

## Read the Bible in A Year: Chronological

### Readings for January 19-31

**This last part of the month we will be reading the book of Job- because though it comes much later in the order of the books in the Bible, the writing is very ancient, from the time of the early patriarchs who we read about in Genesis. I am giving you the whole book so that you can read it as a whole, but you have through the end of the month to tackle it. Job can be a bit tough to read, so I've chosen for this book to use The Voice translation which adds in some helpful insights and presents the text in a script form so we can keep track of who is talking. I'll add in a few comments to help us track the action. Hang in there, you'll be glad you did! Enjoy this book!**

#### **The book begins with an introduction to this man named Job...**

Once there was a man from Uz by the name of Job. He was a very good man—his character spotless, his integrity unquestioned. In fact, he so believed in God that he sought to honor Him in all things. He deliberately avoided evil in all of his affairs. He had 7 sons and 3 daughters; he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 teams of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and a large number of servants. Among Easterners, he was the most powerful and influential man. His sons, who were all wealthy landowners, too, all used to gather together on each others' birthdays and special occasions. The brothers would take turns hosting the others in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When these days of feasting were through, Job would call all of his family to his own house and purify them, rising up early in the morning to offer burnt sacrifices for each one. He would pray, "God, forgive my children for any secret sins or grudges they have against You deep in their hearts." Job did this again and again.

**Now the action moves to a dialogue between the Accuser and God. The dialogue is similar to what might be heard during a court case. Job is a person of the utmost integrity; he is someone God highly respects as his servant. Attacked by the Accuser in God's heavenly court, Job's actions are both supported and evaluated by God, who fills the roles of both Job's Advocate and as the Promoter of Justice...**

Now one day, it came time for the sons of God, God's heavenly messengers, to present themselves to the Eternal One to give reports and receive instructions. The Accuser was with them there.

**Eternal One** (to the Accuser): Where have you been?

**The Accuser:** Oh, roaming here and there, running about the earth and observing its inhabitants.

**Eternal One:** Well, have you looked into the man, Job, My servant? He is unlike any other person on the whole earth—a very good man—his character spotless, his integrity unquestioned. In fact, he so believes in Me that he seeks, in all things, to honor Me and deliberately avoids evil in all of his affairs.

**The Accuser:** I won't argue with You that he is pious, but is all of this believing in You and honoring You for no reason? Haven't You encircled him with Your very own protection, and not only him but his entire household and all that he has? Not only this, but Your blessing accompanies whatever his hand touches, and see how his possessions have grown. It is easy to be so pious in the face of such prosperity. So now extend Your hand! Destroy all of these possessions of his, and he will certainly curse You, right to Your face.

**Eternal One:** I delegate this task to you. His possessions are now in your hand. One thing, though: you are not to lay a finger on the man himself. Job must not be touched.

**With that, the Accuser left the court and the Eternal's presence and put his plan into motion...**

Now one day, all of Job's children were gathered together under the roof of Job's firstborn for their usual celebration—feasting and drinking wine— when a messenger came to Job.

**Messenger:** We were in the field. The oxen were plowing, the donkeys were grazing nearby, and out of nowhere, the Sabeans attacked. They stole your animals, all 1,000 oxen and donkeys, and as for your servants, they put their swords to us, and everyone is dead—every last one, except me. I am the only one who got away from the fields to tell you.

And while the words were still leaving the messenger's mouth, another messenger arrived.

**Second Messenger:** Lightning has struck! The fire of God fell from the sky and burned the 7,000 sheep alive . . . alive! Shepherds, too—all of them burned; everyone is dead—every last one, except me. I am the only one who got away from the pastures to tell you.

And while the words were still leaving that messenger's mouth, a third messenger arrived.

**Third Messenger:** Chaldeans! Three groups of them attacked us. They converged on the camels and stole your 3,000 animals, and as for your servants, they put their swords to us, and everyone is dead—every last one, except me. I am the only one who got away to tell you.

And while the words were still leaving that messenger's mouth, yet a fourth messenger arrived.

**Fourth Messenger:** All of your children were gathered together today under the roof of your firstborn to celebrate—eating a feast and drinking wine— and then a powerful wind rose up from the other side of the desert, and it struck all four corners of the house. It collapsed! Everyone is dead—all of those young people—every last one, except me. I am the only one who got away from your son's house to tell you.

Then Job stood up, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell to the ground. Face down, Job sprawled in the dirt to worship. And he said:

**Job:** I was naked, with nothing, when I came from my mother's womb; and naked, with nothing, I will return to the earth. The Eternal has given, and He has taken away. May the name of the Eternal One be blessed.

In all of this Job neither sinned nor did he make foolish charges against God.

**Now we are back in the throne room to see how God and the Accuser discussed what the Accuser has done and how Job responded...**

Now one day, it was time for the sons of God, God's heavenly messengers, to present themselves to the Eternal One to give reports and receive instructions. The Accuser was with them there again, also ready to present himself to Him.

**Eternal One** (to the Accuser): Where have you been?

**The Accuser:** Oh, roaming here and there, running about the earth and observing its inhabitants.

**Eternal One:** Well, have you looked into the man, Job, My servant? He is unlike any other person on the whole earth—a very good man—his character spotless, his integrity unquestioned. In fact, he so believes in Me that he seeks, in all things, to honor Me and deliberately avoids evil in all of his affairs. And I have found him to be unswervingly committed, despite the fact that you provoked Me to wreck him for no particular reason, to take away My protection and his prosperity.

**The Accuser:** Well, as they say, "Skin for skin!" It is easy to be so pious in the face of such health. Surely a man will give what he has for the sake of his own life, so now extend Your hand! Afflict him, both bone and body, and he will curse You, right to Your face.

**Eternal One:** Well then, this is how it will be: he is now in your hand. One thing, though: you will not take his life. Job must not be killed.

**And so the Accuser set this new plan in motion...**

With that, the Accuser left the court and the Eternal's presence, and he infected Job with a painful skin disease. From the soles of his feet to the crown of his head, his body was covered with boils. Job took a broken piece of pottery to scrape his wounds, and while he sat in the ashes just outside of town, his wife found him.

**Job's Wife:** Will you still not swerve in your commitments? Curse God and die!

**Job:** You're speaking nonsense like some depraved woman. Are we to accept the good that comes from God, but not accept the bad?

Throughout all of this, Job did not sin with his mouth; he would not curse God as the Accuser predicted.

### **Now Job's "friends" got involved...**

Now Job had three friends: **Eliphaz** from Teman, **Bildad** from Shuah, and **Zophar** from Naamath. When these three received word of the horror that had befallen Job, they left their homes, and agreed to meet together to mourn with and comfort their friend. They approached the town ash-heap, but they were still far off when they caught sight of Job. His sores were so severe and his appearance so changed by his condition that they almost didn't recognize him. Upon seeing him and apprehending the extent of his suffering, they cried out, burst into tears, tore their robes, reached down into the dust and ashes at their feet, and threw ash into the air and onto their heads. Then, they sat with him on the ground and stayed there with him for seven days and seven nights, mourning as if he were already dead. All the while no one spoke a single word because they saw his profound agony and grief.

### **Finally Job spoke. He is miserable and wishes he had never been born...**

After all of this, Job opened his mouth and broke the silence. He spoke a curse, not upon God but upon his day of birth.

**Job:** May the day die on which I was born, along with the night that spoke the words, "a boy is conceived," may that day of birth become darkness, and when it has disappeared, may God above neither seek it out nor light find a way to shine on it. Rather, let darkness and the shadow of death claim the day and its life-giving light. Let storm clouds roll over it and threatening blackness terrorize it.

As to that night of my conception— may it be snatched by the thick darkness of death's realm, never to be released again for any year or any month—so my conception and life could never have happened. May that night prove infertile, and may no moan of pleasure be heard there.

Bring out the enchanters, the diviners who cast their spells on the day—who can awaken that beast, Leviathan— and may the early-morning stars be extinguished. Let the day wait for a light that won't ever come. And may it never see the eyelids of dawn crack open. Because it neither closed the door of my mother's womb nor covered my eyes to these sorrows.

Why did I not die at my birth, simply pass from the womb into death? Why did my mother's lap welcome me, and why did her breasts nourish me? If I had died, then I would now be reposed in quiet; I would be sleeping in peace, resting with kings and their earthly ministers who rebuilt ruined cities to glorify themselves, with princes who possessed gold, whose houses swelled with silver. Why was I not buried in secret as a baby born still, as a newborn who never saw light? In the sleep of death, the wicked can do no more damage; the weary ones at last find rest. In death the captives are freed, together at ease, and the shouts of their oppressors die along with them. In the grave, together are the small and great, and slaves from masters are emancipated. Why is light awarded to those distressed, and life given to embittered souls who long for a death that can't be found, though they mine the earth to find it more than hidden veins of riches—who would be overjoyed and glad when they find the grave?

Why is light wasted on the earthbound, who cannot find their way and whom God has surrounded? For I groan before every meal; my moaning flows like water. What I feared most descends on me; my nightmare—now reality. I have no peace; I have no quiet; my resting, gone, has turned to riot.

### Now his friends spoke to him, beginning with **Eliphaz...**

Standing with Job and his other two friends in the trash heap, Eliphaz the Temanite tried to reason with Job...

**Eliphaz:** Could you bear it if someone were to speak? Ah, but who can hold his tongue in such a situation? Look back, and think on the many you have taught; you have strengthened the weak hands of the suffering. Your words propped up the tottering; you have strengthened mourners' wobbly knees. May my words help you in that way, now that trouble arrives and you despair.

It extends its hand, crushes you, and you are overwhelmed. Isn't your fear of God true confidence and your unswerving commitment genuine hope?

Take pause; scan your memory: Who ever died among the innocent? And when have the righteous ever met with destruction? The way I see it, those who pull the pernicious plow, who sow sorrow's seeds, reap the same at harvest. By God's breath, they meet destruction; when His anger explodes, they meet their end.

O the bluster of humanity! The lion roars! The king of beasts thunders! Still the young lions' teeth are shattered. The old lion dies for lack of prey, and the whole pride is scattered.

Now, listen: a secret word was delivered to me; my ears caught hold of a whisper. In the anxiety of a nightmare— while deep sleep falls on humans—fear took me by my right arm, terror by my left, and they shook me, they did!—made my bones rattle. Then a wind blew through, a divine breath skimming my face. Every hair on my body stood on end.

It came to a stop, but I couldn't make it out—some form there before me, then a hushed voice breaking the silence that said,

“Can a mortal stand innocent before God? Can a man or even a hero be pure before his Creator?” If God is unsure of His own servants, and in His holy attendants He finds fault, how much more those whose bodies come from clay, whose skeletons are dust, are crushed like a moth. From morning to evening, their bodies are broken to pieces, ground back into dirt, unseen, gone forever. When the cords of their tents are pulled up, don't they die, none the wiser?

As for you, Job, feel free to call, but will anyone reply? Among His holy attendants, to whom will you turn?

Remember, anger kills off the foolish, and jealous indignation closes in on the simple for the kill. I have seen a fool putting down roots, apparently succeeding, and immediately I cursed his house, knowing this brings destruction. His children are far from safe, crushed in full view of the city's gate with no defender nearby. Hungry raiders consume his

crops, harvesting even where the thorns stand guard while drifters and con-men target his wealth. You see, sorrow is not a natural product of the soil, nor is trouble known to sprout up from the earth itself. Still humankind is born into trouble, just as embers break loose and fly from the fire.

This is why, if I were you, I would appeal to God; I would lay my cause at the feet of the Lord. He does wonderful things that confound, infinite numbers of miracles. He gives rain to the earth, sends down water to the fields; He lifts up the downtrodden, bolsters the bereaved, raising them to safety. He thwarts the plots of the devious and ties their hands to failure. He catches the clever in their deceitful plotting so the plans of the crafty are swept away. Their day turns to darkness; they grope at noon as they do in blackest night. He saves the needy from the cutting sword, and from the perilous grip of the powerful. So there is still hope for the helpless; and the mouth of injustice is muzzled.

Remember, a happy man accepts God's correction, so don't despise the discipline of the Highest God. For the Lord may cut, but He stitches up; He may wound, but His hands also heal. In six different perils, He will rescue you; even in seven, evil will not touch you; in famine, He will save you from starvation; and in war, you won't be run through with the sword; In slanderous situations, you will go unharmed; in the face of chaotic destruction, you won't tremble; in violence and famine, you will laugh; in the presence of wild animals, you won't quiver. The stones of the field will sign a treaty with you, and you'll enjoy a truce with the ravenous beasts. You can rest knowing your tent is invincible; for when you visit your pastures, nothing will be missing. Your children and their children will be abundant, as the blades of grass in the fields. You will arrive hearty and undiminished at the grave after a long life, like a pile of grain harvested at its peak ripeness. We've all thought this through. It's true, and you should hear it. So hear it well, and know it completely.

