

**GOD WITH US**  
**Part 5: Soul Songs**  
**Job – Psalms**

**Message 2 – Job’s Suffering: WHY?**  
**Job Chs. 3-37**

**Introduction**

The major part of the book of Job records the back and forth debate Job has with his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, concerning the reason behind his suffering. None of them were aware of the conversations between God and Satan, in heaven, that led to the testing of Job. They were trying to answer the WHY question with incomplete information. Their interchange runs through three full cycles, with a young man named Elihu appearing at the end to weigh in with his point of view. The interchange between the three friends heats up as it progresses from discussion to debate to dispute.

The commentary on this lengthy section of Job will take the form of a paraphrase of each of the three cycles followed by a brief summary of the major themes in each one.

**The Discussion Cycle: chs.3-14**

**Job curses the day of his birth: ch.3**

*Obliterate the day I was born! May those who curse days curse THAT day! May God above even forget that day. Had I died at birth I could be resting in peace, asleep forever, feeling no pain. Why do You give life to people, and then drown them in pain? I always feared something terrible would happen to me. So now, I don’t have any peace or rest. Only turmoil.*

**Eliphaz rebukes Job: chs.4-5**

*Job my friend, listen to me. You used to give other people advice when they were in trouble. But now when trouble strikes you, you get discouraged. Here’s what you need to consider: Do GOOD people ever suffer like you’re suffering? No! I’ve observed that those who plant trouble harvest trouble. I’ve seen that fools may get away with sin for the moment, but then comes sudden disaster. Don’t despise the discipline of the Almighty when you sin. Listen to my counsel, Job, and apply it to yourself.*

### **Job responds to Eliphaz: chs.6-7**

*Eliphaz, what kind of a friend are you? If my misery could be weighed on a scale it would outweigh the sand on the seashore. And now you pile on by accusing me without reason. Look at me! Would I lie to your face? I have done nothing to deserve all of this. A hurting man needs his close friends; but all I get is judgment and rejection from you.*

*I wish that God would answer my prayer and crush me so I could die without denying His words. God, leave me alone for my few remaining days. Why make me Your target? Why don't You just take away my guilt? For soon I will lie down in the dust and die. When You look for me, I will be gone.*

### **Bildad rebukes Job: ch.8**

*Job, how can you talk such nonsense? Does God pervert justice? Does He ever get things backward? It's obvious that your children sinned against Him – otherwise, why would God have punished them? Look: This is what happens to people who forget God – all their hopes come to nothing. They hang their life from one thin thread, they hitch their fate to a spider web. One jiggle and the thread breaks, one jab and the web collapses. God never rejects a good person, and there is no way He'll help a bad one. It's time for you to get down on your knees before God and repent. It's not too late. He'll set everything right again . . . IF you repent.*

### **Job responds to Bildad: chs.9-10**

*How can mere mortals prove their innocence before God? Even IF we wished to dispute with Him, we could not answer Him one time out of a thousand. He performs wonders that can't be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. Who am I to argue with Him? He is not a mere mortal like me, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to mediate between us, who could put his hand on God and put his hand on me. Then I would speak up without fear of Him.*

*God, does it please You to oppress me, while You smile on the plans of the wicked? Your hands shaped me and made me. Will You now turn and destroy me? Remember that You molded me like clay. Will You now turn me to dust again? Turn away from me so I can have a moment's joy before I go to the place of no return.*

## **Zophar rebukes Job: ch.11**

*Shall we let this mocker silence us? You say to God, "My beliefs are flawless and I am pure in God's sight." I wish that God would weigh in here; that He would open His lips against you. Just be sure of this: He knows a deceiver when He sees one. No evil escapes His notice. You're wasting time, Job. If you would just stretch out your hands to Him and put away the sin that you're hiding then He will forgive you. You will lift up your face and stand firm and without fear. Life will be brighter than noonday. Stop denying the obvious truth. The wicked never escape God's judgment!*

## **Job responds to Zophar: chs.12-14**

*So, you're the three wise men and I'm a big joke? You're telling me that, "God has done this to me." WHO doesn't already know THAT? The birds of the air and the fish of the sea could have told me that. Of course – God is in charge of everything that happens. In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. But your mistake is that you believe God has done this to me because I'm wicked. You smear me with lies. Show me my sin; then I'll shut up and die. You are worthless physicians, all of you! Your wise words are proverbs of ashes. If only the three of you would say nothing; that would be your wisdom. Oh God – Life is short and full of trouble. How I wish you'd just hide me in the grave!*

**Summary of the discussion cycle:** The three friends have only one formula to offer Job. Bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people. Thus, Job must be guilty of sin and he is not being honest about it. They encourage Job to repent immediately.

