliphaz spoke for two chapters, but since he wasn't really addressing Job's specific situation (the "unjust" suffering of the relatively innocent person), Job doesn't respond to anything he said. Instead, in Job's next speech (chapters 6 & 7), he just picks up where he left off in chapter 3. There are three parts to what Job is saying here, and we reflect on the first two today. In vs.1-13 Job is still longing to have his request and hope for death fulfilled (vs.8,9). This would bring a swift conclusion to his suffering, and it would also give him the comfort of knowing that his prolonged agony did not lead him into the blasphemy of having "*denied the words of the Holy One*" (v.10). Job is obviously doubting his own strength; he's not sure he can hold up (vs.11-13). His burden is heavier than the sand of the sea (vs.2,3); it is as if he has become God's enemy (v.4). Then, in vs.14-30, Job directly addresses his friends. They are like a stream that has no water when you need it (vs.15-21). In Job's view they have withheld the kindness he needs (v.14). If he has sinned so greatly, just point it out, and he will hush (v.24).

### Chapter 7

This is the third part of the speech Job began in yesterday's chapter. In the first part, he renewed and even intensified his wish for death. In the second part, he told his friends they were denying him the only thing he wanted from them: sympathy, loyalty, devotion... friendship. And now, in part three, he addresses God directly. The sum of it is that he just wants God to leave him alone so that he can live out the rest of his life without the arrows and poison and terrors of this pain (see 6.4). But there's an irony here, of course. In begging God to depart from him, Job is in fact approaching God. This is prayer. It's in v.16 that Job boldly says to God, "*Leave me alone.*" Why? First, in vs.1-5, his days are filled with misery. Like a slave working hard in the burning heat and longing for shadow (v.2), Job longs for release. Second, in vs.6-10, his death seems to be rapidly approaching anyway; there is not much left to lose. Note that vs.17&18 are the reverse of the "*What is man?*" question in Psalm 8. There this question is full of thankful wonder; here it's full of bitter torment. And so he prays to the end.

### Chapter 8

Job has three friends with him; we've heard from one of them, Eliphaz. And now Bildad the Shuhite speaks. From the friends' perspective, they want to offer Job sympathy and support, but only in a way

that is sober, reasonable, and realistic. From their perspective, Job's sufferings are proof enough that he is being punished by God for some great wrongdoing. That much is plain to them. They can't disregard what their eyes see, and they don't want to affirm in Job a false sense of innocence. And as for his children, their death is proof of their great sin as well (v.4). So... Bildad picks up where Eliphaz left off. "*If you are pure and upright*" (v.6), then do a better job of searching your conscience. Find the evil and root it out. Bad things like this won't keep happening to good people. After all, God does not "*pervert justice*" (v.3). You get what you deserve. In vs.8-10 Bildad appeals to the traditional teaching of humanity on this point. In vs.11-19 he provides a series of cause and effect illustrations, with the summary point found in v.13. Bildad's theology has no place for a righteous sufferer... like Jesus.

### **Chapter 9**

Job's third speech covers chapters 9&10. In chapter 9 Job expands on what he said back in 6.11-13. There he told us that he is so weakened in this trial that he feels he has no inner resources left. He continues to speak of this crushing sense of trapped powerlessness in 9.3-4,14-20,30-31. But there is also a new direction that Job begins to explore: "*how can a man be in the right before God?*" (v.2). This theme will continue to be developed in 10.15-16; 13.13-23; 16.18-21; 19.23-27; 23.2-14; etc. And that theme is essentially what most of the Bible is all about, isn't it? How can fallen man be made right before God? We'll want to keep a close eye on how that question is dealt with in Job. Here's a hint: Job, unknowingly, is actually a shadow (or picture) of how the Bible will ultimately answer his question. Because one day there will come a Greater Job (that is, Jesus) who will arrive as a Righteous Sufferer, also tested by Satan. He will be humiliated and exalted with sufferings and glories far greater than even Job experiences. He will be the mediator between God and man that Job longs for in v.33.

### **Chapter 10**

Here we have the second half of Job's third speech, in which he is openly venting and unleashing his fears and thoughts before God... which apparently we are freely invited to do. How often is this kind of candor a characteristic of our prayers? I occasionally wonder if God (and any angels who may be overhearing) might get bored with how plastic and predictable our prayers sometimes become. Job doesn't merely talk *about* God, in the third person. He genuinely talks *to* God. In vs.1-2 Job states that he will now give "*free utterance*" to his complaint, plainly asking God to let him know why all of this has happened. In vs.3-7 he speculates, in the bitterness of his soul (see v.1), as to possible reasons why all of this has happened. In vs.8-17 we see reflections of the great Psalm 139 But rather than celebrating the beauty of God's joyful creation of each and every human person (as Psalm 139 does), here this language is ironic. "*Did you so create and preserve me, only in order to destroy me?*" And in vs.18-22 Job returns to his earlier request that God just release him and let him die in peace.