**What was that all about? The first of Job's three wise friends, Eliphaz, is a man guided by strong convictions and a belief in the accumulated knowledge of his ancestors. Because he thinks Job is suffering due to his own unintended sins, Eliphaz dwells on God's responses to the wicked and the righteous, believing he will encourage Job to accept God's correction of his sins. Although his intentions are good, Eliphaz's intended encouragement instead upsets Job more. These powerful convictions are expressed in the wrong place and time.**

**Upset by Eliphaz's words, Job answered him...**

**Job:** Would that my anguish were weighed, laid on a scale together with the disaster I've suffered! For there is not enough sand in the seas to outweigh it! It's no wonder my untamed words are but incoherent stammering. The arrows of the Highest One have sunk deeply into me; my spirit drinks their poison. The terrors of God assemble like soldiers marching against me. Does a wild donkey bray in hunger in a field of fresh grass? Does an ox low with pangs over plenty of feed? If I were served a tasteless mush, how could I eat it without at least adding salt? Or is there even any sense of taste in the slime of a plant? I refuse to eat, and I gag at the thought of it. This vile food sickens me.

If only my one request were answered, if only God would grant me the fulfillment of my only hope: that God would be willing to crush me, to kill me, that God would release His hand and cut me off. At least then I would have a crumb of consolation, one source of joy in the midst of this relentless agony: I never denied the words of the Holy One in my pain. What strength do I have, that I should persist in this life? And what is my life's end, that I should forestall it? Is my strength like that of stones? Is my flesh like bronze? Can I even hope to help myself, or has any chance of help been driven away?

A despondent person deserves kindness from his friend, even though he strays from the fear of the Highest One. But you, my brothers, are unpredictable like an unexpected flood of the wadi that quickly rises and then falls, that contains dark, muddy swirls of thawing ice that swell in the melting snow, but whose flow is stopped in the summer heat and that vanish in their gullies under the heat of the sun. The path of their course winds along, goes out into the desert and disappears. You travelers have heard how the experienced caravans from Tema searched for water, how the travelers of Sheba expected to find it; but their confidence turned to frustration and shame; for when they arrived, they found no water, only disappointment. Now you, too, have come to nothing. You see my terror and are afraid for yourselves. Have I ever asked you to give me anything, or from your means to offer a bribe on my behalf? Have I ever asked you to rescue me from my enemies' hands, or to deliver me from the clutches of powerful adversaries?

In all seriousness, teach me, and I will be silent. Where I have erred? Help me understand. True, honest words are painful, but what does your chiding confirm? Was it your intent to correct me? Did you imagine that, desperate as I was, my words were nothing but wind? Yes, it seems you'd have no qualms about sending an orphan into slavery or selling out a friend. Now do me the favor of looking at me; look me in my face; I will not lie to your face. Turn back; don't let any more harm be done. Turn back to me now; my reputation and integrity are at stake. Is there any wickedness, any poisonous word on my tongue? Don't you think I can tell when I've tasted a ruinous lie?

Don't we humans struggle long and hard in our time on earth? Don't we live our lives as common laborers? As slaves longing for shade, as workers pining for wages, so I am destined to receive only months of meaninglessness, and nights of nothing but misery. When I lie down at the end of day, I wonder, "How soon till morning so I can arise?" But the night stretches on, and I toss and turn until sunrise. My putrid skin is covered with maggots and a dirty crust. It hardens and cracks and oozes again. My days whisk by swifter than the shuttle in a weaver's loom— back and forth, and back and forth— and then they come to their hopeless end.

My life, remember, is just a breath; in death no more good will reach my eye. Whoever sees me now, will not for long; you'll look for me, but I'll be gone. As clouds thin and finally vanish, so it is when people enter the land of the dead. Never will they come back up. Never will they return to their homes or will the place they lived recognize them anymore.

Like Eliphaz, I will not keep silent. In the agony of my spirit, I will speak; in the bitterness of my soul, I will complain. Am I the raging sea, or the monster of the deep, so threatening you must appoint a guard over me? When I think my couch will comfort

me or my bed will soften my complaint, You, Lord, intimidate me with dreams and terrorize me with visions. I'd rather be suffocated, even dead, than live in these aching bones of mine.

I hate my life. I have no desire to keep on living. Leave me alone, God, for I have only a short time left. What are these human beings, that You make so much of them— that You shower them with attention? You examine them morning by morning; You test them moment by moment. How long will You stare at me? I can't even clear my throat of spit without an audience. I have sinned. What have I done to You, You who watch after humanity? Why have You targeted me, a man whose life is just a breath? Am I really such a heavy load for You? So I've sinned inadvertently: can't You pardon me? Are my crimes such You can't forgive my sins? After all, I will lie in the dust, and it won't be long until You will look for me, but I'll be gone.

**What was that all about? When Job speaks about the raging sea and the monster of the deep, Job compares his treatment to God's defeat of two mythic enemies of creation: Yam and Tannin. Ancient Near Eastern legends say that before God created the world, the "formless void" that existed was called "the deep." When God separated the heavens from the earth, He divided the formless void with the horizon, leaving the waters of the earth below (the oceans) and the waters of the heavens above (the blue skies and clouds). Yam the sea god and Tannin the sea monster tried to interfere in this separation. God of course defeated them, imprisoning them in the sea with sandbars. Job's reference to this myth shows he believes God is treating him unfairly, punishing him as brutally as He did these subhuman, rebellious creatures. Perhaps he has inadvertently sinned in some way as Eliphaz suggested, but Job, unlike Yam and Tannin, has not been rebellious to God. So if this is punishment for sin, as Eliphaz said, why is it so incredibly cruel?**

**Now the second friend, Bildad chimed in...**

Then the second of Job's three friends, Bildad the Shuhite, addressed Job.

**Bildad:** How long will you say these things, your words whipping through air like a powerful wind? Does God corrupt justice, or does the Highest One corrupt the good? If your children sinned against Him, He merely administered the punishment due them for those sins. But if you search for God and make your appeal to the Highest One, if you are pure and righteous, I have no doubt He will arise for you and restore you to your righteous place. From your modest beginnings, the future will be bright before you.

Ask those who have come and gone! Explore what their fathers learned and taught them. For we are not of ages past, nor even of years gone by. We are ignorant creatures of yesterday, and our time on earth is only a shadow. But the ancients are not similarly bound, are they? Won't they speak to and instruct you? Won't they draw up words from deep within?

Can papyrus grow tall without a marsh? Can reeds flourish without water? Even if they are hardy and unbroken, without water they will dry up before any other plant. So it goes with any who forget God. The hope of the godless soon withers and dies. His confidence breaks, for he trusts in the tenuous threads of a spider's web. When he leans into his house of silken threads for support, it won't hold; though his



arms grab to steady him, it will break—he will fall and never get back up. Still the godless appears to be a hardy plant, thriving in full sun, sending his shoots across the garden. The roots twine and grip the stone heap and search for a home among the rocks. If he is pulled up, the place will disown him saying, “I have never seen you.” See, his sole joy consists of this: knowing that others will spring from the earth to take his place. Do you see it? God will not reject the innocent; He will not reject you or support agents of evil. He will fill your mouth with laughter; your lips will spill over into cries of delight. Those who hate you will don the garment of shame, and the home of the wicked will disappear.

**What is this about? Much like Eliphaz, Bildad believes people suffer as a result of their own sins. But his justification of that suffering is different. Bildad reasons that God is just; as God, He is justice personified. Because He is so perfectly just, God will not punish someone who is also just. Bildad’s logical but flawed conclusion is that Job must have sinned to deserve his current pain. Surprisingly, he manages to be even less effective than Eliphaz had been, alienating Job by reasoning that Job’s children must have sinned to deserve their deaths and implying that Job’s regular sacrifices on their behalf were not enough to save them.**

**So, Job responded to what Bildad said...**

**Job:** Sure, I know all of this is correct, but tell me this: how can a person set things straight with God? If one wanted to argue with Him, even in a thousand questions he would not be able to answer Him once. His wise heart is vast; His strength immeasurable. Who has ever challenged Him and remained safe and at peace? He uproots mountains, and they are unaware when He overturns them in His rage. He shakes the earth out of its place so that its foundation pillars shudder. He commands the sun to go down and not rise, and He sequesters the stars so they do not shine. He single-handedly stretched out the heavens overhead and walks on the back of the raging sea. He fashioned the stars into constellations we know by name— Bear, Orion, the Pleiades— and the lights of the southern sky. He does wonderful things, even confounding things, and performs an infinite number of miracles. Still, if He passes right by me, I don’t see Him; if He brushes past, I don’t notice Him. Ah, but if He were to steal like a thief in the market, who could stop Him? No one has authority over Him. Who could dare say to Him, “What are You doing?”

God does not restrain Himself in His anger. Even the minions of Rahab—that monster of the sea and purveyor of chaos— cower at His feet in subservience. So then how do I argue with Him? How can I find the right words to state my case to Him? After all, I am the innocent one here, and I still can’t find an answer. So I must continually appeal to the mercy of my judge. But even if I were to call Him and He were to answer, I still could not believe that He would listen to my complaint. For He flattens me with a tornado and multiplies my wounds for no reason. He won’t even give me time to catch my breath; instead He force-feeds me more bitterness. If it is an issue of power, there is no question. He is the mighty one; and if it is an issue of justice, who would ever appoint me? Even though I am right in all of this, my own mouth sentences me. Though I am blameless, my own lips cheat me. I am blameless, but I don’t know myself. I hate my life.

Well, then this is what I say: it's all the same. In the end, He kills off both the innocent and the depraved. If a flood of disaster rushes in and kills, He ridicules the anguish of its innocent victims. The earth has been given over and is under the dominion of some wicked hand. God conceals these things from its judges, covering their faces, blinding their eyes. If not He, then who is it?

As for me, my days are sprinting by like a runner. Seeing nothing good, they seek escape. They glide past in swift silence like reed boats on the river. Now a blur, they dive like an eagle toward its prey. If I tell myself, "I will forget all about my grievance against God, I will simply abandon my long face and cheer up," then I fear the suffering to come because I know there's no chance that You, Lord, will find me innocent. So if the verdict is already in, if I have already been found guilty, why should I bother to clear my name? Why struggle in vain? Though I wash my body in the pure melted snow and scrub my hands thoroughly with the strongest soap, You would toss me into a putrid pit, and when I emerged, even my own clothes would hate me.

The Lord . . . He is no man, like me, whom I could answer, no human being whom I could face in court. There is no judge to stand between us who can lay his hands on us both, who can remove God's rod from my back and stave off the terror of Him that haunts me. I long to speak and defend myself without fear of Him and His reprisals; but as things stand now and as I am within myself, that's not possible.

I hate my life, so I will unload the full weight of my grievance against God. Let me speak and reveal the bitterness I am harboring. I will say to God: Don't find me guilty; just explain the charges You have against me. Does it please You to oppress, and is this why You spurn me, the work of Your hands, and yet Your smile shines down upon the plots of the wicked? Do You have human eyes so that Your outlook is short? Do You see as through human frailties? Are Your days like mortals' limited days? Are Your years like mortals' limited years? Is this why You seek out my faults or You go in search of all my error? You know well that I am not guilty, yet nothing can free me from Your overwhelming power. Your hands formed and made me whole, yet now You turn to crush. Recall how You molded me like clay. Will You now render me back to dust? Didn't You pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? Didn't You clothe me in skin and flesh, weave my bone and sinew together? Your care has saved my spirit, and You have given me life and loyalty; yet I know what is in You, what Your heart has always hidden. If I sin, You see it, watching ever so closely, and You do not acquit me of my guilt. If I am wicked, woe is me; even if I am innocent, I cannot take a chance and lift my head because I'm gorged with disgrace. Gaze on my misery! If I do raise my head, then like a lion, You hunt me; like a night sky turned threatening, You unfold Your power against me so that others marvel; like a prosecutor, You drag in witnesses against me; You escalate Your fury against me, coming in waves to pound on me.