Job maintains his innocence, becoming discouraged and even defensive as they attack him. Job does acknowledge that *God has brought this calamity upon him*. What he does not acknowledge is that *his calamity is a punishment for his sin*. For Job, there is some strange and mysterious reason behind his suffering. For his friends, there is nothing mysterious at all. Sinners suffer – plain and simple. (We should note that IF Job had know the reason behind his suffering, then it would not have been a true test. He would have simply waited out the suffering knowing "God was using him as a weapon to defeat Satan" (W. Wiersbe). God's *complete* silence was a necessary part of the test.)

Takeaways from the discussion cycle:

1. To “sympathize” means to “feel together with.” When you come alongside of a suffering person, your goal should be to enter into their feelings as deeply as possible. You should NOT give unsolicited advice, nor should you seek to provide simple answers to deeply complex problems. Put it this way: You do NOT want to be like Job’s three “friends!”

2. Our equations (or formulas) never do justice to God’s mysterious ways. One important step of maturity in our walk with God is when we make more room in our hearts for divine mystery and less room for tidy, logical explanations. Job’s friends had everything reduced to nice, neat boxes (wrong boxes!). Job, on the other hand, knew that there was something unexplainable about God’s movements in his life. “He has shrouded my paths in darkness” (Job 19:8). It is O.K. to walk through darkness with a Father you truly trust.

3. When trials and suffering hit, we often say, “Why this waste?” Job was leaning in this direction when he lamented the day of his birth. In effect he was saying: What a waste my life has been! When Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with precious, expensive perfume, the disciples complained: “Why this waste?” Yet, if God has called us to suffer, and we respond with a heart of faith and trust, then there is NO waste at all in suffering. “Nothing that is offered to Christ in faith and love is ever wasted.” (W. Wiersbe)

4. How do we keep our hope in God when a trial drags on and on, while no “answer” seems to be forthcoming from God? It all comes down to the object of our faith. We must trust the character of God when we cannot discern the reasoning of God. “Though He slay me, yet I will keep my hope in Him” (Job 13:15).

## The Debate Cycle: chs.15-21

### Eliphaz’s 2<sup>nd</sup> rebuke: ch.15

*Job, you’re full of empty talk. Don’t you fear God? And you act like you know it all! But we’ve got more gray hair than your father! Why do you turn against God and say all these evil things? You only want to justify yourself!*

*No man living is righteous. Can’t you see this? God doesn’t even trust His angels. How much less mortals, who are vile and corrupt, who drink up evil like water! I’ve told you once and I’ll tell you again: Wicked men suffer. When all seems well, robbers attack him. His riches fly away. He can’t escape the darkness. He is cut down in the prime of life. The breath of God’s mouth blows the wicked man away!*

### **Job responds to Eliphaz: chs.16-17**

*You are miserable comforters, all of you! I'm tired of your worthless speeches. O God, you have ground me down and devastated my family! You've reduce me to skin and bones! God hates me and tears me apart! All was well with me, but He shattered me; He seized me by the neck and crushed me. He set me up as His target. Now His arrows pierce me without mercy. Yet my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure. You must defend my innocence, O God, since no one else will stand up for me! My spirit is broken, my days are over, the grave awaits me.*

### **Bildad's 2nd rebuke: ch.18**

*So you're tired of our speeches? Well, we're tired of yours' too. Why do you treat us like dumb animals? You're the one who can't accept the obvious: The lamp of a wicked man is snuffed out. The evil man loses strength. His own schemes bring him down. His feet get caught in the net. Terrors startle him on every side. Calamity is hungry for him. Disaster strikes him from every side. Disease eats away his skin. Fire destroys his home; his reputation evaporates into thin air; his descendants are cut off. They will say: "This was the home of a wicked person; the place of one who rejected God."*