### **Chapter 11**

Now Zophar the Naamathite speaks. Remember, the three friends are convinced that Job's suffering is silent proof that he has indeed sinned against God in some secret and terrible way. They are firm believers in the doctrine of retribution—that all suffering is due to personal guilt. And either due to temperament or to the fact that he is the last to enter the conversation, we see that Zophar is the least sympathetic of the three. His message is: "*God knows all secrets and has all understanding and is actually punishing you less that what you deserve (v.6); therefore, repent (vs.13,14)!*" In vs.15-19 Zophar reminds Job of the blessings that come to those who repent. And it is, indeed, a fine speech. And vs.13&14 does provide an astute description of repentance. But the careful reader remembers what God told us in Job 1.1: "*There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.*" Job is a man of faithful repentance. We start to long for God to speak again, as Zophar says in v.5. Just wait. It's coming.

## Chapter 12

With chapters 12-14 (but today we only look at 12), we've reached the end of the first round of speeches. All the friends have addressed Job, and now Job addresses them (12.1-13.18) and God (13.19-14.22). Then we start the second cycle of speeches. One thing to remember as we read this book is that the very length of it is intended to give us a sense—just a small sense—of what it's like to enter into a protracted, extended, lengthy season of suffering. So if the book starts seeming excessively long to you, keep in mind that this is part of the design. You're learning about suffering. You're learning wisdom. The second verse of this chapter is priceless. After all of their self-important but wrong-headed philosophizing and banal contemplations, Job says, "*No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you.*" That's the most hilarious thing you'll hear today. 100 points to whomever uses it in an appropriate context first. Job questions their wisdom in vs.2-12. Sometimes the just are afflicted (v.4) and the unjust seem to enjoy peace (v.6). Then, in vs.13-25, Job dares to look at God's wisdom.

## Chapter 13

Today is Groundhog Day, and—like the old Bill Murray movie by that name—you may feel like you've experienced many of these words before in Job. But, similar to something we said yesterday, understand that this is also an aspect of how this book is designed. In a sense we are "entering into" suffering merely by reading this book carefully, and there is much wisdom to be gained in doing so. If you've ever faithfully walked with someone who is suffering and grieving mightily, you may have noticed that grief isn't exactly linear. We come back again and again to certain things: processing them, praying them, reliving them. Grief is cyclical. It occurs in repetitive patterns, but with healthy grief there is growth and progress and direction in the cycles. By submitting to the very nature of this book, the reader is learning something of that wise and faithful grieving (see v.15). Job is still addressing his friends through v.18, telling them that any theology that has no place for a righteous sufferer is a lie. In v.19 he begins to pray; if God does have something against him, Job would like to know what it is (v.23).

## Chapter 14

Near the end of the last chapter Job began to openly call God into a verbal contest with him (13.22). He knows this is dangerous (13.14), he knows it's suicidal (13.15), but he also knows that he has lived with true repentance and faith before God (13.18). Is God making much ado about nothing (13.25)? Is God punishing Job for the faults of childhood (13.26)? He's calling God into a face to face confrontation. And now, paradoxically and inconsistently, he's back to asking God to just please leave him alone to let him die in peace. Again, this is a true representation of what we are like in the midst of grief and suffering, isn't it? But there's something striking and powerful about chapter 14. What is our hope? Is there life beyond death, that we might sprout again, like a tree after it's been cut down (vs.7-12)? Can we pass the apparent limitation of our death (v.5)? Will there be a day when the world is made new after God's wrath has passed, and we rise and awaken (v.12)? Will God remember his people in this way and renew them (v.13,14)? Can our sins be vanished (v.16,17)? Yes. Resurrection.