So then, why did You bother to drag me out of the womb at all? I should have just died before any eye could see me. It should have been as though I had never been: plucked from the womb, carried to the tomb. Aren't my days almost finished anyway? Stand back, leave me alone, and let me have a scrap of comfort before I go to the place from which I won't return, to the land of utter darkness and still shadows, the land of deep, unending night, of blackness and shadowy chaos where the only illumination is more darkness.

Finally, Job's third friend, **Zophar**, added his "wisdom" to the conversation...

**Zophar:**

Shall such a great volume of words remain unanswered and a long-winded man be so easily acquitted? Shall your empty prattle silence people, and when you mock, shall no one shame you? You've told us, "I have a clear understanding of things, and I am innocent in Your eyes, O Lord." Ah, but I wish God would speak, that He would address you openly, so I will argue for Him. I wish He would show you the secrets of great wisdom— for the two sides of sound wisdom are both found in His mercy and justice. Know this: God forgets some of your guilt.

Can you see to the unseen side of God, or explore the limits of the Highest One's knowledge? Higher than the heavens—what can you do to reach it? Deeper than the realm of the dead—what can you know of it? Its farthest reaches exceed the ends of the earth; its breadth spans far beyond the sea. If He passes by, as is His routine, and throws you into prison, and calls you to testify about what you've done, who can challenge Him? He recognizes worthless people without integrity, so do you really think when He sees wrongdoing He doesn't examine it? As they say, "The empty-headed will become clever in the day the colt of a wild donkey is born human!" If you will focus your intentions in His direction and open your hands and reach for Him, where you have guilt on your hands, if you will send it far away and not tolerate sin in your tents, then you will lift up a face clean of all stains; you will hold your head high, secure, and free of fear. You will forget all of these troubles of yours; they will pass beneath your memory like a drop of water that has just flowed away. Life will become brighter than high noon; darkness will give way to morning. Once again, you'll trust in the presence of hope; you'll scan the horizon and sleep safely. You will lie down, and no one will terrorize you, and many will long to be in your good graces. But the eyes of the wicked will grow dark as they lose hope; they'll find no escape, and in despair, they'll long only to breathe their last dying breath.

Throughout the book, Job has very little to cling to besides a hope for the end of his current suffering. Each of his three friends expounds on hope, drawing three similar but increasingly brutal conclusions. **Eliphaz** realizes Job is basically a righteous man, so he encourages Job to take hope in the person he already is; somehow his own righteousness will manage to save him. **Bildad** adds to Eliphaz's conclusion, claiming that wicked men cannot hope; they are left with only despair. **Zophar**, the most unabashedly honest of the three men, believes hope exists only for the righteous; and since Job is obviously a sinful man, he is hopeless until he changes. Fortunately, all three "wise" men are ultimately wrong. Hope is a product of trusting God and is not based on anyone's actions, wicked or otherwise.

So now, Job responded to the collective accusation of his guilt that his friends have made...

**Job**

(sarcastically to his friends): Surely, surely, my discerning friends, you are the ones! And when you pass away, the sum total of all wisdom will perish from the earth.

I have a mind as good as yours. Don't think I am so far beneath you! After all, who doesn't know all about these things? Who isn't acquainted with the pedestrian

platitudes you've trotted out? As for me—the one who called upon God and whom God answered— now, I am pitiful, laughable, a just and upright joke. Those who have it easy may easily scorn the unfortunate; they have their contempt already prepared for those whose feet slip. Ironically, there is peace inside the tents of the raiders, and those who upset God seem to live safe and secure; they carry their gods around in their hands.

However, call on the animals to teach you; the birds that sail through the air are not afraid to tell you the truth. Engage the earth in conversation; it's happy to share what it knows. Even the fish of the sea are wise enough to explain it to you. In fact, which part of creation isn't aware, which doesn't know the Eternal's hand has done this? His hand cradles the life of every creature on the face of the earth; His breath fills the nostrils of humans everywhere.

Listen! Aren't we made to be discriminating: our ears testing wisdom, our mouths tasting food? But you tell me, "With age comes wisdom, and a long life grants understanding." With God is the sum total of all wisdom and of all power; His is the greatest of plans and the deepest of comprehensions. So, then, what God tears down cannot be built back up; the man He shuts up cannot be released. If God withholds the rains and stops the streams from flowing, the earth suffers drought; if He unleashes too much, the lands are ravaged by flood. He is strong, and sound wisdom belongs to Him: whether one deceives or is deceived, he is under God's control. He leads the counselors off as captives, barefoot and stripped; He makes a mockery of judges.

He strips off the royal sashes of kings and ties them at the waist, making them slaves as well. He leads the priests away barefoot and defeats the long-incumbent men of power. He robs trusted advisors of speech; He steals discretion from elders. He heaps contempt on rulers, and loosens the bind of alliances among world powers. Aspects of His deep wisdom that were hidden away, He shows in plain sight; darkness is brought into the light. He builds the strength of nations, only to crush them— increases their population across the earth, only to scatter them again. He divests each nation's leaders of understanding, and causes them to wander aimlessly with nowhere to go, Until finally they grope in the dark, the light having departed, and He lets them stumble and stagger like drunks.

Look. I've seen it all with my eyes, heard and understood it with my ears. What you know, I know, too; don't think I am so far beneath you! Let our differences be clear; I am ready to speak to the Highest One, eagerly wanting to argue my case with God. But you! You smear me with lies as if to help, but as healers you are worthless. Would that you were totally silent. At least that would make you seem wise. Please, just listen while I reason this out; lean in to hear how my lips will plead. Will you try to defend God's cause by telling lies? Be deceitful on His behalf? Will you show partiality for Him? Argue on His behalf? How would you fare if He searched your soul? Do you think you might deceive Him as you would any other person? No. He would bring charges against you even if you secretly show partiality. Aren't you horrified at the weight of His majesty? Isn't the dread of Him enough to drop you where you stand? All your quoted proverbs turn to ash; your clever comebacks crumble like brittle towers of clay.

So keep your mouths shut around me, and let me speak to God. And whatever may come, let it come. Why should I lay my body at the mercy of the words of my own

mouth or risk my life with only my own hands to defend me? Look, He may well kill me, but I will hope in Him.

Still I will be ready to argue my case before His very face. In fact, this will become my salvation, for the godless wouldn't even dare to approach Him. So then here is my account. Listen carefully! Give me a chance to share my side of the story with you. My case is prepared, and I am confident I will be found righteous. And yet who will meet me in court to argue the other side? If I am out-argued, then I will stay mute until I die.

**(Now Job begins to lay out his case before God...)**

Lord, I ask only two concessions in this case; if You grant them, I will not hide from Your face. First, remove Your damaging hand from me; second don't intimidate me anymore with your terrifying presence. Then send me Your summons, and I will reply, or better yet, I will speak first and then You answer me. How many counts do You have against me? How many sins must I account for? Spell out the nature of Your indictment against my rebellious ways. Why do You hide Your face from me; why is my name now "nemesis" to You? Would You waste Your energy to terrify a windblown leaf, or chase down the dry chaff as it tumbles in the breeze? For I see bitter accusations against me written in Your own hand; You call me to account for the guilt of my youth. You fasten shackles at my ankles but still keep close watch on where I walk, marking the places where my feet may plant themselves. This is how a person wastes away to nothing, like something rotten, like moth-eaten clothing.

Humankind, born of woman, has a few brief years with much suffering. Like a short-lived bloom, he springs up only to wither; like the brief shade gained by a fast-moving cloud, he passes swiftly. Lord, is this why You turn Your gaze on such a creature: to bring me, a mere human being, alongside You for judgment? Who can take what is impure and defiled to fashion something pure and pristine? No one! We are, after all, so different in nature. Since a person's life is fixed, and You are the One who determines the number of his months, and You set a limit on the length of her life, and since they are incapable of exceeding Your decree, the least You can do is turn Your gaze away from him until they pass, so that he can enjoy his day like a hired worker.

You know, at least there is a kind of hope for a tree: if it gets cut down, it may yet sprout again out of the roots. And very likely then, its tender shoots will not die. Its roots may age deep under the ground, and the stump appear dead in the dry earth, but even then it needs only the merest whiff of water to bud again and put forth shoots like a newly planted sapling. But not so with humankind. The noblest of human beings dies and lies flat. Humans die, and where do they go? Just as water evaporates from the sea, and riverbeds go parched and dry, so humankind lies down and does not rise again. Until the day when the skies are done away with, humankind will neither awaken nor rouse from slumber.

O that You would merely hide me in the land of the dead and keep me in secret till Your wrath is gone, until a time You decide when You might think upon me. If one dies, can he live again? Through these days of toil and struggle, I will patiently wait until my situation changes. You will call out, and I will answer You then; and You will long for me, the work of Your hands, again. For then You would still count each of my steps but not focus on my faults. My sins would be sealed up as in a bag, and my crimes

You would carefully cover up. And yet while every crack in me is closely watched, the mountain will slide and erode as the avalanche steals its cliffs away. The water grinds at the surface of stones, and the floodwater steals the soil away. This is how You wreck the hope of humankind. You continually overwhelm him, and he dies; You alter his appearance and send him away. If his children rise to honor, he does not know of it; if they sink to humiliation, he is unaware of it. He knows only this: His body feels agony and his soul grieves.

**Basically- what Job has just said to his friends is that they need to mind their own business- he is very aware of all they are saying, but unless they are in his situation, they should not be pointing fingers at him and telling him what to do. God is the one who is control, God is the one in power. And even if God kills him- he will continue to trust in God.**

**But then, to God, Job lays out his case- if Job has done something that has brought on God's wrath- he deserves to know what he has done. Job will continue to wait and trust, but he does not understand why this suffering and grief is given to him. He wishes he could go to sleep like the trees do in winter or when they are cut down and wait for the time of new life instead of experiencing this terrible pain and suffering.**

**Now the friends each addressed Job again, beginning with **Eliphaz** who reiterated the points he made before...**

**Eliphaz:** Does a wise man reply with windy knowledge and fill up his belly with the hot east wind? Does a wise man reason with impotent chatter, with bankrupt words of no account? Indeed, Job, you have ignored your responsibility to revere God and depreciated your own thoughts toward God; for your faults inform your speech, and your language is tricky. Your own mouth condemns you, not I; your own lips volunteer as witnesses against you. Were you the firstborn among men? Were you introduced to the earth before the hills were conceived? Were you allowed to listen in on the deliberations in God's assembly? Do you imagine all knowledge to be confined to you and you only? What do you know that we don't know? Do you have an understanding that has somehow eluded us? We have gray hairs and elders among us weighed down with years, heavier than your father. Do you find God's many comforts too meager and His gentle speech to you too mild? What has stripped you of your reason, carried away your heart? Why do your eyes flash with anger—so much so that you unleash your spirit and spray out such speeches against God?

What is humankind, that people would be considered pure? And among those born of women, who could possibly be innocent? Look, if God refuses to trust even His holy attendants, if even the heavens above are impure in His eyes, then how much less regard must He show for humankind, who is base and corrupt, or for Adam's children who drink sin like water.

**(Genesis 6:1–4 tells the strange story of God's own heavenly messengers procreating with beautiful human women. Such a union was obviously forbidden, possibly because it endowed the children with eternal life, based on God's response to the situation—limiting the lifespan of humans to 120 years. As Job has revealed, these**

**heavenly messengers are with God all the time. They do His bidding. No one could possibly know His rules better than they do or have more motivation to follow them, yet they still chose to disobey God. Eliphaz's point is clear: no human could possibly claim to be above the temptation to sin when God's heavenly envoys are not.)**

I will tell it like it is, so listen. I'll recount what I have seen: The very things that knowledgeable men have declared and which they do not hide that they heard from their fathers to whom the land was granted long ago when no foreigners were among them. The wicked man endures misery his whole life long; and many years of sorrow are stored up for the ruthless. His ears are assailed by the sounds of terror; but when he is finally at peace, the destroyer seizes him. Unsure that he will ever escape darkness, he lives ever-conscious of the sword. He wanders aimlessly in search of food. "Where is it?" he asks. He knows all the while that the great day of darkness is imminent. He is addled by strain and anxiety, terrified; he will be overwhelmed as if by a king about to descend upon his enemy in war. For he raises his fist to God and acts arrogantly like a hero against the Highest One. He runs at Him, headlong, headstrong, and leads his charge behind the thick protection of a massive shield. Strong and healthy, he has nourished himself well and prospered until his face and his thighs are pleasantly fat. He lodges in evacuated towns in empty houses unfit for habitation, in buildings condemned to rubble and ruin. He will never be rich; his wealth will not last, nor will he have possessions enough for any to put down roots. He will not manage to escape from darkness, as it scorches like tender branches that wilt in the flame; he will blow away like the breath of his mouth. Don't let him fool himself; if he trusts in the emptiness of his vanity, emptiness will be his reward. Before his time is up, it will all be finished and the branches of his trees will never leaf out. He will be like the vine that drops its immature grapes, the olive tree that sheds its own blossoms. O the gathering of the godless is unfruitful, and fire consumes the tents of those who pervert justice by giving bribes. Their intercourse yields only the conception of misconduct, the birth of sinfulness, and their wombs carry only lies to term.