### **Job responds to Bildad: ch.19**

*How long will you crush me with words? God has concealed my path in darkness. He has stripped me of honor; He tears me down on every side; He uproots my hope like a tree; He counts me among his enemies; He has alienated my family from me; my friends are completely estranged from me; my relatives have gone away; my closest friends have forgotten me; My servants look at me as if I'm a stranger. My breath is offensive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own family. Even the little boys mock me like some freaky monster. Have mercy on me, my friends, have mercy, for the hand of God has struck me. I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*

### **Zophar's 2<sup>nd</sup> rebuke: ch.20**

*I am greatly disturbed by you, Job. Don't you realize how it has*

*been since the day mankind was placed on the earth? The happiness of the godless lasts but a moment. The pride of the godless person reaches God's ears in heaven. Then he will perish forever, like his own dung; those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?' He will suck the poison of serpents; the fangs of a viper will kill him. For he has oppressed the poor and left them destitute; he has seized houses he did not build. In the midst of his plenty, distress will overtake him; the full force of misery will come upon him. When he has filled his belly, God will vent his burning anger against him and rain down his blows on him. The heavens will expose his guilt; the earth will rise up against him. A flood will carry off his house. Such is the fate God allots to the wicked man.*

### **Job responds to Zophar: ch.21**

*Bear with me while I speak, and after I have spoken, you may resume mocking me. You say that bad things happen to bad people. Take an honest look around you? Why do the wicked prosper, growing old and powerful? Why do the godless see their children grow up and thrive? Their homes are safe and free from fear. Their bulls never fail to breed; their cows do not miscarry. Their children go through life singing and dancing like it's one big party. They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace. They never utter a single prayer to God . . . but their life is not snuffed out. If you don't believe me, then ask those who travel the world. The wicked don't always "get what they deserve." They are carried to the grave in peace and guards watch over their tombs while lilies grow over their heads! How can you console me with your nonsense? All your answers are lies.*

**Summary of the debate cycle:** The tone has become mean-spirited. The three friends are angry that Job will not admit that he has sinned. They accuse him of proud self-righteousness. They start describing in vivid pictures the specific ways that God will punish the wicked man. They are trying to scare Job into a confession, warning that things will get even worse if he does not repent. They also try to use the argument that "all men are sinners" (a fact that is true); but this does nothing to explain Job's predicament. IF *all* men are sinners (and they are), then why has Job been singled out from among *all* sinful men for such drastic calamity?

As for Job, he is deeply wounded by the harsh accusations of his

friends. But he is even more deeply wounded by his God, who seems now to hate him and attack him without mercy. He wishes God would come to his defense against the false accusations of his friends. Instead, God keeps the fiery arrows coming at Job. He knows deep in his heart that there IS a reason for his suffering; but believes that God has concealed the answer in darkness. He graphically details his many afflictions, yet maintains hope that someday he will see God and understand the reason behind it all: *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*

Job does throw one logical wrench into his friends' argument: The wicked do *not* always suffer. In fact, they often prosper and seem to go through life unpunished, while the more innocent and humble people seem to suffer the most. The friends 'formula' was: Good things happen to good people – bad things happen to bad people. Job counters with this observation: Good things happen to bad people – bad things happen to good people.

*Takeaways from the debate cycle:*

- 1. If you are suffering, don't conclude that God is punishing you. In fact, God poured out ALL "punishment" against sin on His own Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. God will bring constructive "discipline" into our lives, and this may involve suffering. But discipline, by its very nature, is to help us learn and grow in our relationship with God. "He does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10).*
- 2. Job raised a good point when he asked: Why do GOOD things happen to BAD people? The fact is that in this lifetime, "God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). God is in fact a merciful Father Who showers many of His earthly blessings on all of His created beings – even humans who disregard Him. Thus, it is unwise to try to understand God's ways by comparing your life to that of another. The writer of Psalm 73 almost lost his faith completely when he tried to do so!*

**The Dispute Cycle: chs.22-31**

**Eliphaz' 3<sup>rd</sup> rebuke: ch.22**

*Oh. So let me get this straight. God is doing all of this to you because you're SO GOOD? No! It's because you are so wicked!*

*Are not your sins endless? Here's what you've done: You demanded security from your relatives for no reason; you stripped people of their clothing, leaving them naked. You gave no water to the weary and you withheld food from the hungry. And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless. That is why sudden peril terrifies you.*