## Chapter 15

The dialogue portion of this book began with Job giving a speech in chapter 3. Then each of the friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, & Zophar) gave speeches, with Job speaking again after each of them. Now we're fully into Round Two with Eliphaz giving his second speech. In vs.2-16 Eliphaz is speaking directly to Job; in vs.17-35 he is describing the fate of the wicked—*those who do not repent of their sins*—in a general way. But even in that section he is implying that Job is *not* among the wicked who never repent, so he need not fear that ultimate end. This is meant as an encouragement to Job. He wants his friend to acknowledge that no man is perfect in God's sight (vs.14-16). Job is not superhuman (v.9); he has not sat

in on God's heavenly council (v.8); he is at fault here (v.4), and that is wronging himself (v.6) and God (v.13). He needs to listen to those who are older (v.10). And then, coming to the general picture of the wicked in vs.17-35, Eliphaz says the wicked live in constant fear of death (vs.20-26), and they always die before their time (vs.31-33). Remember: this is Eliphaz speaking, not God.

### **Chapter 16**

Job speaks again, and his comments here can be divided into three movements. In vs.2-6 Job lets his friends know what he thinks of their speeches so far: *"miserable comforters are you all"* (v.2). His theme: their *"windy words"* are repetitive, endless, unprovoked, and powerless to really touch his struggle and offer him true help. In vs.7-17 Job is lamenting how God has devastated him. Just read the forcefully hostile verbs in this section. Is the sense of oppression not crushing? God is pictured, among other images, as a wild beast (vs.9,10), a betrayer (v.11), a wrestler (v.12), a master archer (vs.12c-13a), a merciless swordsman (v.13b-14), etc. In vs.18-22 Job now speaks to the earth itself. In Genesis 4.10 Abel's blood cried out to God from the earth, after Abel was murdered. In v.18 Job is appealing to this same earth: *"cover not my blood, and let my cry find no resting place."* He thinks he will soon die from this assault by God (v.22), and he wants his innocent blood to cry out for his vindication. This reminds us of the Greater Job, whose blood also cries out, but it cries for grace (Hebrews 12.24).

### **Chapter 17**

At the end of chapter 16 Job was asking the earth itself to bear witness to his innocence and see to his vindication after his death; in this chapter, he is admitting that he does not in the least expect that to happen. There is only one certainty in his earthly future, and that is the death of his body. This is the voice of a man over the edge of despair. Death is his only *"hope"* (vs.13,15). His grave is already dug (v.1). He is haunted by the mockery of those who are certain that he has done something exceedingly wicked to deserve all this suffering (v.2). In vs.8&9 Job uses irony, calling his friends the *"upright"* and the *"innocent"* and referring to himself as the *"godless"* with whom they are *"appalled."* Yet, in v.10, he basically tells them to *"bring it on."* (Which they do.) But at the end of the chapter, we see his depression revealed again: his only remaining earthly expectations are the grave and the worm. Remember, the sufferings of Job are a picture of the sufferings of Christ, the Truly Righteous Sufferer... *"despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"* (see Isaiah 53.3).

### **Chapter 18**

Now we hear from Bildad again. In vs.2-4, he addresses Job directly. In vs.5-21 he describes, for Job, the dreadful fate of the *"wicked"* (v.5)—that is, those sinners who do not repent of their sins, but rather remain in them. Bildad's theology of sin and suffering and his understanding of the earthly experience of the wicked is unreasonably black and white, outrageously *"absolute,"* and also—it seems—very much full of wishful thinking. The reader is *not* expected to find in Bildad's description a convincing portrait of the earthly life of all unbelievers. The world is just not that predictable. It's not that neat and tidy. But, in Bildad's mind, to give up the traditional religious teaching on these points is akin to forsaking the earth and removing rocks from their place (v.4). As he did back in 8.5-7, Bildad is recommending that Job stop doing whatever sin he was engaging in and *"seek God"* (8.5). Time for some C.S. Lewis: "When pain is to be borne, a little courage helps more than much knowledge, a little human sympathy more than much courage, and the least tincture of the love of God more than all."

### **Chapter 19**

In vs.1-6 Job again speaks to how these friends are tormenting him, breaking him in pieces, and casting reproach upon his disgrace. In vs.7-12 Job runs through a series of crushing images. Like a victim of robbery he cries for help, but no one comes (v.7). He's a traveler up against a barricade, in the dark (v.8).

He's been humiliated (v.9). He's been torn limb from limb and then uprooted (v.10). He's under siege (vs.11,12). In vs.13-20 he gives voice to a common product of long suffering: he feels "*wholly estranged*" (v.13), alienated and isolated from family, friends, acquaintances, employees, spouse... even young children. In vs.21&22 he begs his friends for mercy. Can they stop slandering him? In vs.23&24, Job wishes his experience in this trial could be recorded in some permanent form, so that he might be vindicated and so that people might learn something true about faith and suffering. *And look!* Here we are studying Job for that very purpose in AD 2016; his prayer was granted! Verses 25-27 are some of the most well-loved words in the Bible, perhaps even more so now, in context.