**Job:**

All the things from you sound the same. You are all terrible as comforters! Have we reached the end of your windy words, or are you sick with something that compels you to argue with me? If we were to trade places, I could rattle on as you do. I could compose eloquent speeches as you do and shake my head smugly at you and your problems. But I believe I would use my words to encourage you; my lips would move only to offer you relief. And yet, I am not you, you are not me, and my words are of no real use: When I speak, my pain is not relieved; if I remain silent, it does not go away. God has drained me utterly; He has made those near to me desolate—killed my family and my servants. You have shriveled me up; my withered form stands as a witness against me; my body, haggard and thin, testifies to my face. In anger He hunts me down and tears at me; in rancor His teeth grind on my flesh; His eyes are locked on me as a foe, eager to destroy still more of me. My foes taunt me, their mouths gape in derision, they slap my cheek in disgust, and they conspire against me.

God has forsaken me to young thugs and flung me into the hands of evildoers who lie in wait for me. I was living a good life—a quiet, peaceful life— when He began to beat on me; He throttled my neck, tore me apart, and then propped me up at the far end of the field, making me a target. His archers have now gathered around me. In cold blood He

splits my belly open and spills my bile on the earth. He charged like a soldier storming a stronghold until my walls were breached, broken down, one after another.

Well, I have sewed the sackcloth to my very skin and buried my mighty forehead in the dirt. My face, red and hot, boils over in tears; the shadow of darkness lies heavy on my eyelids, no matter that my hands are free of violence, and my prayer is pure.

O earth, do not conceal my blood! And when they seek to silence my cry, refuse a place for its burial. Look! Even at this very moment, my witness is there, in heaven; my advocate is seated on high. My only friends scoff at me; they persist in mocking me; even now my eyes well up in tears to God, appealing to God as a mere man, as a human being might for the sake of his friend. Only a few years left now, and I will go down the path from which I cannot return.

My spirit has collapsed; my days have been blotted out; the grave is prepared for me. There are mockers all around me; my eyes are fixed on their unwarranted opposition of me. Show me a sign! Vouch for me, God! Who is there to give me his hand, guaranteeing his pledge? I think no one is there because You have closed up their minds, made them unable to see or understand; so You will honor none of them. You have heard, "Whoever denounces his friends for land will watch his children go blind."

But God has turned me into a swear word for everyone; I have become a symbol of human darkness; I am the face on whom one spits. All my afflictions cloud my vision; the members of my body are wasting away; I am a mere shadow of what it once was. Those of moral fiber are appalled at this; innocent men grow indignant at the wicked. Even still, the righteous embrace their way of life; those with clean hands go from strong to stronger. By contrast, I look to you, my friends, and I say, "Come ahead, all of you; try your words once more." I still won't expect to find a wise man among you.

Even now my days have passed me by; my plans lie broken at my feet; the secret wishes of my heart grow cold. And yet my friends say, this loss of hope is for good, turning my dark night into what appears to them as day. In the pitch darkness, these broken plans and secret wishes speak to me. They say, "There is light nearby." If I hope only to live in the land of the dead, if I prepare for myself a bed in the darkness, if I speak to my burial pit, calling it "Father," and to the worms in the earth, calling them "Mother" and "Sister," then where will I find my hope? And who will see it? Will hope go with me to the place of death? Will hope accompany me into the ground?

**Then Bildad spoke again, encouraging Job to righteousness...**

**Bildad:**

How long will you keep up the hunt for words? Show some sense, and then we can actually converse. Why is it we are like cattle to you, dumb animals in your eyes? You speak of how God "tears at you," you! You tear at yourself in your rage. Oh, how self-centered you are! Ought the earth be emptied of its inhabitants for your sake? Ought the rocks roll away for your convenience? Remember, the flame of the wicked is extinguished. His fire no longer lends light to anything. His tent-lamp goes dark; his bedside lamp flickers and dies. His long strides falter, as his own plans take him



down. His then-weakened feet lead him to a net and wander into its waiting mesh. A snare clamps around his heel; he feels it dig into him. This trap was set for him beforehand: a snare is hidden on the ground; a net is overhead along the path. Terrors press in on every side and badger his every step. His deepest fears stalk him as he staggers, craving him, and awaiting his imminent collapse. Bit by bit, disease eats at his skin; bit by bit, the firstborn of death gnashes at his limbs. He is torn violently from the safety of his tent and forced to march before the king of terrors. Nothing of his remains in his tent and burning sulfur has been scattered on it so no one will dwell there again. Death comes from both directions: from below, his roots dry out; from above, his branches wither. On the earth, he disappears from memory; on the outside, no one recalls his name. He is pushed out of the light into darkness and chased from the inhabited world altogether. He has no children, no descendants among his people; no one survives him or escapes from his homeland. His fate is unanimously viewed: with dismay in the West, with horror in the East. Surely this is the way it goes with all evil people; surely this is the lot in life for those who do not know God.

**Bildad sees the realm of death not just as a place of rest and waiting, but as a growing society ruled by a king. Sheol always has room for more citizens and always wants more. Like an infant, this place—this firstborn of death—has a voracious appetite for the wicked. And the infant’s father, the king of terrors, has many ways to provide for his child. His terrors are not nightmares or phobias or any other psychological device. Instead, he rules over disaster, disease, and famine—anything that brings death. Through his vibrant imagery, Bildad explains that death is the ultimate fate of the wicked; he implies that Job cannot be evil because the terrors he has faced have not yet killed him.**

**Now Job was truly frustrated, and he answered his friends with a heartfelt plea and confidence in God’s redemptive care...**

**Job:** O how long! How long will you torture me and pound me with your chatter? What is it now? Eight times? Nine times? No, surely it’s ten times you have insulted me. Ten times you’ve shamelessly acted to harm me. Even if I have erred, my faults lie with me alone. However, if you must exalt yourselves at my expense, if you must proffer my own disgrace as evidence against me, Then you ought at least to know that I have been wronged by God. Yes, His net is closed about me. Look! I cry out, “Violence!” but no response comes. I shout for help, but justice eludes me. He is a roadblock. He will not let me pass; He has covered my roads in darkness. He has stripped me of my honor, torn the crown off my head. He comes at me from all sides, but I attempt to leave; He rips out my hope as if it were a tree in dry ground. His anger burns white-hot against me, and He considers me His enemy. His militia arrives to raise a siege ramp against me and to surround my dwelling. He has driven my relatives far from me; I am cut off from my friends. My entire family has failed me; my best friends have forgotten me. Everyone in my house, including my maidservants, treats me like an outsider; I am a stranger to them now. When I send for my servant, he does not come. I even plead with him with my own voice. My breath is strange; even my wife avoids me; I’m loathsome to my relatives; they can’t stand to be around me. Even young children taunt me, and

when I seek to rise, they mock me. My closest friends can no longer bear me, and anyone I have ever loved has turned against me. I am reduced to skin and bones; I have barely escaped by the skin of my teeth. Show me your pity, my friends, show me your pity! For truly, I have been struck by the hand of God. Why do you pursue me as God has done? Is my emaciated body not satisfying enough for you? What I would give to have my words taken down, to have them inscribed for posterity on a scroll. No! More than that! To have them chiseled with iron filled with lead— carved in stone for all eternity.

Besides, I know my Redeemer lives, and in the end He will rise and take His stand on the earth. And though my skin has been stripped off, still, in my flesh, I will see God. I, myself, will see Him: not some stranger, but actually me, with these eyes. Toward this end, my deepest longings pine away within my chest.

If you ask, “How will we pursue him since the root cause of his suffering lies in him?” You ought to fear the sword yourselves; for the sword bears fury’s punishment in order that you might realize there is, in fact, a judgment.

**And now Job’s third friend, Zophar also spoke again, reiterating his concern for Job.**

**Zophar:** My anguished thoughts force me to respond because I feel an urgency within myself. I caught wind of your words that dishonor me, but I am prompted to answer based on my own spirit and understanding. Don’t you know how it has always been? Since humankind was first put here on the earth, the celebrations of the wicked have been brief, and the joy of the profane lasts only a moment. Even if he were tall enough to reach into the heavens and his head were to reach to the clouds, he would still perish forever, like his own excrement; those who once looked upon him would wonder, “Where has he gone?” Like a dream, he flies off where no one can find him; he is chased away only to vanish into the air like a vision of the night. The eyes that saw him before see him no more; his home doesn’t ever welcome him again. His children beg at the door of the poor; his hands render his wealth back to them. The vigor of youth had a home, a residence in his bones, but it lies down in the dust with him. Though his wrongdoing is sweet in his mouth, though he hides it under his tongue, though he holds it close and will not let it go (but must keep it in his mouth), his food will be transformed within him into the bitter venom of the asp. The wealth he has swallowed will be poison. He will vomit it up—God will cast it out. It is as they say, “He sucks the venom of asps and is slain by the tongue of the viper.” Never again will he gaze at the brook’s edge or see streams that flow with milk and honey—the food for which he worked he vomits up or cannot swallow, and the gains of his trading, he can never enjoy. After all, he’s an oppressor; he’s crushed and forsaken the poor; he made his home in a house he stole from another, a house he did not build himself. Because he’s never known inner peace, he has seized everything he’s ever craved. Because he consumed all he could see, nothing is left; his prosperity cannot last. When he is fat with satisfaction, the belt of distress will tighten around him and the hands of the downtrodden will rise up against him. When he has filled up his belly, God will visit him with His ferocious anger; it will rain down on him while he is eating. Let him attempt to escape the iron weapon. Instead, a bow of bronze will send death to tear into him. When the arrow is drawn it comes out of his back, and the shining arrowhead comes

out of his organ, bringing terror upon him. A great darkness waits for and stalks everything he values. A mysterious fire—unstoked yet burning hot—will consume him and devour everything and everyone left behind in his tent. The skies will tell on him, exposing his wrongdoing; the earth will rebel against him. All that he labored to build will be carried off, washed away in the day of God's furious anger. This is how it will be for the wicked of humanity before God; this is the inheritance God bequeaths them.

**And again, Job answered Zophar...**

**Job:** Listen carefully to what I'm about to say, and let your listening be the consolation you give me. Suffer me to speak to you, and after I've said what I need to say, you may commence mocking. Is my complaint addressed to humanity, or has it ever been? Why shouldn't I, by this point, be impatient with all of this? Stay with me and be stunned at what has happened to such a righteous person; cover your gaping mouth with your hand. When I think back upon everything that has gone before, I'm terrified; my body is overtaken with trembling. Why do the wicked live on an ever-upward path to long life and riches? Their children become well-established in front of them; their offspring are guaranteed to grow up before their very eyes. Their houses are immune to approaching terrors; the rod of God is not on their backs punishing them. Their bulls are consistent breeders; their cows deliver healthy calves without miscarrying. They produce flocks of children and send them all out into the world; their young ones dance around free of care. They still participate in celebration, raising their voices to the song of the tambourine and the harp; delighting in the sound of the flute. They pass their time in the lap of abundance, and they are even permitted to pass quickly to the land of the dead, instead of lingering with chronic pain. They tell God, "Leave us be. We have no interest in You or Your ways. Who is the Highest One anyway, and why should we serve Him? What can we possibly gain by asking favors of Him? Isn't He generous enough already?" Look, don't you see? The wicked do not control their own wealth, God does; I am a long way from understanding the plan for the wicked.

Bildad claims the flame of the wicked is blown out. But how often is their lamp extinguished? How often does disaster strike them or does God give them pain because of His anger at what they've done? How often are they as straw in the wind or the chaff separated from the grain by fierce winds? It is said, "God stores away a man's misdeeds and delivers them to his children." Let Him repay the man Himself, so the man can know it. Let the wicked see his ruin with his own eyes as he drinks down the wrath of the Highest One. After all, once he's dead and gone and his time is up, what will he care for his household and family?

Now who dares impart knowledge to God since He stands as judge over the most powerful? One person dies when he is fit and strong, completely secure and totally at peace; his body is vigorous and well fed; his bones are strong and moist. Another person dies with a bitter soul, having never even tasted goodness. But they lie down together in the same dust, covered by the same blanket of worms.