*This is the last time I'll say it: "Submit to God and be at peace with Him; in this way prosperity will come to you. IF you return to the Almighty, THEN you will be restored. IF you remove wickedness far from your tent, THEN you will find delight in the Almighty and will lift up your face to God.*

### **Job responds to Eliphaz: chs.23-24**

*If only I knew where to find Him; if only I could go to His house! I would state my case and find out exactly what He's thinking. I head East looking for Him – I find no one; then West, but not a trace; I go North, but He's hidden His tracks; then South, but not even a glimpse. But He knows where I am and what I've done. My feet have closely followed His steps. I have treasured His words more than my daily bread. Still, He carries out His plans against me, and many such plans He still has in store. He controls my destiny. That is why I am terrified before Him. I don't know what He's going to do next! Why doesn't God take appointments so we can ask Him our questions? Life seems so unfair. The wicked get away with murder, while the humble get ripped off. You're free to try to prove me a liar, but you won't be able to do it.*

### **Bildad's 3<sup>rd</sup> rebuke: ch.25**

*Dominion and awe belong to God; He establishes order in the heights of heaven. How then can a mortal be righteous or pure before God? The moon is not flawless to Him. The stars are not pure in His eyes. How much less a sinful, mortal, who is but a MAGGOT in comparison – a human being, who is only a WORM!*

### **Job's final speech: chs.26-31**

*Thank you all for your help! What great advice you have offered to your friend the fool! Where did you get such wisdom? Whose spirit gave you these words?*

*God spreads out the northern skies over empty space; He suspends the earth over nothing. He wraps up the waters in His clouds. He*

*sets the boundary between light and darkness. And these are but the outer fringe of His works. Who can comprehend His great power? Who can fathom His great wisdom?*

*Yet, the Almighty God has denied me justice! He has ruined my life! As long as I draw breath, I refuse to confess to any charge that's false. I'm holding fast to my integrity and not loosening my grip – and, believe me, I'll never regret it.*

*How I long for the days when God watched over me, when He was the light of my life. Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when the Almighty was still with me and my children were around me; when my path was drenched with cream and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil. But now, young men mock me in song; they spit in my face. God throws me into the mud, and I am reduced to dust and ashes. I cry out, but God does not answer me. (Toward God) You have turned on me ruthlessly; with Your almighty hand You have attacked me. You have snatched me up and driven me before the windstorm. I know You will bring me down to death, to the place appointed for all the living.*

**Summary of the dispute cycle:** Job's friends are running out of words. Bildad's final rant is only a few sentences, while Zophar fails to say a single word this time around. They have run out of arguments and can only replay old lines – though with more anger and nasty attacks aimed at Job. Eliphaz tires to help Job recall his sin by listing the specific sins he has likely committed. Bildad compares Job to a maggot trying to look good before the Almighty! Zophar stands by in silence, probably shaking his head in disbelief at Job's stubborn refusal to admit his sin.

Job now lets his three 'friends' drift into the background. He addresses God directly through much of this section, longing for an audience with God. He cannot understand why God seems to have pulled away from him during this trial. He prays and prays; but God is silent. Meanwhile, the intensity of his suffering increases day after day. He acknowledges the power of Almighty God as displayed in the created order. He simply cannot comprehend *any* good reason why God does not use His great power to bring an end to his suffering. He has come to the place where he is actually questioning the justice of God. *How can God justly allow this level of pain into the life of one that loves Him?* He wishes he could turn back the hand of time and return to life as it used to be.

Takeaways from the dispute cycle:

1. It is important to recognize when you are allowing negative voices to influence you. Job's three friends practically exhausted all they had to say (Job was a sinner). They have contributed nothing to his spiritual progress. They became mean spirited; engaging in unjustified attacks accusing Job of even specific sins.
2. Job's frustration with God's justice and care for him was fueled by his friends' incessant attacks. Job could have stayed stronger in his ability to keep trusting and believing the best about God if his three friends had sought to encourage and support him. Toxic criticism is lethal to the soul. We (and Job) should choose to excuse ourselves when negative voices repeatedly accuse us.
3. Job ignored his friends (finally) and took up his main complaint with God. He trusted God's heart and love for Him. He was "honest" with God. Scripture says that God knows every word even before it comes from your mouth (Psalm 139:4). So don't stuff it. Declare it. The majority of Psalms are "laments" where people are pouring out their emotions in brutal honest toward God – even if the theology in their laments is not what they know to be true about God.