## Chapter 20

In the final two verses of the last chapter (19.28,29), Job warned his friends to "*be afraid*" (19.29). They "*pursue*" him, continually accusing him of some great, hidden sin, saying that "*the root of the matter is found in him*" (19.28). They keep saying that Job himself is somehow the author of all these tragedies in his life. Job was cautioning them: he has not committed some great injustice. But they have! They are unjustly accusing an innocent man. They need to know that this is itself a serious transgression before God; they need to know that "*there is a judgment*" (19.29). Yet, in spite of Job's warning... it's Zophar's turn, and he does not intend to miss it. The theme of Zophar's 2nd speech is the guaranteed downfall of the wicked in this life. He is insulted by Job's "*censure*" (v.3). What the friends have been saying is thoroughly traditional (v.4). The wicked come to nothing (vs.5-9) They always vomit back and lose everything that they've gained from their wrongdoing (vs.12-23). The wicked person cannot escape this certain sentence of doom in this earthly life (vs.24-29). Do you agree with Zophar?

## Chapter 21

Job has not responded to suffering by floating off to some tranquil haven, where he contemplates these matters in quiet harmony with the universe. He's fighting for truth! All three of his friends in Round Two of these speeches have dwelt upon the glaringly obvious and unmistakably straightforward doom of the wicked. Job vigorously disagrees (see vs.7-34, almost the entire chapter). The wicked—*that is, sinners who do not repent of their sins*—often live to old age, with great influence (v.7), see their children established (v.8), with much earthly safety and prosperity (vs.9,10), even though they live in constant blasphemy before God (vs.14,15). Job does not desire their kind of prosperity at all (v.16), but within three verses he thoroughly contradicts Zophar (see 20.11 & now v.7), Bildad (see 18.19 & now v.8), and Eliphaz (see 5.24 & now v.9). In vs.29-33 Job invites his friends to ask any traveller to describe the common human experience that they've seen. The wicked are often spared from calamity (v.30), not denounced or "paid back" (v.31), and honored in death (vs.32,33). Will v.34 hush the friends?

## Chapter 22

On Friday we asked if Job's refutations and closing statement in 21.34 would completely silence the three friends. The answer is no. Round Three of the speeches now begins; however, *something different will happen this time*. Eliphaz seems to contradict his original point of view, Bildad seems to have been cut off just as he was warming up, and Zophar will not speak at all any more. *Do not all three of those things usually happen in the midst of long conversational strife?* In vs.2-11 Eliphaz, who originally did not believe Job was guilty of some great, untold wickedness, now accuses him of great, untold wickedness. In vs.12-20 Eliphaz assures Job that God has seen his secret sin; God knows; God judges "*through the deep darkness*" (v.13). The wicked may have their homes temporarily filled with "*good things*" (v.18), but they will be "*snatched away before their time*" (v.16). And now, in vs.21-30, he returns to his earlier posture. Eliphaz advises Job to "*agree with God*" (v.21), "*return to the Almighty*" (v.23), and be "*delivered through the cleanness of your hands*" (v.30). Repent, believe, obey.

### Chapter 23

Job now takes his turn to speak again, after Eliphaz's final comments, and there are two main themes of this speech. The first theme is developed in chapter 23; the second theme in chapter 24. In 23.2-17, Job wishes that he could physically find God and call upon him for vindication (see vs.3-5). But God is *physically* inaccessible. However, *if only Job could materially appear before God*, he is confident that God would listen and pay attention (v.6). He is confident that God would clear him of all wrongful suspicion—forever (v.7). But Job cannot "grab" God, though he look ahead or behind, to the left, or to the right (vs.8-9). However, even though Job cannot "find" God, God knows where to find Job (v.10). And when God finally does examine Job, Job knows that he will be found innocent and upright (vs.10-12). And yet... who can make God do anything? *"What he desires, that he does"* (v.13). As they say of Aslan in Narnia, *"Do you think I keep him in my wallet, fools? Who am I that I could make Aslan appear at my bidding? He's not a tame lion."* Even so, Job will not be silent (v.17).