I know how your minds work, my friends, and how you plan to wrong me—your thoughts of retribution. You will counter, “Show me! Where is the palatial estate? Where are the vaulted tents of the wicked?” But I say, have you ever consulted with those who travel this world? They can tell you the complexions of many lands. But you’ve never permitted their witness in your courts of opinion, have you? Well, if you had, you’d have heard that when disaster strikes, the wicked are spared; on the day of fury, they are escorted safely through. Who challenges them openly regarding their actions, and who repays them on account of all they’ve done? When death finally comes and they are laid in their graves, guards stand watch over their tombs, fending off grave robbers. Laid to rest beside the stream, clods of earth cover them kindly; while countless souls have gone before, all of humanity follows after. So, my friends, how can you continue trying to comfort me with these empty consolations? So far, your answers have been only thinly veiled lies!

**These friends were persistent- so they each addressed Job a third time, beginning with Eliphaz who had some suggestions for Job...**

**Eliphaz:**

Can a strong person be of any use to God? How about one who is wise? Can he help himself? Is the Highest One made happy if you are righteous? Does He profit from your perfect ways? Do you really think He takes you to task because you revere Him too much? Is this why He brings allegations against you? Is it not possible that you are, in fact, great with wickedness and endless in your wrongdoing?

When your relatives came to you needing money, for no good reason you took their clothes for collateral and left them naked. You have never given so much as a cup of water to the thirsty or a crumb to the hungry. You must think only the powerful and privileged possess the land and can live in it any way they wish. You have sent away widows who were wanting, and you have obliterated the only support of orphans. This is why you are surrounded by snares, why you are overcome with dreadful fears, why you’re in the dark, without a glimmer to help you see, sunk beneath the rush of flooding water.

Is not God up there at the crown of the highest arc of heaven? And the highest stars! See how lofty they are! But you—you say, “What does God know? Can He send His judgments through such thick darkness? Those clouds are just a veil for Him so He does not have to look upon us while He saunters, oblivious, through the chambers of the sky.” Job, are you now guardian of the ancient road where the wicked have traveled? The wicked, who are captured and taken off before their time, their foundations washed out by a flooded river, they are the ones who tell God, “Leave us be.” They say, “What can the Highest One do to us?” How are they repaid for their insolence? You say, “He stuffs their homes with goodness,” then you shake your head and mutter, “Far be it from me to understand the thoughts and plans of the wicked.” The righteous would look upon their ruin and laugh for delight; the innocent would taunt by saying, “Sure enough, our enemies have gone to their annihilation, and what they’ve left behind feeds a hungry fire.”

Now be of use to God; be at peace with Him, and goodness will return to your life. Receive instruction directly from His lips and make His words a part of you. If you return to the Highest One, you will be restored; if you banish the evil from your tents, and consider your gold as common as earth's dust and Ophir's refined gold as plentiful as stones in rock-lined streams, then your true treasure will be the Highest One—worth more than gold and silver beyond measure. For then, at last, you will find pleasure in the Highest One, and you will finally be able to show Him your face. When you approach Him, He will listen; you will make good on your promises to Him. You will pronounce something to be, and He will make it so; light will break out across all of your paths. God will humble, but you say, "Raise them up." He will save the downcast. He will even consent to deliver those who are not innocent through the purity of your then-washed-clean hands.

### **The pattern continued, and Job responded by confiding in his friends...**

**Job:** So once again you are telling me my complaint amounts to rebellion, that the heavy hand I feel upon me is smothering my groans? Would that I knew where to find Him. I would appear before Him. I would lay my case out before Him; I would fill up my mouth with arguments. And then I would finally learn how He would answer me, and I would understand what He tells me. Would He oppose me merely with His great power? Surely not! Surely He would show me the respect of listening to my argument. There, in that courtroom, a moral man might hope to reason with Him, and I would escape my Judge forever.

Alas, wherever I go, ahead or behind, He is not there; I am unable to find Him. When He works on either side of me, I still cannot see Him. I catch no glimpse of Him. But He knows the course I have traveled. And I believe that were He to prove me, I would come out purer than gold from the fire. My foot has been securely set in His tracks; I have kept to His course of life without swerving; I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have valued everything He says more than all else. He alone is one True God; who can alter Him? Whatever He desires within Himself, He does. For He will carry out exactly what He has planned for me, and in the future there are more plans to come. Therefore, I am deeply troubled before Him; when I ponder it at any length, I am terrified of Him. Yes, God has melted my courage, and the Highest One has overwhelmed me with His terror. He could have turned me aside when the darkness came, but He did not cut me off. Nor does He hide my face from the gloom that has now overtaken me.

Why are there not judgment times for the wicked before the Highest One? Why do those who know Him not see His judgment days? After all it's the wicked who seize land that belongs to others, capture flocks and let them graze for themselves, drive off orphans' donkeys, take as collateral widows' oxen, drive the needy off the road, and force the poor into hiding together. Look at how the poor are forced to live! Like wild donkeys in the desert, they spend all their energy scrounging for food, hoping the desert provides enough to feed their children. They forage for scraps out in the open and glean what they can from the already-harvested vineyards of the wicked. They settle

down night after night, naked since pawning their cloaks, and have nothing to protect them from the cold. The hard mountain rains soak them as they press themselves against rocks in the absence of real shelter; the fatherless child is torn away from the breast; the suckling babe is seized as collateral from the poor. They force the poor to wander naked, no clothing to be had, carrying the very bundles of grain they long to eat. They are stationed among the terraces pressing oil from the olive that calls to their hunger; they trample in winepresses, extracting the juice for which they thirst. At the outskirts of the city, the oppressed groan, wounded souls crying for help, but God fails to charge the guilty who have brought them such pain.

They were among those who rebel against the light. They don't want to know what makes it shine, nor do they live their lives in its paths. It is not the poor and the victim who rebel. It is the murderer who rises before first light and kills the poor and the needy. And in the dark of night, he becomes the thief. And the eye of the adulterer waits for the onset of dusk; he thinks, "No one will see me," because he disguises his face. And others break into homes in the dark. However, by day they shut themselves up inside because they do not know the light. For all of these criminals, the morning arrives arm in arm with the threat of being found out. It is as the shadow of death to them, for they are at ease with the terrors of the night.

**Isn't this the frustration people of faith have had throughout the generations- that though God has specific expectations for humankind about the way we care for the downtrodden, for the way we live a moral and upright life- it seems like those who snub their nose at God and his law never face judgment for it. They prosper, while the righteous man (Job) suffers and God does not reveal why. Job is torn between his current circumstances and confusion about them, and his confidence and faith that God's judgement will fall on the wicked someday.**

The wicked may sit lightly on the surface of the waters, but their bit of land, the parcel on which they live, will be accursed; so that they don't even turn down the road to their vineyards because they don't produce. Just as summer's heat and drought melt and carry off the winter snow, the land of the dead will digest and will carry away sinners. The very wombs whence they came will forget them; the worms feast on them until no one will remember they existed; the skeletons of wickedness will dry up and snap like twigs. Because they deliberately prey on women with no children to protect them and don't care to lend a hand to widows! I wait for God, by His power, to drag off the high and mighty with the ropes of a hunter, because though they may rise to the top, they have no assurance of true life. God may provide for them, and they may feel secure, but His eyes are always on their ways. They may make their mark—to be sure—in a brief moment of glory, but then just as quickly the wicked are gone, like the rest of humanity, like heads of grain cut off and dried up. Now, if this is not the truth, then call me a liar and count all this talk for nothing.

**To this, Bildad argued that no one is righteous before the Almighty God...**

**Bildad:** God rules over all things; dread is His domain, God—who makes peace and order on His own heights. As for His armies, can they even be counted? As for His light, is anyone not illuminated? Then tell me how can a person be right with God? How can someone born

of a woman in blood be pure? If even the moon is not bright enough and the light of the stars is not pure in His estimation, how much less so a human, who is a mere worm- the offspring of humanity, who is a maggot!

**So Job explains himself, first sarcastically to his friends...**

**Job:** What a great help you are to the powerless! How you have held up the arm that is feeble and weak! What sage counsel you have given to me, the unwise! And what immeasurable insight you have put on display for us! Whom did you say these words to? Where did you get such profound inspiration?

The departed quiver below, down deep beneath the seas, and all that is within them, the land of the dead is exposed before God, and the place where destruction lies is uncovered in His presence. He stretches out the northern sky over vast reaches of emptiness; He hangs the earth itself on nothing. He binds up the waters into His clouds, but the cloud does not burst from the strain. He conceals the sight of His throne and spreads His clouds over it to hide it from view. He has encircled the waters with a horizon-boundary: the line between day and night, light and darkness. The very pillars that hold up the sky quake and are astounded by His reprisals. By His power, He stilled the sea, quelling the chaos; by His wisdom, He pierced Rahab, evil of the sea; by His breath, the heavens are made beautifully clear; by His hand that ancient serpent—even as it attempted escape—is pierced through. And all of this, all of these are the mere edges of His capabilities. We are privy to only a whisper of His power. Who then dares to claim understanding of His thunderous might?

By God—who lives and has deprived me of justice, the Highest One who has also embittered my soul—I make this proclamation: that, while there is life in me, while the breath of that selfsame God is in my nostrils, my lips will not let lies escape them, and my tongue will not form deceit. So I will never concede that you three are right. Until the day I die, I will not abandon my integrity just to appease you. On the contrary, I'll assert my innocence and never let it go; my heart will not mock my past or my future. May my enemy be counted as the wicked and my adversary as the unjust. For what hope does he who is sullied and impure have once God lops him off from life and requires his soul? Will God listen to his cry when he is overtaken by distress? Will he have made the Highest One his pleasure after the fact? Will he have marked the seasons with his calls to God once it is too late? Let me show you what I have learned of God's power. I assure you I will not cover over the true nature of the Highest One's ways. Look, you have all seen it—seen the same things I have seen here. Why then all this vain nonsense? Indeed, Zophar, listen closely, for what the wicked of humanity will inherit from God. This is the heritage the Highest One bequeaths to those who oppress: if the children of the wicked multiply, they meet their end at the blade of the sword. And even if they are fat with surplus, the descendants of the wicked will be starved for bread. Those who survive will fall to disease and be buried; many of their widows will not mourn their deaths. Though he pile up money as if it were common dirt and clothing in heaps like mounds of clay, what he may prepare, the righteous will wear; the silver he sets aside, the innocent will divide. He builds his house doomed to

impermanence— like the moth’s cocoon, like the field watchman’s lean-to that is dismantled after the harvest. He lies down to sleep a wealthy man, but never again, for when he opens his eyes to morning, all is gone. Terrors overtake him as if they were floodwaters; the tempest snatches him away in the dead of night. Indeed, the sultry east wind lifts him up and away. He is gone, swept off the place he knew as his own. It will have blown against him pitilessly, and he tries to flee from its fast-closing hand. As a final humiliation, it claps its hands against him as a man would—sneering, hissing at him as he leaves.

**Job does not dispute what his friends are saying about the wicked inclinations of man, or God’s righteousness and power. He trusts God to bring judgement on the wicked, as they deserve. But he does not count himself among the wicked, and believes it dishonors his integrity before the righteous and holy God to admit to wickedness he does not see in himself. To his friends, who think they are so wise, Job now ponders on the hidden and illusive nature of wisdom. He begins by describing the search for wisdom as mining for silver and gold...**

There is a place where silver is mined, a place where gold is refined. There iron is dug from the earth, and copper is smelted from ore. Humans put an end to darkness, and search in every last corner for the ore that is in gloom and darkness. In the earth they cut a shaft in a place forgotten, far from the beaten path; they descend on ropes, swinging dangerously back and forth. The ground above yields food; the earth below is turned as if fire has destroyed it where earth gives up sapphires from her rocks and bits of gold from her dirt. No bird of prey knows this way, this secret path down below; no falcon’s eye has ever peered into it. No proud beast has ever reached this place; no lordly lion has marched over it. The miner breaks apart flinty stone, uprooting the ancient mountains. He carves tunnels through the rock, revealing precious treasures. He dams up the underground streams until they cease seeping, and he brings out into the light what was hidden there in the darkness.