**Elihu's Speech: chs.32-37**

*I'm the youngest, so I've been silent; but now I must speak. You all need to pay attention to me. I'm angry at you 3 because you could not refute Job. I am angry at you, Job, because you keep justifying yourself and questioning God's justice.*

*You three say God has judged Job because he has sinned. Not so fast. God also uses pain to keep a person from sin and from pride. If a man is heading toward destruction, God might send pain to steer him away from the pit. He might even send an angel of mercy to intervene and spare the man. Pain is not always for punishment. Sometimes it is for our good.*

*Job, you say that God has denied you justice, because you have not sinned. Will you condemn the just and mighty God so that you can be proved right? You also say that God doesn't listen and isn't concerned. He doesn't care about wickedness or judge sinners. Job, you're talking like a fool. How dare you try to haul God into court!*

*Let ME show you the truth. Everyone listen to ME! God is mighty in both power and understanding. He rules the universe! Certainly He knows how to judge the wicked and watch over the innocent.*

*Job, God is trying to lead you away from danger through your suffering, to a place of blessing. But you are only obsessed with whether the godless will be judged fairly. Be on guard Job. God has sent you suffering to keep you from a life of evil!*

*No one can teach God anything! He is greater than we can understand. Who can understand all His acts in nature? Mighty God! Far beyond our reach! Unsurpassable in power and justice! It's unthinkable that He'd treat anyone unfairly. So bow to Him in deep reverence, one and all! If you're wise, you'll most certainly worship Him."*

**Summary of Elihu's Speech:** Elihu was out to get everyone! He went after Job's three friends for their complete failure to constructively lead Job to a better place of understanding his trials. At the same time, he rebuked Job for 1) asserting his own innocence and 2) questioning the justice of God.

Elihu was not trying to prove that Job was a sinner, as the three friends were. He was asserting that Job's view of God was wrong. Elihu's main contribution to the debate was that God sends suffering to keep us from sinning and to refine our character; not necessarily to punish us for sin. Pain is preventative, not just punitive. God allowed Job to suffer to keep him from pride and ultimately from the pit of destruction.

This helps us to understand Job's gradual drift in the narrative. While he started off as a man who would humbly accept adversity from the hand of God, as his suffering progressed he began to argue with God over the justice of it all, and to demand a hearing with God so he could defend his own character and hear a legitimate answer from God. *"There was a sediment of pride that began to cloud the purity of his life when it was stirred up by suffering."* (Piper) This also explains Job's withdrawal of his arguments at the end of the story: *"I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes"* (42:6). He realized that his prolonged suffering (and his unhelpful friends) had revealed in him a level of pride that even he did not know existed. P.T. Forsyth wisely said: *"It is a greater thing to pray for pain's conversion than its removal."*

We conclude, then, that there were multiple layers to God's work with Job and his friends. Job's suffering achieved the following:

- It showcased Job's faith, proving to Satan that Job would not curse God; but would remain loyal to God.

- It refined Job's faith, bringing to light aspects of Job's character that still needed refinement.
- It prevented Job from sin and destruction.
- It corrected the very formulaic and immature faith of Job's friends, calling them to a deeper understanding of God's ways.
- It allowed the young man Elihu to exercise his voice/wisdom and to express how his faith in God was forming and maturing.

*Takeaways from Elihu's speech:*

*1. It is good for us to remember that God's wisdom is great, and His ways are so beyond our understanding. He is always 'working several angles at once' when He allows suffering to enter our lives. Never limit God to just one answer when it comes to your trials. He is likely advancing His plan in several different ways all at the same time.*

*2. It is always wise to ask: How is this trial bringing to the surface things in my character that need to be revealed and refined? Are there blind spots that I was not even aware of in my own heart and mind? Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the deeper things that God may be getting at through this trial. "So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world" (1Peter 1:6,7).*

Elihu's speech served another purpose: It prepared the way for God's speech to Job. His use of rapid-fire rhetorical questions prepared Job for the questions God would fire at him. His focus on how Job had misunderstood and questioned the character of God set Job up for the same line of argument from God. His use of nature to describe the power and wisdom of God was very similar to what God Himself said to Job. So Elihu's speech was a fitting transition to the final great speech coming from God Himself.