### Chapter 24

Job knows he is not the only innocently suffering person on earth. Here he considers the difficulties and troubles that the innocent poor often suffer in this world, and compares them to the apparent ease and abundance of the prosperous who take advantage of the innocent poor. This leads him to wonder why God does not hold regular *"times of judgment"* (v.1), to deal with all these injustices. As it stands, the oppression of the poor—so poignantly described in vs.2-12b—is allowed to continue without interruption. Even God seems to be unmoved (v.12c). Next he considers how other injustices are often permitted to thrive, as in the evils of the "successful" murderer or "successful" adulterer (vs.13-17). Job is here reflecting on how God governs this world; things in a fallen realm of sin are not going to be as black and white and neat and tidy as his friends wish to believe. In vs.18 and following Job is summarizing what the friends have said, to disagree with it. All this consideration of evil pushes us to the gospel, where God does finally come in a "time of judgment." But on the cross, who is judged?

### Chapter 25

It could be that you, dear reader, are starting to get weary of Job. If so, allow me to return to something we said back when we considered Job 12: *"One thing to remember as we read this book is that the very length of it is intended to give us a sense—just a small sense—of what it's like to enter into a protracted, extended, lengthy season of suffering. So if the book starts seeming excessively long to you, keep in mind that this is part of the design. You're learning about suffering. You're learning wisdom."* But we now turn a corner in the book. Eliphaz spoke three times (chapters 4&5, 15, & 22). By the end he seemed to be contradicting his earlier words. Bildad has spoken three times (chapters 8, 18, & now here, 25). In this chapter he seems to have been interrupted and cut off just as he was starting to soar. Zophar spoke two times (chapters 11 & 20), and we expect him to speak again—but apparently he is done. He's had enough. If you've ever participated in an intense conversation, all three situations will feel somewhat familiar. They will not speak again, but they will appear again... at the end.

### Chapter 26

We have seen sharp sarcasm from Job before, and we see it again here (vs.2,3); he seems to have a talent for it. But Job doesn't hold a candle to the Master of (righteous) sarcasm who will speak at the end of the book God truly is the master of everything, isn't he? But let's not get ahead of ourselves; we've got five more chapters of the speeches of Job and then seven chapters of the speeches of a man named Elihu—*whom we haven't even met yet*—before we get to The Speeches of God, which will dwarf all the previous speeches, in every way imaginable. After mocking Bildad at the beginning of this speech, Job then begins to reflect on the wisdom and power of God in vs.5-14. Job recognizes that he has *"no power"* (v.2), but that God's power is majestic, absolute, and perfect. Job has *"no wisdom"* (v.3), but

God's wisdom is pure, robust, and useful. God hangs the earth upon nothing (v.7), holds the rainwaters (v.8), covers the moon in its various phases (v.9), marks out the horizon in a circle (v.10), etc. And yet, all this is only *"the outskirts of his ways,"* a small whisper of his power (v.14).

### **Chapter 27**

Over in the New Testament, when the Apostle James writes about suffering, we read this: *"As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful"* (James 5.10,11). Notice his remark, *"you have heard of the steadfastness of Job."* The Apostle recognizes that if we want to grow into faithful and mature disciples, who know how to love and follow Jesus even in the midst of suffering, we need to spend some time with the book of Job. Keep that in mind, Christian. As James said, the steadfastness of Job is showing you the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. This is wisdom. In vs.2-12 Job confesses several things again: God's holy sovereignty (v.2), that his friends have it all wrong (v.5), he is innocent of great sin (v.6), but he has apparently taught these things in vain (v.11,12). In vs.13-23, he decries the wicked.

### **Chapter 28**

There are two parts to this amazing chapter. In vs.1-11 Job is celebrating the wisdom, the skill, the ingenuity of humankind, and he chooses just one example to illustrate: mining. Think about the mining of precious metals (*silver, gold, iron, & copper* are mentioned in vs.1&2; *sapphires* in v.6) in the ancient world. It involved the making of lamps for use underground (v.3); the opening of shafts and the hanging of the miner in mid-air, swinging to and fro, isolated from all people, as he descends into the shaft (v.4). Farming is peaceful (v.5a), but mining is violent (v.5b,9,10). In mining, humanity has taken its dominion of the earth to new frontiers (vs.7,8). It's incredible what "we" are able to do (v.11). And yet... in vs.12-28 Job reminds us that there is still a majestic disparity between human wisdom and divine wisdom. In Ecclesiastes 3.11 we are reminded that even with all of our practical, technological wisdom, we *"cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end"* (see also Ecclesiastes 8.17). True wisdom is beyond our grasp; it belongs to God alone. Our best is found in v.28.