But where is wisdom found, and where does understanding dwell? No human perceives wisdom’s true value, nor has she been found in the land of the living. The deep says, “She is not to be seen within me.” “Nor within me,” says the voice of the raging sea. No gold can be given in trade for wisdom, nor a sum of silver weighed out as her price. She cannot be bought with all the gold of Ophir, neither with onyx nor sapphire. The shimmer of gold and brightness of glass cannot compare, and no refined gold jewelry is worth her in trade. Perish the mention of coral and crystal; even more than pearls is the value of wisdom. Ethiopian topaz—unequal as well; even gold, unalloyed, is too paltry indeed. Then from where does wisdom come? Where does understanding dwell? She is hidden away from every eye, even from birds looking down from the sky. Destruction and Death have both confessed, “Rumors are all we know about her.”

Only God understands wisdom’s path and way; her place is known to Him alone. For He gazes out to the edge of the earth, sees all that falls beneath the sky overhead. He lent the wind its weight and force and measured out the waters’ spread. When He set a limit on the rain that falls and made the thunderbolt a road to race, then He saw wisdom and made her known, He settled her and searched out for her a place. And to humankind, He said, “Now, the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.”



**Remember that the book of Job began like a court proceeding. Job now takes up this format, and begins to lay out his deposition and defense before God...**

Ah, that I were as I once was, months ago during the time when God oversaw me, when His lamp shone above my head, and by His light, I walked through the darkness. Ah, to be in the ripest time of life once more— when the intimacies of friendship with God enfolded my tent, when the Highest One was with me and my children encircled me, when my steps were bathed in milk and the rock poured out rivers of olive oil, showering my body, when I went up to the gate of the city, when I took my seat in the town square where the elders meet. There the young saw me and made room for me, in deference to elders. The old rose and stood out of respect. The leaders stopped talking with their hands over their mouths. The voices of nobles fell to a hush; their tongues stuck to the roofs of their mouths. Every ear that heard me blessed me, and every eye that saw me testified to my greatness. After all, (contrary to what Eliphaz accused earlier) I rescued the poor when they cried out for help and assisted the orphans when they had no one else. The dying spoke their blessings over me, and the widows sang their joyful songs honoring what I did. I adorned myself in righteousness, and it covered me; my justice fit me like a cloak and turban—conveying both my dignity and my authority. I was the eyes for the blind, the feet for the lame, a father for the needy, and I sought for the cause of whom I did not know. I broke out the fangs of the wicked and wrested prey from their jaws.

Then I said, “I will pass from this earth in the comfort of my nest. My days will be more numerous than a beach’s grains of sand. My roots will grow deep, spreading out to the water’s edge, and in the night, the dew will come to rest on my branches. Respect will be accorded me every day, my skill with the bow always new in my hand.” People used to listen to me, the sense of expectation visible on their faces; they waited in silence for my advice. And when I finished, they did not hurry to speak again. They waited while my words dropped like dew upon them. Indeed, they waited for me as one waits for a good rain, and they opened their mouths as if to catch spring showers on their tongues. I smiled upon them when their confidence flagged, and they took comfort in my beaming face. I led them in their way. I sat as their leader. I lived like a king among his troops. I was as a happy man spreading comfort among the mourners.

But now they mock me, these young men whose fathers I hold in such contempt. I wouldn’t trust them with my herds as I do my dogs. What good does their strength do me? Their potency has wilted. Gaunt from starvation, haggard from hunger that drives them to gnaw the ground in the night, a ground all wasted and hollowed-out, they are left with the desperate foods of the famished— plucking mallow from the bushes by the salt marshes, and making the ashy broom tree root their staple. The people from the town chase each one out of his neighborhood; they howl at all of them as if they were common thieves, and push them out to live in the deep valleys of the wadis— those desert streams that come and go- so these outcasts seek shelter in the overhangs and crumbling caves that line the banks of no-man’s-land. Braying like donkeys from the bushes, huddled together in the prickly undergrowth are fools and sons of no-names, driven by lashes out from the bosom of the land. And now they sing of me in taunt and parody and make my name a byword among them. They abhor me, keep their distance, and feel free to spit in my face. Because God has unstrung His bowstring and stricken me with suffering, they are no longer restrained toward me. To

my right, the horde<sup>l</sup> arises. They seek to knock me off my feet, piling their disastrous ways against me. They lay waste to my path and benefit from my destruction, and no one is there to stop them. As through a wall breached, they advance easily. Their thunderstorm of wheels rolled across my ruins. Alas! A storm of terrors has turned toward me and is upon me; my dignity is blown away as by the wind; my prosperity vanishes like a wispy cloud.

And now my own soul is drawn out, poured over me. The days of misery have taken hold of me; I am firmly in their grasp. By night, my pain is at work, boring holes in my bones; it gnaws at me and never lies down to rest. With great force, God wraps around me like my clothing. He binds tightly about my neck as if He were the collar of my tunic.<sup>l</sup> He has pushed me off into the mud, and I am reduced from man to dust and ashes. I call out to You, God, but You refuse to answer me. When I arise, You merely examine me. You have changed. Now You are cruel to me. You employ Your strength to attack me. You pull me up into the wind and make me ride upon it until I am fractured and dissipated in the storm. I know where this ends. You will send me off to death and usher me to that meetinghouse where all the living one day go.

And yet does not a person trapped in ruins stretch out his hand, and in this disaster does he not cry out for help? Did I not grieve for the hard days of another or weep for the pains of the poor? And yet when I longed for the good, evil came; when I awaited the light, thick darkness arrived instead. I am boiling on the inside, and it will not quit; yet the days of misery still come for me. I drift in darkness, the sun absent; I arise in the assembly and call out for help. But who will come now that I am roaming the wilderness? I am a brother to jackals, a friend of ostriches. Despite my earnest cries, my skin burns until it is black and flakes off, and my bones burn with fever. And so my harp is tuned to the key of mourning, and my flute is pitched to the sound of weeping.

I have made a sacred pledge with my eyes. How then could I stare at a young woman with desire? And what share has God set aside for us from above? What is the heritage we can expect from the lofty God, the Highest One? Has it not been made clear these many years? Is there not supposed to be punishment poured out on the wicked and disaster on those wrongdoers? Does God not see the paths of my choosing; does He not count every single step I take? If I have walked alongside lies or if my feet have rushed toward deception, then let God weigh me on a truly balanced set of scales. He will know and see my integrity. If my steps have veered off God's prescribed path or if my heart has followed any of the evil my eyes have seen or if my hands are soiled, then let me sow, but then let another one eat the produce! Let my sprouts be pulled up by their roots! If my heart has been seduced by another woman or if I have waited by a friend's door for a liaison with his wife, then let my wife be taken by another, to grind his grain or do whatever he pleases, and let other men kneel down over her because adultery is such a lewd, scandalous act, an offense punishable by the court, for it is a fire that burns until the destruction is complete.

Had I done it, it would have undone all that I had gained. If I have refused justice to my servants—either male or female—when they have had cause for dispute with me, then what ought I do when God stands to judge me? How will I answer when He calls me to account for my actions? Did not God, who made me in my mother's womb, make my servants as well? Is He not the same One who made us each in our own mother's womb? If I have stood between the poor and the object of their desire, if I

have caused a widow to lose her love of life, if I have eaten my food alone and not shared it with the hungry orphan (Indeed, from as far back as I can remember, I have cared for them all— from my youth, been a father to the orphan; from my own birth, cared for the widow), if I have idly watched anyone die from exposure simply due to a lack of clothing or seen the poor without any kind of covering, if ever people in such conditions did not physically bless and thank me for warming them up with the fleeces of my own sheep, if I ever used my civic strength to condemn the fatherless simply because I knew I had allies in the courts; then let my arm be pulled from its socket! Let my forearm be snapped off at the elbow for raising it against the orphan! See, I have always dreaded the kind of disaster wrought by God; I was never able to withstand His majesty.

If I have put my confidence in my stash of gold, if I have trusted in a metal so well-refined, if I have exulted in my immense wealth (for I had accumulated so much), if I saw the sun in its radiant glory or the moon sliding across the sky in its splendor, if such sights secretly seduced my heart and made my hand throw kisses to the false gods of sun and moon, then these things, too, would have been punishable offenses because they would have shown me untrue to the God above.

Have I gloated at my enemy's downfall or been excited when he encountered evil? No. I have not permitted my mouth to sin by uttering a curse against his very life. Have my guests ever left my dwelling saying, "Anyone still hungry? Who didn't get enough to eat?" Have I ever left the foreigner to sleep outside? No. My door was always open to the traveler. If I have covered my sin as people do or attempted to hide my wrongdoing in the recesses of my heart (because of my fear of the opinions of the crowd or my fright at the disdain of my family) and kept silent hiding indoors away from all possible discovery of flaws; (if only someone were listening!)

Now, here to these oaths, these curses, I make my signature! Let the Highest One answer me! Let my adversary put his case in writing! If He does, I would place it on my shoulder for all to see; I would put it on my head and wear it like a crown. I would offer Him an account of the steps I've taken along my life's path and approach Him directly like a prince. If my land cries out against me, if my furrows gather together to weep over my mistreatment of them, if I have eaten the fruit of the land without payment to those who tend it or exasperated the lives of its tenants, the farmers, in pursuit of greater harvest, or in poor management of them; then let thistles grow instead of wheat and stinkweed instead of barley.

**This concludes the words of Job. In this speech, Job is actually recording his deposition; he is calling God to come answer the charges he is laying out. Using a rigid format, Job explains away eight areas of potential sin in his life. So certain is Job that he is innocent of wickedness, he actually pronounces curses upon himself if the all-knowing God finds him guilty of any of the sins. This ethereal courtroom procedure would be like any human going to a court to explain how he did not violate the law of the land and prefacing his testimony with a proposed sentence of the death penalty if the judgment goes against him. Job will soon learn that it is never appropriate to assume he knows more about justice than God, the very author of justice.**

At that point, Job's three friends stopped responding to him because Job was quite certain of his own righteousness. But someone else was there. His name was **Elihu** (Barachel's son from Buz, of the family of Ram), and he was burning with anger toward Job because Job defended his righteousness rather than God's. And Elihu was also angry with Job's three friends because they found no decent rebuttal to Job yet condemned him, nonetheless. Elihu had withheld his words from Job because he was younger than all four of them and knew it was improper to speak until each of them was heard, but when Elihu (Barachel's son from Buz) realized the three men's words were spent, his anger inflamed him.

**Elihu:** I am a young man, and you are my wise elders, so I have been here shyly creeping about in the background, timid about sharing my opinion with you. I thought to myself, "Age should speak first; those advanced in years will teach wisdom." But alas, it turns out it is the spirit in a man, not age, and the breath of the Highest One within him that lends understanding. In fact, sometimes it is neither the great who are wise nor the elderly who have an understanding of justice. And so I say, "Listen to me, Job, and I, even I, will explain what I know."

(turning to the three friends) After all, I waited while each of you three spoke; I lent my ear to your insights while you searched for what to say, looking for the right words. I paid you my utmost attention but hear this! Not one of you countered Job with a decent argument; not one rebutted his statements of the case. And don't you dare fall back on the easy reply: "We have found wisdom; let God rebuke him, not just any old human!" I will answer him differently, for he has not assembled his words against me. I will not answer him with your overly personalized and insufficient arguments. They are all undone, unhinged, embarrassed! They have no response! Their faculty of speech has apparently failed them! Should I wait a bit longer to make sure they are all done speaking, for when they stand silent and appear to have nothing to say? So now it is my turn. I will tell you what I think. I will impart what I know. After all, I am filled to the brim with words, and my gut reaction is to speak. My insides are like fresh wine sealed up and needing to breathe. Like a new wineskin, I am on the brink of bursting from the pressure. Let me speak. Then I will find relief. Yes, I will open my mouth and answer. You will have to pardon me if I do not impede my words with deference to any of you or flatter you with honorable titles. After all, I am not very skilled with flattery anyway; I have reason to believe that, if I were to engage in such senseless rhetoric, my Maker would whisk me away from here because this matter is so serious.

So now, Job, listen closely to my words, lend an ear to my speeches. Wait for it! I am about ready to part my lips; even now, my tongue begins to stir within my mouth. My words emerge from a heart of integrity; my lips express their knowledge with sincerity. God's Spirit has fashioned me and the breath of the Highest One imparts life to me. So refute me if you can; go ahead and make your preparations and assume your position. But remember I am just like you; we are both God's vessels, both pinched from the clay and formed by Him. Look, there is no reason for you to be afraid of me; my hand will not feel all that heavy on you.

Job, now you have said—and I heard it— I heard the words sounded out: "I am pure, without sin; innocent indeed, and there is no wrongdoing within me! But oh! God has come up with reasons to accuse me; now He considers me His enemy. He locks my feet in the shackles; He watches all my paths, dogs my every step." But

listen! You are wrong in all this because God is greater than a mere man. Why do you argue with Him, complaining that He refuses to account for all of His actions? For God does speak in one way and even another way— yet no one may be able to perceive what He says. One kind of answer God gives comes in the form of a dream—in a night-vision—when deep slumber comes to people who have lain down to sleep in their beds. Yes, this is often when He opens the ears of humanity and seals their life-corrections in the terrors of the night. So that He can turn one away from his evil deeds and put down the arrogance of the proud. He does all of this so that He might hold back one soul from the pit and protect one life from passing over to the land of death.

Or another kind of answer God gives comes thus: one may be corrected through a bed of pain; his bones may hold him in an unceasing trial, in which his food becomes repulsive, and he doesn't hunger for even his favorite meals. His body wastes away almost to nothing, and bones, once hidden, stick out gruesomely. Thus he is sobered as his soul approaches the rim of the pit, as his life hears the whispers of the coming messengers of death.

If there is a heavenly messenger at one's side, a mediator, even just one out of the thousand in his regime of God's messengers, to proclaim what is right for that person according to God, and to be gracious to him and to say, "Spare this one from descending into the pit; I have found a ransom that will save his life! Then his skin will be renewed, as smooth and fresh as a child's, and he will be restored to the vim and vigor of his youth." He will make his appeal to God, and God will grant acceptance; he will see God's face and shout with joy, knowing God has restored his right standing. Then he comes to his fellow humans and sings out, "I sinned and perverted what I knew to be right, but God has not repaid me what I deserved. He has instead paid that ransom and spared me from descending into the pit and my life now sees the light."

Look! God does all of these things two, even three times with a person, in order to guide his soul back from the rim of the pit so the light of life might shine on him. Lend your ear, Job, and listen well to me; remain silent, and I will do the talking. If you have anything to say to me, say it. Make your answer to me; go ahead and speak, because I do desire to see you justified to God. But if not, then listen well to me; stay quiet, and I will teach you wisdom.

### **Job remained silent, so Elihu continued...**

Hear my words, you men of wisdom; listen to me, learned ones: Our ears are capable of testing wisdom of words the way the roofs of our mouths are capable of tasting food. Let us form a council here then, and decide among us what is right; let us come together to know what is good in all of this. After all, Job has told us, "I am innocent, but God has denied my right to a fair hearing. Though I am right, should I lie and claim to be wrong? No. Let me put it to you simply: I am gravely wounded as by an arrow, but I am innocent." What other man is comparable to Job? He drinks disdain like water. He is not like the one who runs with the workers of wickedness and associates himself with evil people. In fact he even suggests, "A person receives no benefit from pleasing God."

**In his first speech to Job, Elihu has been a cowboy, brazenly calling Job out for his blasphemous words about God. He has not exactly condemned Job as a wicked man; he has condemned Job for his**

**reaction to his suffering and to God. This is unprecedented behavior, since a younger man would never contradict an elder, especially in the presence of other elders. Possibly realizing how disrespectfully he has been acting, and certainly noticing that Job isn't responding well to his arguments, Elihu begins this second speech with a new approach. He tries to gain the support of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Maybe if other elders are on his side, Elihu can make Job understand that it is wrong to question God, the very Creator of justice.**

So, you men whose hearts have embraced wisdom, listen to me: far be it from God to commit evil acts; and from the Highest One<sup>[f]</sup> to engage in wrongdoing! For He is like an employer who pays workers according to what they have done; He makes sure the rewards they receive match their conduct. Oh, unimaginable thought—that God would cause evil! The Highest One does not pervert justice! Who designated Him as earth's overseer? Who placed Him in charge of the entire world? If He made it His aim to do so, if He recalled to Himself His spirit and His breath, all living creatures would expire as one and humankind would return to the dust from which He formed them.

If you are one of understanding, hear this! Listen to what I am saying! Can one who despises justice also govern? And are you willing to render condemnation on the Righteous and Mighty One? Is He not the One who says to the king, "You are worthless," and to the exalted nobility, "You are depraved." Is He not the One who refuses favoritism to royalty and who will not put rich above poor? After all, they are all the creations of His very own hands. All of a sudden, in the middle of the night, people perish; they are shaken, and then they pass away; the strong and mighty, apart from any human hand, are taken. For God's eyes are on the paths people choose; He surveys each of their steps. There is no darkness, no gloomy shadow in which wrongdoers may hide themselves from Him. God does not need to scrutinize people further or bring them before Him for judgment. Without need of a lengthy investigation, He breaks even the mighty into pieces, and installs others to replace them. And this is because He is already acquainted with their actions. When the seemingly sudden midnight hour rolls over, they are crushed beneath it.

He strikes down people as if they were wicked— front and center—a display for all to see simply because they turned from following Him, because they no longer considered His ways. As a result of their injustice, the poor cried out to Him and as you ought to know well, He always hears the cries of the needy, of the oppressed peoples. If God remains silent, who is fit to raise his voice against Him? If He chooses to hide His face, who is able to see Him? This goes for a nation or an individual; all are the same. A person estranged from God must be prevented from ruling over any nation and from laying snares for the downfall of a people.

Has anyone then said to God, "I have carried punishment, but I will not offend again. Teach me and fill in my blind spots, and if I have done wrong, I will stop and do what is right." Is God obliged to reward you on your terms for your personal revolt against Him? You must decide that, not I. Tell me, if you know what you believe, people who comprehend such things, wise folk who hear me say, "Job speaks without knowledge; his harangues are devoid of insight." May God try Job to the bitter end, for he responds as the wicked do and he keeps adding to his sins; he claps his hands in rebellion in our very midst, and he multiplies his offensive words against God.

**Elihu continued, now addressing Job...**

Job, is this your idea of justice, that you would say, “My righteousness exceeds God’s”? For you say something like, “What good does it do You if I do right? What is in it for me if I don’t sin?” I will return your words with my own, and I will answer your friends with you. Look at the skies above and take notice. See how high the clouds are—they are so far above you! Surely, if the clouds maintain such a distance, one must wonder: how high up and far away is God? If you sin, how much have you really accomplished against Him? If you pile up your sins, if you stack them high, what does it do to Him? Likewise, if you are righteous, what does that confer to Him, or what gift does He receive from your outstretched hand of righteous generosity? Listen! Your wickedness affects your own kind, and your righteousness only helps other human beings.

People call out to God when they feel the crush of oppression. They implore Him for deliverance from the strong hand of tyranny. But none of them pleads in this way: “Where is God, my Creator, who gives songs of comfort in the silence and suffering of night, Who enlightens us more than the animals of the field, Who instructs us in wisdom more than the birds of the air?” And so, in the absence of such prayers, God does not answer the cries of the people because they cry with the arrogance of the wicked. Indeed, God does not hear the vain and empty cry, nor does the Highest One pay it any mind. How much less must He hear you— you who say you cannot see Him, You who say you have already pled your case before Him but that you are still waiting for Him.

And now, here we are. Because God has not been swift to punish in His anger, because He does not concern Himself with great arrogance, Job opens his mouth and out comes empty talk. Yes, he heaps up words with ignorance.

Wait for me to finish, and I will explain. There is still more to be said on God’s behalf. I will acquire my knowledge from ancient, far away sources and illustrate the righteous ways of my Maker. Truly, there is no untruth hidden in my words; in fact, perfect knowledge has graced your presence. Look! God has great strength, but He does not detest human beings; He is mighty indeed, and His heart swells with understanding. He does not preserve the life of the wicked, but He grants justice to those who are weak and humble. He does not divert His gaze from the righteous; He enthrones them with monarchs, lifts them up to positions of power forever. And if the people are restrained in chains, caught in the cords of their misery, then He explains to them their exploits, their errors, and how they have lived in arrogance. He uncovers their ears so as to hear His teaching and commands them to abandon their sinful path. If they hear and choose to serve Him, then they end their days in prosperity and their years in felicity. But if they refuse to listen, then they will pass over to the land of death by the sword and will arrive, lacking any wisdom, at their death.

The sullied and impure stash away their anger. Even when He puts them in chains for their own good, they refuse to cry for His help. They die young, debased among the male prostitutes of the shrines. As for the righteous—when they are afflicted— God delivers them through the affliction itself and uses the trial to open their ears to His voice.

Job, even now, God is enticing you away from the jaws of distress; He is luring you to a wide, wonderful place free of boundaries where your table will be covered in the finest foods. You are weighed down, instead, with judgment usually reserved for the wicked.

And yet, ironically, as you seek to lay hold of justice and judgment, justice and judgment have laid hold of you. Beware that your anger at how you are being judged does not seduce you into scorning. Do not let the high ransom you are paying through your suffering steer you off God's path. Will your cry for help lessen your misery? How about your strength and forcefulness? Are they yielding you any better result? Do not pine, Job, for the night when people pass from their earthly homes into oblivion. In short, be careful! Do not turn your life toward evil ways—which you have preferred to hearing God's correcting voice in the midst of your suffering. See, God is supreme in His power. Is there any teacher like Him? Is anyone capable of overseeing His path? Who has ever said to Him, "You have done wrong"?

**Scholars think that, at this point, a rainstorm must have picked up where the men were, because Elihu begins to refer to thunder and lightning as he speaks of God's power...**

Remember to praise His works, which generations have celebrated in song. All of humankind has seen them and has gazed upon them from far away. Look, God is exalted, beyond all knowing. The number of His years is vast, beyond all discovery. For He draws up drops of water, distills the rain from the mist which pours down from the clouds, dripping a sky full of water over the whole of humanity. It is beyond comprehension: the fanning out of the clouds, the crashing thunder from His cloudy pavilion. Ah, and then He extends His lightning over the earth, striking even the sea to illumine its depths. For with these, He judges the peoples— lightning punishing His enemies and rain blessing His people— but now with those same waters, He gives them food in abundance. In the palms of His hands He holds lightning and issues orders for it to strike its target. Thunder announces His presence; His jealous anger is against what is coming. At this, my heart quivers, and it nearly leaps out of my chest. Listen! Listen to the raging anger in His voice, the rumbling that's coming from His mouth! He sets the roar loose across the whole length of the sky, and His lightning flashes to the ends of the earth. After the flash comes the deafening roar of His voice, the voice that thunders His majesty—the voice that resounds with no evidence of restraint, the voice of God that is thundering wondrously.

He does magnificent things, beyond our comprehension. To the snow, He issues the order: "Go! Fall on the earth!" And to the rain shower, He says, "Show your power; beat down heavy on the earth!" Then, as the weather drives laborers indoors, He closes in around every human hand, sealing them off from their labors, and in forced rest, all are drawn to see the ongoing work of God.

The beast of the field scampers for cover, hiding in its cave for the duration. Meanwhile, the whirlwind comes forth from its southern chamber, and the arctic winds bring the cold. From the breath of God ice forms, and the wide waters of the rivers and seas expand in the freeze. He weighs down the thick clouds with moisture, and they scatter His clusters of light. The storm changes course under His guidance; it moves as He directs over the contours of the entire earth. And what is His aim? Whether for the discipline of His people or for the sake of the earth itself, or as an expression of His deep, loyal love, He causes all of this to happen.

Hear this, Job. Pause where you are and ponder the wonders of God. Do you know how God orchestrates these marvels? How He makes the clouds flash with lightning? Do you know how those same clouds are hung up in the sky or how they move? Do you



know the wonders of God, who is perfect in His knowledge of such things? You, who feel the wind of His voice even now, are the same one whose clothes are hot to the touch when God makes the land go still beneath the south wind. Can you assist God in hammering out the silver sky until it appears as hard as cast metal mirror? Job, tell us what to say to Him. We cannot draw up our argument before such impenetrable darkness. Shall He be told that I wish to speak to Him directly? Will it help if I admit I would be consumed if I did?

But now no one can see the brightness of the light through the thick clouds; as the wind changes and blows through the sky, it clears the air. From the north, the weather changes; golden skies encircle God, now clothed in awesome majesty. We cannot find the Highest One: He is exalted in power, great in righteousness, and does not depreciate humanity. This is why mortals fear Him; He doesn't see the wise of heart.

### **And then, finally, out of the raging storm, the Eternal One answered Job...**

**Eternal One:** Who is this that darkens counsel, who covers over sound instruction with empty words void of knowledge? Now, prepare yourself and gather your courage like a warrior. Prepare yourself for the task at hand.

I'll be asking the questions, now— you will supply the answers.