### **Chapter 29**

Gregory the Great lived from 540-604 AD. The reformer John Calvin referred to him as the last good pope. In teaching the book of Job, Gregory faithfully described how Job points us to Christ, the Greater Righteous Sufferer: *"And therefore it behooved that blessed Job also, who uttered those high mysteries of His Incarnation, should by his life be a sign of Him, Whom by voice he proclaimed, and by all that he underwent should shew forth what were to be His sufferings; and should so much the more truly foretell the mysteries of His Passion, as he prophesied then not merely with his lips but also by suffering."* In chapter 29 we meet a nostalgic Job, remembering what his life was like before he was overwhelmed with terrible suffering. It's a moving way to get to know Job better. He describes those as the days *"when God watched over me"* (v.2), when he was in his *"prime"* (v.4), when his children were with him (v.5), when he was awash in prosperity (v.6), when he held the respect and dignity of an elder in the gate (v.7ff), when he could meaningfully help the less privileged (v.12ff). All gone.

### **Chapter 30**

In the last chapter Job was nostalgically remembering the man he used to be, a man of blessing and prosperity who faithfully used his strength and power to lift up the poor, the fatherless, the dying, the widow, the blind, the lame, the needy, and the oppressed (see 29.12-17). In today's chapter he is lamenting, before God, the great reversal of his condition and the loneliness of his isolation: *"But*

now..." (v.1). "And now..." (v.9). "And now..." (v.16). The contrast is emphatic and profound. His sense of relationship with God, with his peers, and with the needy is altogether smashed and trashed. Now even the people he once so generously helped treat him with mean contempt (vs.1-15, 24-31). Verse 14 pictures Job as if he were a besieged city; the wall is breached, and the enemies are pouring in. But it's the middle portion of this chapter that cuts deepest: God seems to have turned callous toward him (vs.16-23). And remember the intense physical pain he is enduring (vs.16,17). All he can do is cry for help (v.24). He was always a giver of help (v.25). But now, for him, there is no help (v.26).

### Chapter 31

We are nearing the stunning conclusion of this book; the last words of this chapter are "*The words of Job are ended*" (v.40). He will still make replies to the Lord's words, but here end his "speeches." And what a moving final speech! Go back to chapter one and remember what we first learned of Job: he was "*blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil*" (1.1). Even God himself said, "*there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil*" (1.8). If you want to know what the Bible means by that kind of language, the study of Job 31 is a great place to start. Reflect on it with care, thought by thought. It involves turning away from things like lust, "heart" sins as well as external sins—sexual or otherwise, dishonesty in business, deceit in any financial matter, adultery, treating employees with any indignity or injustice whatsoever, love of money, idolatry, taking pleasure at the downfall of enemies, overlooking those in need, and hypocrisy. Positively, it means serving the disadvantaged, practicing hospitality, and giving generously.

### Chapter 32

And now something unexpected happens! *Someone* unexpected is introduced. His name is Elihu, and he will speak for six chapters, after which the Lord Himself will (finally) speak into this matter of unjust suffering. Perhaps the best way to understand Elihu is as someone straddling the middle way between Job and his three friends. The friends have argued that God is perfectly just; therefore, Job is being punished for some awful, secret sin. Job has argued that God's ways are not as simple as that, and that this suffering is *not* the result of some awful, secret sin. Elihu seems to be saying a third thing: that some suffering is discipline; therefore, suffering need not be the penalty for our past sins. It could even be formative discipline—*training in righteousness*—that keeps us from committing future sins. Note that we're still grappling with this issue with merely human wisdom; God will speak soon. But when he does, he firmly rebukes the three friends; Elihu is not mentioned. We are told 4 times (vs.2, 3, 5) that Elihu "*burned with anger*" before he spoke. And in vs.6-22 he says he's about to bring it...

### Chapter 33

Yesterday Elihu promised that he would "*not show partiality to any man or use flattery toward any person*" (32.21). In fact, he said in 32.22, that he does not even "*know how to flatter.*" So... Job needs to prepare himself for some straight talk. In vs.1-7 Elihu continues to introduce himself. He too, like Job, is a mere human, "*pinched off from a piece of clay*" (v.6); Job need not fear him (v.7). But he wants to correct any implication Job has made that God has been unjust to send this suffering. In vs.9-11 Elihu is summarizing Job's position, in order to correct it (v.12). Elihu wants to maintain both God's justice (v.12) and Job's innocence of great transgression (v.32). In vs.14-18 Elihu uses the example of a nightmare to show how God can use a form of suffering to warn us against potential future sins, turning us aside from evil deeds and keeping us back from destruction. In vs.19-28 Elihu says that God can do the same thing with physical suffering, bringing us to the good confession of vs.27&28. His purpose here is not to accuse, but to "*justify*" Job (v.32). This suffering could be loving discipline.