- Where were you when I dug and laid the foundation of the earth? Explain it to me, if you are acquainted with understanding. Who decided on the measurements? Surely you know that! Who stretched out a line to measure the dimensions? Upon what base was the foundation set? Or who laid the cornerstone on the day when the stars of the morning broke out in song and God's heavenly throng, elated, shouted along?
- Who held back the sea behind doors and brought the earth bursting forth from the womb of the deep, when for clothes I gave it a cloud and for swaddling I wrapped it in darkness, when I placed shores around its limits and put up the doors and the bars; and I said to the sea, "Here you may come, but no farther. And here is the shore where your grand waves will crash."
- In your short run of days, have you ever commanded the morning to begin or taught the sun to rise in its place? Under your watch has the early light ever taken hold of the earth by the edges and shaken the wicked loose? Under dawn's early light the earth takes shape as does clay when a seal is firmly pressed in it; its colors and features stand out as a well-made garment does from the body. Yet the light is withheld from the wicked, and the arm is snapped off of the oppressors.
- Have you entered into the sea's tidewater or trod the bottom of the ocean looking for the deepest cavern? Have you found it, only for death's infamous gates to be unveiled to you, or did you catch a glimpse of the gates of the deep darkness beneath the waters? Have you roamed the earth in her entirety, comprehended her vast regions? If you know all of this, declare it! Make your statement!
- Tell me, which way is it to where the light resides? And darkness? Where does the darkness live? When you escort it through its regions every day, will you know the way to its home? Ah, but of course you know! After all, you were born way back then when all this was created, and your days have been many indeed.

- Have you visited the vast, cold treasury where the snow is stored, or have you gazed on the shimmering, frozen armories where the hail is held, the hail which I keep on reserve for the time of great trouble, for the day of battle, the day of war?
- Where is the way to the realm where light is scattered across creation, and where is the field where the east wind is divided up and sent across the face of the earth?
- Who cut the channel for the flooding rivers or paved a path for the thunderbolt  
So that rain might fall on an uninhabited land, even on a wilderness where no human sets foot so that the desolate desert and the withering wasteland are satisfied, so that the grass is made to sprout in that seemingly forsaken place?
- And does the rain have a father? Who sires the drops of dew? From whose womb comes the ice? And who gives birth to the sky's pale, thick frost? When water seems to turn to stone, the face of the deep freezes to imprison its inhabitants.
- Can you bind together a cluster of twinkling stars— the seven sisters of Pleiades who keep company in the night sky? Can you loosen the cords of Orion's bow? Can you lead the stars of the Zodiac out in their proper seasons and guide the Bear with her cubs? Do you know the rules of the heavens, or apportion their influence on the seasons of the earth?
- Can you bellow out orders at the clouds and pull down a flood of rain around you? Can you dispatch bolts of lightning on their way, who instantly obey and say to you, "Here we are"? Who put wisdom within the center of the created or granted understanding to the mind? Who has the wisdom to count the clouds and send them on their way or tip over the water skins of heaven to refresh the ground below when the dry dust is as hard as metal and clods of clay clump together?
- Can you hunt prey for the lioness or sate the appetites of her cubs while they crouch in their dens and wait in the brush? Who nourishes the hungry raven when its young chirp to God and wander for want of food?
- Do you know the time when the mountain goats give birth? Do you attend at the doe's delivery? Can you keep track of the months until each carries to term? Do you even know their calving season? They drop to their knees to birth their young, and their labor pains cease to grip. Their offspring grow to their full strength in the open field; then they leave and do not return.
- Who set the wild donkey free? Who cut it loose from its bonds? I gave it the wastelands for a home and the salt flats for a dwelling. It avoids the commotion of the city; it is far from the shouts of the mule driver and never has to obey. Instead, it trundles through hills in search of pasture, its eyes ever watchful for a patch of green.
- Is the wild ox willing to serve you? Will it be content to stay the night beside your feeding trough? Can you confine the wild ox with a rope to plow a straight furrow? Will it cultivate the valleys as you pull him along? Can you trust it simply because of its enormous strength? Can you really leave your work to it without guiding it? Can you depend on it to return the remaining seed to you, to carry the grain to your threshing floor?
- The ostrich flaps her wings, and the ringing joy is heard. But her wings and pinions are not like a stork's. She cannot fly. She is different from other birds, for she lays her eggs straight on the ground, and she incubates them in the bare dust. She forgets that a foot might crush them or a wild animal trample them. She is harsh to her young, as if they were not even hers. She is unconcerned at the futility of her labor, for God denied her a share of wisdom, and in doling out understanding, He passed her by. Oh and yet, look at her when the time comes to run— she spreads her strange wings and laughs at the horse who must be guided by his rider although she is an absurd bird who can't even fly.

- And oh, of course—now let us speak of the horse! Do you give that creature its power? Do you adorn its neck with that flowing mane? Do you make it leap like a locust and terrify the enemy with its dreadful snorting? It paws and stamps the valley ground, prancing and gloating at its strength; and it greets the battle with a charge. It laughs at fear, is a stranger to panic, and will not turn away from any oncoming blade. Though the quiver's arrows rattle at its side, though the spear and lance flash in its eyes, it is a storm and a fury devouring the ground ahead, set off by the blast of the trumpet, unable to stand still. Stirred by the trumpet sound to charge, the horse responds with its own blast and smells the blood of battle from a distance, amid commands barked by officers and shouts of alarm.
- Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom, stretching its wings toward the south? Does the eagle take flight at your command, or build its nest in the towering heights? On jutting cliffs it lives and keeps the night; on rocky crags it builds its mountain stronghold. From there it spies its prey; its keen eyes discover its victim still far off. Its young ones feast on blood, and wherever the slain lie, there it is.
- Have you heard enough? Will the one who finds fault with the Highest One now make his case? Let God's accuser answer Him!

**Job is humbled by these questions, and so he responds to God...**

**Job:** Oh, I am so small. How can I reply to You? I'll cover my mouth with my hand, for I've already said too much. One time I have spoken, and I have no answer to give— two times, and I have nothing more to add.

**But God has more questions for Job, and so, out of the storm, the Eternal One speaks again, ...**

**Eternal One:** Now, prepare yourself and gather your courage like a warrior. Prepare yourself for the task at hand. I'll be asking the questions, now— you will supply the answers.

Let Me ask you a new question: Would you go so far as to call into question My judgment? Would you imagine Me guilty merely in order to justify yourself? Do you have an arm just as powerful as God's and does your voice thunder as His does? Then dress yourself up in majesty and dignity. Deck yourself out in honor and splendor and indulge your anger. Unleash your wrath! Look down on each and every proud soul and cut him low. Look down on all who are proud, and humiliate them. Raise your mighty foot, and stomp the wicked where they stand. Bury them all together in the dirt, and shroud their frozen faces in the secret recesses of the grave.

If you can execute all this, then I—yes, even I—will praise you, for your great and mighty right hand earned you the victory! But before you undertake My challenge, turn your attention to Behemoth, the beast which I fashioned along with you.

**(Behemoth isn't just any beast. Because of the Hebrew grammatical construction, it is apparent that Behemoth is the largest, strongest beast the Lord ever created.)**

It eats grass like an ox. Look carefully: it has a sturdy, muscular base and draws its power from its brawny core. Its bends like a cedar, the sinews of its powerful thighs are woven tightly. Its bones, unbreakable, are like tubes of bronze; its whole skeletal structure is like a framework of iron. It is one of My most marvelous creations; only I, its Maker, can threaten its existence. The hillsides offer it food as it grazes near where the wild animals bustle and play. It lies beside the river under the shade of the lotus, hidden by the reeds of the marsh; the lotus trees cover it with their shadows; the willows of the stream surround it. It is not alarmed when the river rises and rages; it stands confident, firmly fixed, even when the Jordan swells and rushes against it. Can anyone capture this beast while it is watching or trap it and pierce its nose to haul it off?

Now let us not stop here. What of Leviathan? Can you haul it in on the end of a hook or strap down its tongue with your line? Will you subdue it with a fragile reed through its nose or pierce its jaw with a hook? Do you imagine it will beg you endlessly for mercy or lower its voice to a whisper when speaking to you? Will it strike a deal with you and enter into your service as a lifelong slave? Will you play with it as you would a pet bird or put it on a leash for your girls? Will traders haggle over its price and others seek to divide it up among the merchants? Can you fill its hide with harpoons or its head with fishing spears? If you are able to lay a hand on it, you will remember the struggle all of your days, and you will never do it again. Now look, any expectation you could subdue it will be shattered. Just the sight of it is enough to overpower you. No one is fierce enough to dare disturb it.

So is there anyone in all the earth who dares to stand up to Me? Who could ever confront Me and force Me to repay him? Everything and everyone under heaven is Mine! I will not be silent regarding Leviathan's powerful limbs, its enormous strength, or its beautiful form. Who can reveal what is under its outer armor covering or penetrate down through its double coat of mail? Who can pry open its enormous jaws? Remember: its teeth are a terror from every angle. Its back is covered with rows of shields that overlap and shut with a tight seal—one against another, so close that no wind passes between them. They are joined to one another, inseparably locked. When it sneezes, light flashes from its nostrils; its eyes are like the rays of the morning sun. Fire streams from its mouth as fiery sparks fly outward. Smoke pours from its nostrils as from a boiling pot or a brush fire. Its searing breath sets coals ablaze; its flaming tongue darts from its mouth. Leviathan's neck bristles with raw power; terror dances before him. The creases in its flesh fuse together: firm, fixed, immovable. Its heart is rock hard, as hard as a lower millstone, impervious to grinding. When the beast rises up and moves near, the mighty ones shudder in fear; when it crashes down, they retreat. The sword that reaches it may strike but to no effect, so, too, the spear, the dart, and the lance. For it treats iron as straw and bronze as rotten wood. The arrow cannot force its retreat, and the stone from the sling shatters on impact. A club is no more dangerous to it than a piece of straw; it taunts and laughs at the rattling lance. Its underbelly is as sharp as broken pottery shards; it easily dredges a channel in the mud behind it. It brings the deep to a rolling boil like a pot over a hot fire; in its course it stirs the sea like a pot of ointment. Behind it, the wake is bright and shining, as if the sea has long white hair. Nothing on earth is its equal, this creature fashioned without fear. It looks upon all the high and mighty— this king over the children of pride.

**Ashamed of his arrogance before God, Job answered the Eternal One.**

**Job:** I know You can do everything; nothing You do can be foiled or frustrated. You asked, “Who is this that conceals counsel with empty words void of knowledge?” And now I see that I spoke of—but did not comprehend—great wonders that are beyond me. I didn’t know. You said, “Hear Me now, and I will speak. I’ll be asking the questions, and you will supply the answers.” Before I knew only what I had heard of You, but now I have seen You. Therefore I realize the truth: I disavow and mourn all I have said and repent in dust and ash.

**After the Eternal had spoken these words to Job, He turned and spoke to Eliphaz from Teman.**

**Eternal One:** My anger is burning against you and your two friends because you have not spoken rightly of Me, as My servant Job has. So now, gather your friends and bring seven bulls and seven rams. Then go to My servant Job, make a burnt offering for yourselves, and he will pray for you. I will accept his prayer. Despite the fact that you have not spoken rightly of Me, as My servant Job did, I will not deal with you according to your foolish ways.

So Eliphaz from Teman, Bildad from Shuhah, and Zophar from Naamath went and did as the Eternal commanded, and He accepted Job’s prayer for them. The Eternal restored the fortunes of Job after he prayed for his friends; He even doubled the wealth he had before. All of his brothers and sisters, along with those he had known earlier, came and shared meals with him at his house. They sympathized with him and consoled him regarding the great distress the Eternal had brought on him. Each guest gave him a sum of money and each, a golden ring. The Eternal One blessed the last part of Job’s life even more than the first part. He went on to possess 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 teams of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. He also fathered 7 more sons and 3 more daughters. He named his first daughter Jemimah, his second Keziah, and his third Keren-happuch. Nowhere in all the land could one find women as captivatingly beautiful as Job’s daughters, or as independently wealthy: their father gave them each a share of the family inheritance along with their brothers. After all this, Job lived 140 years. He lived to see his children and their children and so on, to the fourth generation. Then Job died, old, and satisfied with his days.

***Congratulations! You made it through one of the more difficult books of the Bible. I hope you found something beautiful or challenging in these very ancient words.***

***You are doing great! You’ve read all of Genesis, and all of Job, and a bit of 1 Chronicles. In the next few weeks, we’ll turn to the stories of Moses and the Israelites as we head into the book of Exodus...***