### Chapter 34

Now Elihu appeals to the "wise men" (v.1, meaning the crowd listening to these speeches). The thrust of this speech is that God is always absolutely just: "far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong" (v.10). If Job has implied otherwise (see v.5), Job is simply mistaken. Elihu puts words in Job's mouth in v.9 that we have not really heard Job say. Job has said that sometimes the wicked escape earthly justice and that sometimes awful trouble falls upon the faithful. But remember that Job himself has held fast to God, even when it has brought him no immediately apparent gain. Elihu continues to make his point: God is "righteous and mighty" (v.17); he alone has the power to judge kings and nobles (v.18); he alone can shatter them "without investigation" (v.24), for he alone already knows all their ways and all their steps (v.21). He alone can overturn them in one night, leaving them crushed (v.25). And all this is in strict agreement with holy justice (vs.19, 25-28). So if God is silent this time, with regard to Job, who will condemn him (v.29)?

### Chapter 35

Like he did in 34.9, Elihu again seems to put words in Job's mouth that we have not heard Job himself say. This time he does so in v.3, imputing to Job this question before God: "What advantage have I [in remaining faithful]? How am I better off than if I had sinned?" Elihu then answers this question that he (*not Job*) has posed. In v.7 he says that we should not expect some gain or demand some reward from God simply for being "righteous" in our behavior. If you truly consider the greatness of God (v.5), you'll see that our wickedness or our righteousness is—from one perspective—of very little concern to him (vs.6,8). And then, in vs.9-13, it seems that Elihu misrepresents Job again. He is saying that Job is just crying out for help in his "multitude of oppressions" (v.9), which—for many—is nothing more than an involuntary human reflex action during trouble. But Job is not sincerely calling upon God his "Maker, who gives songs in the night," who teaches us and makes us wise (vs.10,11). And that's why God doesn't answer Job; it's an empty cry, to be disregarded (vs.12,13). *What do you think?*

### Chapter 36

We now enter the final two chapters of Elihu's words, and thematically there's a division here that doesn't really line up with the chapter division. Today we'll consider 36.1-25; on Monday we'll consider 36.26-37.24. In vs.1-25 Elihu is describing again his idea of "suffering as formative discipline." He says he is speaking "on God's behalf" (v.2) so that he might "ascribe righteousness to [his] Maker" (v.3)—meaning, again, that there has been no injustice on God's part with regard to Job. He speaks again to how high and exalted God is above humanity, so he must "get [his] knowledge from afar" (v.3); but having done so, he is now "perfect in knowledge" (v.4). When the righteous fall into suffering, Elihu says, their ears will be newly opened to instruction so that they might turn back from iniquity (v.10). If the righteous respond to such sufferings correctly, all is well (v.11). But if they do not, they will suffer the same fate as the godless (vs.12-14). But again, the *godly* will be delivered from such evil by responding to suffering correctly (vs.15,16). In vs.17-25 he's urging Job to respond to God rightly.

### Chapter 37

In the very next chapter of this book The Living God Himself will personally appear, as Job has frequently requested. Are you ready to meet him? Elihu, perhaps unwittingly, is now preparing us for the encounter. From 36.26 ("Behold, God is great...") to 37.24 ("Therefore men fear him...") what we have here is something of a hymn to the eternity and might and power and wisdom and judgment and awesome majesty of God. Considering it carefully will be good preparation for the rest of the book. Elihu is here basically playing the part of John the Baptist—the forerunner who has been sent ahead of the King, to prepare the way. Reflect on God's wonders of rain and sky and clouds and thunderings and lightning and sea and food and winter snowstorms (*that stop people from working and keep wild animals in their dens*) and the whirlwind and the cold and the scattering winds and ice and frozen lakes.

Then reflect on summer storms, delicately balanced clouds, heat, hot winds, a blazing sky hard as a metal mirror, and the dazzling sun that no one dares to look at directly. Are you ready?...

### **Chapter 38**

To me this has always felt like one of the holiest places in all of Scripture. After 35 chapters of human argument and sometimes bickering, The Lord Himself enters the story, with unmistakable power and the fullness of majesty. If this doesn't resolve the tension that's been building over the last 35 chapters, nothing will. But fear not; the tension will melt like mountains before the Lord. And mountains, by the way, melt like wax before the Lord (Psalm 97.5). Job has repeatedly called upon God to meet with him, sometimes out of anger and frustration; his request is granted. A few things to reflect on: God makes no mention of any fault in Job. Also, God does not justify his ways with Job; rather, he describes the world he created with an emphasis on its mystery and complexity. We are meant to make a connection between the mystery and complexity of the natural order of the universe and the mystery and complexity of the moral order of the universe. It may at times seem beyond all human comprehension to us, but it is the work of holy and wise God. Ponder the mystery afresh.

### **Chapter 39**

God continues to question Job, highlighting all that is *unknown* to him. Yesterday's chapter pointed to things like the foundation and measurements and cornerstone of the earth, the womb and bars and doors of the sea, the coming of the dawn, the gates of death, the dwelling of light, the place of darkness, the storehouses of snow and hail—reserved for the day of battle, the rain that God gives that is not even for the sake of humanity (it's for the sake of other parts of his creation), the origin of rain and dew and ice and frost, what fastens together the constellations, etc. Today's chapter continues to highlight yet more that is *unknown* to Job. Starting with 38.39 and continuing through all of chapter 39 the emphasis is now on the animal creation. Notice that the focus is not on the cute & cuddly animals, but on the mysterious and hostile animals. They—like suffering itself, since the Fall into sin—are now part of God's creation: wild, unpredictable, dangerous, enigmatic, untamed, ridiculous-seeming, cruel—but here in the created order for a purpose, *even if Job doesn't know that purpose*. God knows.

### **Chapter 40**

When the Lord began his first speech, he said to Job: *"Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me"* (38.3). And now, in v.2 of our present chapter, Job is invited to respond. In vs.4&5 we have his first response, which can be summarized as follows: *"I've got nothing."* It seems that Job has a fresh appreciation for the limitations of human understanding—which was exactly the point of the previous two chapters. As if to restrain himself from speaking unwisely, Job now puts his hand over his mouth (v.4). So the Lord begins his second speech, which also begins with those powerful words: *"Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me"* (v.7). In vs.7-14 the Lord is reminding Job that only God has the might and authority to vindicate a sinner: Job cannot save himself (v.14). And then in 40.15-41.34 God gives two illustrations of his sovereign power: his absolute mastery of the fiercest of the land animals (*"Behold, Behemoth..."* v.15) and the fiercest of the sea creatures (*"Leviathan,"* 41.1). What do you think the majestically terrible Behemoth is?

### **Chapter 41**

In yesterday's chapter God asked Job if anyone could tame Behemoth (40.24). Today he asks—repeatedly—if anyone can tame Leviathan. From this description of Leviathan (see also Job 3.8; Psalm 74.13-14; 104.26; Isaiah 27.1), what do you think this is? Whatever this thing is, it is also (like Behemoth) a symbol of great dread and wild terror and legendary splendor and fierce chaos and unconquerable strength... and yet God describes him in an almost loving fashion. Why was this thing even created? It is

of no practical service to mankind. It cannot be caught (v.1); it cannot be managed (v.2); it cannot be domesticated (v.3); it cannot be "used" by us (v.4); it certainly cannot be a pet for our children (v.5); it cannot be eaten (v.6); it cannot even be captured (v.7)! Who would even try (v.8)? We tremble at the mere sight of him (v.9). And then God says this: *"Who then is he who can stand before me? Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine"* (vs.10b,11)—before 23 more verses of terrifying & mysterious description. Let us consider.

## **Chapter 42**

This final chapter has three parts. In vs.1-6 Job recognizes God's right to rule the universe according to the counsel of his own will, even if that includes suffering that cannot be explained by human beings. Note that God has not even made an attempt to explain or justify this suffering to Job. But Job now sees that he was proudly mistaken to *demand* an answer to the "problem" of suffering. He has now seen and heard God Himself (v.5), and through this personal encounter with the Almighty, he understands that there are some things *"too wonderful"* (v.3, *too transcendent*) for him to know. In vs.7-9 God emphasizes to the three friends that Job has truly been his *"servant"* (repeated four times!), and that it is Job—not they—who has *"spoken of me what is right"* (v.7). And, in fact, if they want to have God's anger turned away from them, they must approach God through the STILL SUFFERING Job (vs.8,9). Reflect on the irony of that. May we not simply talk "about" God in the mist of suffering; may we talk to him—as Job did. In vs.10-17 God vindicates his servant in the eyes of all. And it is all grace.

### **Reflecting on Job –**

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Job. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Job before we move forward?

*"But he [Jesus] answered, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."'"* Matthew 4.4